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"Dollars Damn Me": Editorial Politics and Herman Melville's Periodical Fiction

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Acknowledgment

Vita

Timothy R. Morris was born in 1981 in Severna Park, Maryland to the Reverend John Morris and Doctor Cynthia Morris. He graduated from South Lakes High School in Reston, Virginia in 1999. He completed a Bachelor of Arts in English from James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia in 2003. He also earned a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from CUNY Brooklyn College in 2008. In 2009, he married Stephanie Morris. While pursuing his Master of Arts in English at Virginia Commonwealth University, he taught classes as a Graduate Teaching Assistant in the Department of Focused Inquiry, in the University College. In September 2015, Timothy will begin doctoral study in English at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey in New Brunswick, where he hopes to continue this analysis of the literary marketplaces of the United States in the nineteenth-century.

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Abstract

"DOLLARS DAMN ME": EDITORIAL POLITICS AND HERMAN MELVILLE'S
PERIODICAL FICTION

By Timothy R. Morris, B.A., M.F.A, M.A.

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   To illustrate Melville's navigation of editorial politics in the periodical marketplace, this

study analyzes two stories Melville published in *Putnam's* in order to reconstruct the particular

historical, editorial, social, and political contexts of these writings. The first text examined in this

study is "Bartleby," published in *Putnam's* in November and December of 1853. This reading

recovers overtures of sociability and indexes formal appropriations of established popular genres

in order to develop an interpretive framework. Throughout this analysis, an examination of the

narrator's ideological bearings in relation to the unsystematic implementation of these ideologies

in American public life sets forth a set of interrelated social and political contexts. Melvilles

navigation of these contexts demonstrate specific compositional maneuverings in order to tend to

the expectations of a popular readership but also to challenge ideological norms. *Israel Potter*,

Herman Melville's eighth book-length novel, serialized in *Putnam's* from July of 1854 to March of 1855, is the focus of the second case study. This study tracks Melville's engagements and disengagements with a variety of source materials and positions these compositional shifts amid contemporaneous political ideologies, populist histories, middle-class values, audience expectations, and editorial politics. This study will demonstrate that Melville set out to craft texts for a popular readership; however, Melville, struggling to recuperate his damaged credentials, seasoned by demoralizing business dealings, his ambitions attenuated by the realities of the literary marketplace, undertook the hard task of self-editing his works to satisfy his aspirations, circumvent editorial politics, and meet audience expectations.

Introduction: Writing for "The Fireside People"

"Sailors are the only class of men who now-a-days see anything like stirring adventure; and many things which to the fire-side people appear strange and romantic, to them seem as commonplace as a jacket out at elbows."

--*Typee,* "Preface," 1846

In June of 1851, as he was composing *Moby-Dick*, Herman Melville wrote to Nathaniel Hawthorne in an agitated state, though he had hoped for "The calm, the coolness, the silent grass-growing mood in which a man *ought* always to compose" (*Correspondence*, 191). Even in the midst of writing this ambitious novel, Melville was beset by the anxieties of earning a living in the literary marketplace: "Dollars damn me; and the malicious Devil is forever grinning in upon me, holding the door ajar" (191). Indeed, Melville's personal finances had long been in a state of distress as a result of trying to earn a living as a professional writer in the literary marketplace. Having recently located to Pittsfield, subsisting primarily on a small advance on *Moby-Dick* and royalties on *Typee* (1846), owing enormous sums of money to friends and family members, it seemed that Melville needed to compose a bestseller, one at least approximating *Typee's* success, in order to provide for his family and remain financially solvent (Parker 483-486). However, Melville chose instead to compose ambitiously and without regard for the expectations of the mass-market. Melville's candid epistolary admissions to Hawthorne in the summer of 1851 reveal a self-destructive disregard for the expectations of mass-market readers

and a refusal to adhere to stylistic norms, decisions which resulted in the critical and commercial

failure of *Moby-Dick*. Subsequently, though he had hoped *Pierre* (1852) might recover his

standing with a broader readership, this novel's formal heterodoxy and provocative suggestions

of incest only served to further denigrate Melville's marketability. The failure of these novels

permanently damaged his credentials with popular-reading audiences and it seemed his career as

a professional writer may have been coming to a close. Even Melville's former literary ally,

Evert Duyckinck, allegedly[1] penned a devastating review of *Pierre,* describing it as a "literary

mare's nest… alone intelligible as an unintelligibility."[2] Thus, it appears that the formal disunity

of Melville's ambitious novels *Moby-Dick* and *Pierre*, had estranged him from even his most

ardent supporters and that the struggling author had (quite publicly and with great

embarrassment) been damned by dollars.

After the critical and commercial failures of these novels, to recuperate his credentials

with popular readers and restore his professional standing, Melville began writing short fiction

for periodicals. However, because his professional frustrations began long before his decision to

write for periodicals, an analysis Melville's career trajectory leading up to this decision recovers

an important context. His career began with *Typee* (1846) and the adaptations he made to this

novel indicate an initial desire to meet the expectations of a broad readership.[3] Based on

Melville's correspondence with his publishers, it seems he consented to extensive excisions of

Typee's more provocative passages, removing "all critical comments on missionaries and all

comments on recent political events" (Howard 289). In a letter to his British publishers, Melville

defended the expurgated *Typee* on the basis that "Such passages are altogether foreign to the

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[1] The *Literary World,* edited by Duyckinck, published reviews anonymously. Jay Leyda argues that Duyckinck, motivated by his strained friendship with Melville, must have authored this devastating review (Hetherington 230).
[2] *Literary World,* 21 August 1852.
[3] For a complete account of *Typee's* revision, publication, reception, and commercial history, see Leon Howard's "Historical Note" in the Northwestern-Newberry edition.

adventure, & altho' they may possess a temporary interest… their exclusion will certainly be beneficial" (*Correspondence*, 56). In light of Melville's willingness to expurgate provocative depictions of missionary efforts, it appears he crafted this text for popular reading by tempering his subjects to appease readers' sensibilities. However, despite these expurgations, *Typee* demonstrates Melville's incisive capacity to draw out stark differences between his subject matter and the shared values of his readers.

In the novel's preface, quoted at the start of this chapter, Melville identifies his audience as "the fireside people," referring to the communal reading practices and domestic values of the middle-class social sect. With the advent of industrial-age printing technologies, the rise of cosmopolitanism and secularism, as well as increasing access to literacy education, the literary marketplace in the United States underwent a transformation whereby the middle-class rapidly emerged as the predominant readership. Meredith McGill describes this transformation as a shift in the barriers of exclusion, opening up loop-holes for marginalized voices to participate in this substantially democratized publishing world, resulting in a dismantling of exceptionalist cultural practices (19). This broadening of access to the publication and distribution of textual materials occurred alongside what Stuart Blumin argues is the emergence of an educated middle-class readership, a social sect which coalesced around commonly embraced ideologies (9-10). For many writers in the literary marketplace of the 1840s, building consensus with this readership was a necessity to establish credentials and build prestige.

However, it must be pointed out that the notion of a middle-class readership being in any way stable is entirely delegitimized by the emergent, shifting, and heterogeneous nature of this group's ideologies, political and religious affiliations, and cultural practices. Furthermore, it can be argued that the emergence of a middle-class readership in the United States is accompanied

by, or may be the result of, an emerging consciousness of laboring classes, who began organizing and gaining footing in the labor movements of the late 1840s. Nonetheless, for Melville, and for many authors hoping to build a career in the literary marketplace, appeasing the diffuse ideological sensibilities of this sprawling and amorphous social sect proved to be an imperative, albeit impossible, preoccupation. Even at the very beginning of his writing career, an inner-conflict between the desire to craft a text for popular reading and the need to challenge assumptions emerges. Thus, tracing the development of these competing desires in Melville's earlier novels improves our comprehension of his decision to begin writing short fiction for magazines such as *Putnam's Monthly* and *Harper's Magzine*, publications with middle-class affiliations, aspirations of mass-mediacy, and editorial agendas of literary nationalism.

In the case of *Typee*, "the fireside people" welcomed the novel's Edenic portrayals of Polynesian life. Though these readers must be conceived of as a heterogeneous socioeconomic group, Melville's term invites a specific set of associations with the Fireside Poets, an established cohort of American writers, including Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, William Cullen Bryant, John Greenleaf Whittier, and Oliver Wendell Holmes. The writings of these prestigious authors legitimize core ethical values of domesticity, patriotism, and moral forbearance, values that were subsequently targeted by mass-market authors and editors to build consensus with readers in this emergent social sect. In an effort to align his texts with these editorial politics, Melville's novels of the 1840s embraced established genres and often reaffirmed such foundational values (Post-Lauria 81). *Typee,* in particular, successfully mixed the ethnographic description of travelogue with the emotive sentimentality of idyllic happiness, embracing and combining ready-made tropes that resonated with a popular readership, selling 6,000 copies in under three years (Post-Lauria 43). In addition, the young author's first novel

attracted considerable attention in literary reviews and from established authors, establishing his reputation as a rising talent.[4] However, Melville's literary notoriety largely depended upon his willingness to craft and revise his texts for popular reading. *Typee's* tremendous mobility in the literary marketplace, the text's capacity to circulate broadly among mass-market readers as well as high-prestige authors and reviewers, is due in large part to the author's willingness to expurgate the text, to align its conventions with the ideological norms.

In contrast, Melville's novels of the early 1850s, such as *Moby-Dick* and *Typee*, adopted literary forms unfamiliar to middle-class readers, garnered divided critical reception, and sold poorly.[5] Sheila Post-Lauria argues that the popularity of mixed-form novels from the mid-nineteenth-century were largely at the mercy of the literary allegiances of reviewers. As such, outspoken "reviewers loyal to the realist tradition" would condemn novels which did not adhere to mimetic novelistic paradigms and conventions, often in spite of a novel's merits or an author's popularity (124).[6] Though *Moby-Dick* and *Pierre* adopted many established conventions of popular literature, the maritime in the former and the romance in the latter, reviewers balked at their hybridized forms and unorthodox metaphysical digressions. Thus, though Melville packaged these novels in the accepted generic conventions of an emergent national literature, reviewers for mass-market periodicals with realist allegiances, often the arbiters of public taste and gatekeepers of the literary marketplace, easily recognized the transgressive innovations in these novels, despite Melville's best efforts to conceal their formal heterogeneity. The fact that

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[4] It seems Melville's reputation amongst his peers established Melville as a writer's writer. Positive reviews from Margaret Fuller, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Charles Fenno Hoffman, George Ripley, and Walt Whitman lead James Russell Lowell to remark that Melville was the "best launched" author of the time (Howard 294).

[5] Sheila Post-Lauria systematically traces the relationship between the generic appropriations of these novels and their critical reception in the book chapter "(Un)Popularity: *Moby-Dick* and *Pierre*."

[6] Here, Post-Lauria's term "the realist tradition" does not correspond to or invoke the movement of American Realism. Her term, as well as my deployment and treatment of it, describes an editorial politics which favors mimetic works, with linear narrative progressions, which appeases readers' divided political, ideological, and religious divisions through tropes of sentimentality and portraits of moral fortitude.

Evert Duyckinck rejected the perceived excesses of formal innovation in the early 1850s may

serve as a barometer for the critical climate as a whole at this time. Never afraid to offer pedantic

advice to the authors he reviewed, Duyckinck writes: "…now that [the author] has put himself

into… the orthodox and established school, he must, perforce, submit to all the rules and

ordinances."[7] For reviewers such Duyckinck, the literary marketplace was governed by a clear

set of conventions and his dogmatic view of the "orthodox and established school" established

predominant norms in the marketplace which would come to legitimize mass-mediacy.

Thus, critics such as Duyckinck viewed Melville's formal blending as transgressive and,

therefore, deficient.[8] Yet it appears that Melville believed it was, in fact, a conflicted desire to

meet popular reading expectations which derailed his efforts to compose a successful book. In

the early 1850s, though he was steadily composing novels to defy the categorical and interpretive

norms of his readers and reviewers, Melville remained reluctantly engaged with the professional

demands of the marketplace. It appears he was aware that his efforts to meet audience

expectations may have been leading to mixed results. In an 1851 letter to Hawthorne, he writes

"What I feel most moved to write, that is banned, --it will not pay. Yet, altogether, write the

other way I cannot. So the product is a final hash, yet all my books are botches"

(*Correspondence,* 191). Thus, the "botch" of Melville's books, when situated within the aesthetic

and political discussions of their times, is a failure to sufficiently unite the generic conventions of

popular literature with the digressions and formal innovations of an emergent metaphysical

literary tradition. Thus, popular readers, uneasy with metaphysicality, and conservative

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[7] *Literary World,* 17 August 1850.
[8] Notably, Melville cancelled his subscription to Duyckinck's periodical, the *Literary World* on February 14th of 1852. Though it is impossible to know precisely why Melville abruptly ended their literary and professional allegiance, his decision might have been influenced by the *Literary World's* somewhat unfavorable review of *Moby-Dick* in November of 1851 (*Correspondence,* 222).

reviewers, highly skeptical of formal innovation, viewed Melville's unorthodox literary efforts as failures.

In the case of *Moby-Dick,* many elite reviewers, sympathetic towards formal innovation, praised the novel; however, aesthetically conservative reviewers on both sides of the Atlantic found fault with its formal heterogeneity. In John Forster's review of *Moby-Dick* for the *London Examiner,* he complains that "all the regular rules of narrative or story are spurned and set at defiance" (qtd. in Hetherington, 197). Likewise, a reviewer for the *Hartford Daily Courant* complained of the novel's lack of narrative conventionality, pointing out that "there is the same want of unity of subject—of a regular beginning and end—of the form and shape of a well-built novel" (qtd. in Post-Lauria, 126). Thus, the expectations of mass readers, dictated by the predominant norms of an aesthetically conservative literary marketplace, demanded realistic portrayals written in the conventions of established genres. *Moby Dick's* sales suffered tremendously as a result of this inability to satisfy the formal demands of a mass readership, earning only $556.37, far less than Melville had earned from any of his previous novels (Delbanco 178). Clearly, despite his efforts to mask European formal innovation with the conventions of emergent national genres, popular audiences and conservative critics rejected the hybridization of this novel, permanently damaging Melville's commercial viability.[9]

When composing *Pierre*, Melville may have sought to redress *Moby-Dick's* failure to reach a mass readership. Outlining a reinvented approach in a letter to his publishers, Melville promises that his next book will be an:

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[9] Scathing reviews in secular periodicals seem gracious in comparison to the many far more damaging assessments of *Moby-Dick* in protestant magazines and newspapers. One such reviewer for the New York *Churchman* in a December 6th review writes that it is "pitiable to see so much talent perverted to sneers at revealed religion and the burlesquing of sacred passages of Holy Writ" in *Moby-Dick*.

"unquestionable novelty, as regards my former [novels]… and, as I believe, very much

more calculated for popularity than anything you have yet published of mine—being a

regular romance… representing a new and elevated aspect of American life."

(*Correspondence,* 226)

Unfortunately, Melville's contract conditions with Harper & Brothers publishers made it

virtually impossible for *Pierre* to generate sufficient earnings for the struggling author, offering

Melville only twenty-cents for every dollar the novel earned in sales, far less than the fifty-cents

he customarily earned from his other novels with the publisher (Parker xxxiv). Melville

dramatizes this disappointment in encyclopedic chapters, digressions into which "Melville

poured his anger at the reviews which had led people in Pittsfield to gossip about him self-

righteously and had laid him open to the Harpers' punitive contract" (xxxvi). These chapters

constitute an open rebellion against the normative formal conventions of the romance, the

aesthetic conservativism of his publishers, and audience demands for "all the regular rules of

story." The high watermark of Melville's rebellion in *Pierre* occurs in the chapter *Young

America in Literature*[10] when he famously disavows the strictures of narrative convention,

claiming "I write precisely as I please" (244). Freed from the constraints of audience

expectations, *Pierre* grew more expansive and digressive, embracing liberties and exploring

possibilities which altogether alienated readers of popular fiction. Thus, *Pierre's* anti-mimetic

digressions far surpass those of *Moby-Dick,* constituting the most famous of all Melville's

"botches."

    Pierre's profoundly disappointing sales may have caused Melville to attenuate his

professional literary ambitions. Furthermore, *Pierre's* reviewers argued that Melville's talents

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[10] The title of this chapter "has an unmistakable reference to the "Young America movement" in which Melville and
his close literary associate Evert Duyckinck were active participants (Howard and Parker 376).

were declining and many questioned his sanity,[11] charges that humiliated the struggling author

and permanently damaged his reputation.[12] These frustrations to Melville's writing career

resulted in a calculated decision to recuperate his credentials in the literary marketplace by

publishing short fiction in popular periodicals. This study argues that Melville's periodical

fiction demonstrates the author's efforts to re-engage with "the fireside people," the readership

he had avidly courted in his early novels. To conform to the editorial politics of the periodical

marketplace, Melville adapted his compositional orientation by designing texts of a deeply social

nature which adopted both emergent and established literary conventions. Publishing short

fiction and serial novels in periodicals provided Melville with an opportunity to reach not only

popular readers, the coveted "fireside people," but also elite readers with literary ambitions. In

addition, Melville's contributions to the periodicals are some of his most incisive—they engage

with provocative subject matter and pose challenging questions to this coveted readership. This

transition away from "writing precisely what I please" and the return to writing for "the fireside

people" is the starting point for this study of Melville's periodical fiction.

In order to navigate the periodical marketplace, Melville needed to learn to address the

set of shared political and ideological principles which accompanied the rapid ascension of the

middle-class.[13] During this transition, his subject matter took a sharp turn towards the social,

most notably, to an examination of class struggle. Michael Paul Rogin argues that injustices in

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[11] In a review for the New York *Day Book* bearing the headline "HERMAN MELVILLE CRAZY," one reviewer writes "…Melville was really supposed to be deranged, and that his friends were taking measures to place him under treatment" (qtd. in Howard and Parker, 381).

[12] The damage to Melville's reputation was long-lasting indeed. Even in 1855, after he had published many stories in periodicals, George William Curtis voiced reservations about Melville's prestige to Dix & Edwards, the publishers of Melville's short story collection *The Piazza Tales* (Hayford 458).

[13] Throughout this study, the term "middle-class" refers to the conceptualization of this social sect and their shared values by editors and authors who hoped to build consensus with this readership. It does not refer to a historical or documentable public, rather the imagining of this public by publishers.

the American social landscape during Melville's literary career, especially the betrayal that the practice of slavery posed to the principles of the constitution, brought such questions to the forefront of US public discourse (102), especially examinations of class divisions and social injustice. In the early 1850s, two literary forums dominated literary discussions of social and political issues in belletristic writing: *Harper's Magazine* and *Putman's Monthly*. Thus, we can directly align the social and ideological practices that shaped public debates with a set of editorial practices. Therefore, the notion of editorial "politics" should not be misunderstood to be equated with editorial policy. To fully understand the relationship between the periodical marketplace and public discussions of the social, we must consider the relationship between the editorial policies of these periodicals and the ideological and political discourses which shaped the implementation of such policies. The resultant set of interrelated beliefs and practices can best be defined as editorial politics—a term that encompasses both the particular implementation of ideologies in editorial practices as well as the attending political maneuverings of these ideologies writ large.

In essence, the ideological and political doctrines accompanying the rapid ascension of middle-class readers in the literary marketplace of the 1850s foundationally altered the editorial politics of the times. In turn, these editorial politics shape Melville's fiction from this period in fundamental ways. The marketplace for periodical literature during this time, as described by Susan Belasco in *A History of the Book in America*, encompasses a broad set of cultural affiliations and sought to build consensus with many sects of the social landscape (259-260). However, *Harper's* and *Putnam's* came to dominate the market for belletristic writing by aligning their editorial politics with what the editors of these magazines believed to be the shared values and ideologies of the ascendant middle-class. Thus, as a result of the amorphous and

unfixed nature of this heterogeneous social sect, a very different set of aesthetic and nationalistic

agendas characterize the competing editorial practices of these two magazines. Furthermore,

though the periodical marketplace appears to be a vital stepping stone for career authors hoping

to build a reputation, Sheila Post-Lauria argues that magazine writing often required authors to

shift compositional orientation in order to meet marketplace demands. She believes that though

the publishers of higher-prestige books allowed authors considerable leeway and "tolerated

innovation," especially for marquee names and celebrity authors, the periodical marketplace

"aimed at audiences with specific demographic characteristics" and required authors to satisfy

the expectations of these coveted readerships (154). Situating Melville's writings within the

context of the editorial politics of *Putnam's* and *Harpers* reveals the uses and means of

periodical literature as a consensus-building apparatus among a popular readership; furthermore,

the reconstruction of this marketplace context verifies and authenticates Melville's conflicted

desires to "write exactly as I please" as well as to craft texts that conform to audience

expectations.

 Without question, *Harper's* non-partisan editorial policies aided the periodical in

establishing popular appeal, leading to a surge in copies printed, from 7,500 to 50,000, just

within the first six months of the magazine's lifespan (Belasco 266). Due to the fact that

Harper's, in large part, served as a publicity apparatus for the Harper & Brothers' book offerings

by extracting and reviewing such publications, the magazine's content was carefully controlled

in order to meet the demands of mass-market readers. Though the magazine published many

stories by Melville, whose earlier titles Harper & Brothers had published, *Harper's* chiefly

reprinted works by established British authors, such as Leigh Hunt, Edward Bulwer Lytton, and

most noticeably Charles Dickens. In order to reach "the great mass of the American people," the

monthly published works which were deferential to the differing and, at times, opposing political views of middle-class readers, discouraging controversy by providing "the most perfect freedom from prejudice and partiality of any kind."[14] In light of this stated policy, *Harper's* editors preferred sentimental texts which naturalized the major social problems of the 1850s through "stylized portraits of moral fortitude" which "[transform] the social problems… into a celebration of the moralistic principles of toleration and acquiescence" (Post-Lauria 167). Thus, Harper's editorial politics reaffirmed those domestic ideologies they believed to be broadly held by the middle-class by presenting readings which sought to build consensus, seeking out texts of political appeasement rather than divisive readings urging social reform.

As a result of *Harper's* editorial policies of non-partisan sentimentality, the periodical marketplace presented an opening for *Putnam's* to attempt to overtly address the social issues of the day by challenging the viewpoints of some middle-class readers while building consensus among educated and elite readers. Furthermore, because *Harper's* published predominantly British authors, *Putnam's* adopted a nationalistic literary agenda by promoting the works of emergent American authors (Belasco 267). There is a strident and palpable nationalistic tone in the "Introductory" to the first issue of the monthly, announcing to their readers that "The genius of the old world is affluent; we owe much to it, and we hope to owe more. But we have no less faith in the opulence of our own resources" (1).[15] In addition, the magazine sought to challenge, rather than assuage readers, by publishing the viewpoints of emergent American writers and thinkers:

> "In what paper or periodical do you now look to find the criticism of American thought upon the times? We hope to answer that question, too, by heaping upon our pages the

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[14] "A World at the Start," *Harper's*, 1 June 1850.

[15] *Putnam's,* 1 January 1853.

results of the acutest observations, and the most trenchant thought, illustrated by whatever wealth of erudition, of imagination and of experience, they may chance to possess." (2)[16]

Rigorously analytical and categorically liberal, at least within the context of the 1850s periodical marketplace, *Putnam's* offered a direct contrast to the political conservativism and literary sentimentality of *Harper's*. These editorial politics may have shaped Melville's contributions in foundational ways. For example, stories such as "The Encantadas" or "Benito Cereno," adopt the stylistic mode of "acute observation" which characterizes travel writings in *Putnam's* (180). Furthermore, the aforementioned "wealth of erudition" sought after by *Putnam's* editors lead Melville to develop "multileveled" narrative structures in his writing for this periodical, resulting in rich ambiguities and a breadth of social and ethical perspectives (208). Without question, *Putnam's* editorial politics, which sought to advance a literary nationalist agenda and analyze social issues rigorously, shaped Melville's portrayals of the political and social issues of his time in his writings for this magazine.

By electing to publish with both periodicals, the aesthetic preferences, nationalist literary agendas, class sympathies, and political leanings of the two predominant publishers of belletristic writing in the 1850s became salient factors in Melville's decision-making regarding the publication of his fiction. In a marketplace dominated by elitism, entrepreneurialism, and literary nationalism, given Melville's uncommon talent for complicating business dealings, not to mention his tenacious penchant for challenging his readers, we would expect nothing short of total financial ruin and critical failure. However, Melville's writings from this period did indeed successfully recuperate his standing as an author, at least among the editors at *Putnam's*, who

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[16] Ibid.

actively courted his manuscripts and fast-tracked his materials for publication (Hayford 490).

Furthermore, because *Putnam's* paid Melville five-dollars per page, almost double what they

paid their other contributors, the periodical paid the author quite well. In total, it is estimated that

Melville earned $1,329.50 for all his writings in both *Harper's* and *Putnam's* from 1853-1856

(494), earnings which were later supplemented by royalties on single-editions of and *Israel*

Potter (1855) and *The Piazza Tales* (1856). Though Melville's short fiction never reached the

level of commercial viability of his debut bestseller *Typee*, the financial success of Melville's

writings for periodicals indicates the capacity for these writings to circulate among both mass-

market and elite readers.

Furthermore, the critical assessment of these works strongly suggests that these stories

did indeed recuperate Melville's credentials to some extent. One reviewer for the *Berkshire*

County Eagle wrote of *The Piazza Tales* that "This new work of our fellow citizen is decidedly

the most readable which he has published since *Omoo* and *Typee*"[17] (qtd. in Hayford, 502).

Another reviewer for the Newark *Daily Advertiser* reaffirmed comparisons of *The Piazza Tales*

to Melville's early novels: "This book is in the real *Typee* and *Omoo* vein"[18] (qtd. in Hayford,

503). Most significantly, a long review in the New York *Daily News* took the reviewers who had

defamed Melville's reputation to task, writing:

> "Now if the decay of which the said literary mourner complains be not in himself, we
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> recommend him to purchase and peruse the delightful "Piazza Tales." They will
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> effectually correct the acidity of his criticism. But we are inclined to think that the source
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> of discontent is only the altered mood of the reader to which we have referred, as we can
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> nowhere find in any of Mr. Melville's writings the slightest rational symptom of

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[17] *Berkshire County Eagle*, 30 May 1856.
[18] *Daily Advertiser,* 1 June 1856.

deterioration. They are, we admit, moulded in styles different from the peculiar setting of

Typee, but that fact only proves the versatility of the pen which prepared them."[19] (qtd. in

Hayford, 503)

Despite the irrecoverable damage to Melville's reputation by the scathing reviews of *Moby-Dick*

and *Pierre*, it is clear that Melville's efforts to reinvent himself by re-engaging with "the fireside

people," by returning to the stylistic norms that characterize his early fiction, he successfully

broadened his readership, increased his professional standing, and restored some degree of his

former prestige.

Thus, Melville's career reinvention in the commerce-driven periodical marketplace may

invalidate long-standing theories that he managed to somehow "transcend" literary economics

and editorial politics. For instance, F.O Mathiessen seems to willfully overlook the interventions

of such climates, famously linking Melville's fiction, even works such as *Redburn* and

Whitejacket, "two jobs" which Melville had admitted he had written "for money"

(*Correspondence,* 138) to the "Emersonian belief in the divinely inspired poet" (405). Other

literary scholars propose a "subversion" model which aligns the author's writings in opposition

to antebellum culture, most notably David Reynolds's assertion that Melville's texts are part and

parcel of a tradition of the "subversive imagination," a stylistic mode characterized by

"competing language and value systems, openly at war on the level of popular culture" (3).

Clearly, the "subversion" model of interpretation cannot account for the fact that Melville

adopted figures and tropes from accepted conventions of popular writing in order to craft texts

for a broader readership. Therefore, in order to fully comprehend Melville's career resurgence in

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[19] *Daily News*, 16 June 1856.

the periodical marketplace, a new model allowing for sufficient recuperation of the relationship between the author, editorial politics, and the literary marketplace must be developed. When positioning the author amid the ideological and economic climates governing the literary marketplace, it becomes clear that Melville is highly aware of these climates and that this awareness shapes his writing in fundamental ways. An examination of the relationship between these climates and Melville's art is essential to the task of tracking his nuanced maneuverings of editorial politics.

To illustrate Melville's navigation of editorial politics in the periodical marketplace, this study examines two cases studies of his fiction in *Putnam's* and seeks to reconstruct the particular historical, editorial, social, and political contexts of these writings. Melville's professional relationship with the upstart magazine *Putnam's* reveals an ambitious new set of social and artistic preoccupations. Due to the magazine's stated literary nationalism and populist aspirations, it is possible to view Melville's new relationship with this magazine as a move to reinvent, revise, and expand the political and social reach of his writings. Furthermore, *Putnam's* graciously accepted lengthy and ambitious works from the struggling writer on the basis of his reputation with elite readers, an adjustment in the magazine's editorial politics which reveals their effort to expand their reach into new audiences. In many ways, Melville's professional relationship with *Putnam's* is one of the few mutually beneficial and artistically generative arrangements in his career, leading to the composition and publication of some of his best-known works. These case studies of Melville's fiction in *Putnam's* rely upon a range of primary source materials to reconstruct the professional, social, and political contexts of these writings. By reading Melville alongside these correspondences, journal materials, reviews, extracts, advertisements, non-canonical and ancillary belletristic writings, sermons, editorials, newspaper

articles, and historical events, this study recovers just a modest acreage of the fraught social and literary landscape of this time period.

Critical and scholarly efforts also define this study in significant ways. Historicist studies such as Sheila Post-Lauria's *Correspondent Colorings* (1996)*,* Meredith McGill's *Culture of Reprinting* (2003)*,* Michael Paul Rogin's *Subversive Genealogy* (1979), George Dekker's *The American Historical Romance* (1987), and Carolyn Karcher's *Shadow over the Promised Land* (1980), all contributed to defining the interpretive parameters and critical ethos of this study. Though these studies adopt an array of methodologies to reconstruct historical situatedness and though they arrive at a wide range of conclusions regarding the relationships between Melville's art, contemporary politics, and antebellum society, each of these studies is committed to the recuperation of meaning through historical contextual analysis. For instance, Post-Lauria and McGill reconstruct the politics of the literary marketplace; however, McGill attends to systemic and legal causes whereas Post-Lauria examines the cultural and editorial practices of literary cohorts. Similarly, Michael Paul Rogin and George Dekker each situate the relationship between Melville's art and his political affiliations; however, Rogin examines biographical contexts whereas Dekker explores literary form. This is to say nothing of the growing body of "boundaryless" interpretations of Melville's writings which seek to somehow unify his writings with twentieth and twenty-first-century discourses on politics, philosophy, and art. Given the enormous body of Melville theory, scholarship, and biography, there is a sense of an ongoing turf war along interpretive lines. A tangential goal of this study is to identify methodological approaches that fill in the gaps of the "subversion" and "transcendence" models by seeking out interpretive strategies aligned with historical re-constructionist traditions.

The first text examined in this study is "Bartleby," published in *Putnam's* in November and December of 1853. This was Melville's first story published in *Putnam's* and, though it has often been examined by philosophers and theorists in notably modern discourses, this study analyzes "Bartleby" within the emergent literary genres and the political discourses accompanying the class struggles of the 1840s and 1850s. However, this examination eschews naturalizing interpretations which position the story as a parable of working-class alienation. Instead, this reading seeks to recover overtures of sociability and index formal appropriations of established popular genres in order to develop an interpretive framework for Bartleby which is both more and incisive and grounded in historical context. In addition, this analysis examines the apparatus of social welfare in 1850s New York in relation to the story's critiques of the limitations of liberalism, revivalism, and charity. Throughout this analysis, an examination of the narrator's ideological bearings sets forth interrelated social and political contexts which underwrite a critique of the shared middle-class values which had come to predominate the editorial politics of the 1850s. In sum, this analysis demonstrates specific compositional maneuverings on the part of the author and examines Melville's desire to meet the expectations of a popular readership but also his imperative to challenge ideological norms.

Israel Potter, Herman Melville's eighth book-length novel, serialized in *Putnam's* from July of 1854 to March of 1855, is the focus of the second case study. This novel is the only serial in Melville's writing career and, as such, represents a long-term engagement with *Putnam's* editorial politics. In his previous novels, he had loosely adapted various source materials, such as natural histories and travelogues; however, the initial manuscript of *Israel Potter* was a very close paraphrase of a Revolutionary War veteran's narrative. As Melville's engagement with the novel's subject matter deepened, he abandoned the initial source and began adopting a set of

narrativized historical sources; in essence, revising notions of popular history to convey an as yet unwritten account of the sacrifices of anonymous historical actors on society's margins. Though Melville set out to write a text crafted for a popular readership, this analysis will demonstrate that *Israel Potter's* progress over the course of serialization comes to elaborate social ills, philosophical problems, historical misappropriations, and political upheavals. This betrayal of the text's stated aspirations to reach a popular readership plays out within a serialized format, thereby situating Melville's conflicted stance towards audience expectations within the context of an extended engagement with editorial politics.

Though these texts were composed nearly a decade after *Typee*, because both texts navigated a set of audience expectations similar to Melville's debut bestseller, "Bartleby" and *Israel Potter*, just as all of Melville's periodical writings, must be seen as part-and-parcel of *Typee's* stated intent of initiating a dialog with "the fireside people." In crafting these periodical fictions, Melville willingly ceded quarrelsome discourse and provocative description, undertook formal compromises of his material to adopt popular conventions, but remained steadfastly committed to advancing narratives of dissent. However, struggling to recuperate his damaged credentials, seasoned by demoralizing business dealings, his ambitions attenuated by the realities of the literary marketplace, the experienced writer undertook the hard task of self-editing his works to satisfy his aspirations, circumvent editorial politics, and meet audience expectations. Yet, in his return to writing for "the fireside people," though his ambitions are tempered, they do not fade to the far-margins of the text; they are immediately present and can be recovered through a process of careful reconstruction.

"Bartleby's" Historical Margins: Class Divisions and the Limits of Charity

"Posted like silent sentinels all around the town, stand thousands upon thousands of mortal men fixed in ocean reveries. Some leaning against the spiles; some seated upon the pier heads; some looking over the bulwarks of ships from China; some high aloft in the rigging, as if striving to get a still better seaward peep. But these are all landsmen; of week days pent up in lath and plaster—tied to counters, nailed to benches clinched to desks. How then is this? Are the green fields gone? What do they here?"

--"Loomings," *Moby-Dick*, 1851

Herman Melville situates *Moby-Dick's* opening amid the cosmopolitan throngs of lower Manhattan, urban confines to which his epic sea-adventure never returns. Ishmael describes the precise geography of Battery Park, guiding the reader on a walking tour from "Corlears Hook" to "Coenties Slip," major shipping hubs at the confluence of the East and Hudson Rivers, to situate this commercial epicenter amid the social alienation that accompanied the rise of industrialism in mid-nineteenth-century New York. Ishmael beckons the reader to better understand the longings of these bureaucratic laborers whose lives are "pent up in lath and plaster" and whose compulsory labors, "tied to counters, nailed to benches, clinched to desks," thwart their autonomy and efficacy, delimitations which compel these "landsmen" to cast their eyes seaward in hopes of glimpsing the freedoms they have lost. Ishmael's poignant questions to the reader,

"How then is this? Are the green fields gone? What do they here?" invite analyses of structural changes in a rapidly industrializing society. When Melville transitioned to periodical writing, he took up social issues as his subject matter to both build consensus with a broader readership and to challenge the shared and dearly held doctrines which underpin an impending industrial social order. Thus, In "Bartleby," first published in *Putnam's* in September of 1853, Melville returns to the social alienation of these urban and bureaucratic laborers, these lonely "landsmen" dreaming of the freedom of the sea as described in "Loomings," in order to index and narrate the social deprivations of bureaucratic workers.

Though "Bartleby's" analysis of bureaucratic society overtly attends to the emotional and ethical withdrawals endemic to this social sect, a carefully constructed metaphor establishes bureaucratic writing, or, more precisely, paperwork, as the focused material representation which underpins these withdrawals. In Thomas Carlyle's *The French Revolution* (1837), he coins the term "The Paper Age," an epoch in which paper currency is the primal motivator of the social ills because of the insufficiency of paper notes to support economic value (Lamb 28). According to Kevin McLaughlin, author of *Paperwork: Fiction and Mass Mediacy in the Paper Age*, Carlyle's metaphor implies that "with mass-produced paper and with the conditions of mass mediacy… the support loses substance ('Bank-paper' has no 'Gold;' 'Book-paper' no 'Thought')" (1). Melville, an avid reader of Carlyle,[20] was probably aware of this centralizing metaphor of "The Paper Age" and, in many ways, the covert metaphor of paperwork in "Bartleby" revises Carlyle's social analysis to address the ills stemming from legal practices and clerical proceedings in New York's emerging bureaucratic work force. Indeed, the emergence of

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[20] Though there is no record of Melville owning or borrowing *The French Revolution* in Sealts' *Melville's Reading*, records indicate that Melville owned a volume of translated and excerpted *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays* by Carlyle (198).

bureaucratic labor which accompanied rapid industrialization in the United States resulted in a new kind of "Paper Age," in which bureaucratic writing legitimized and substantiated the acquisition of material wealth by urban petty capitalists. Thus, in "Loomings," it is this industrial "Paper Age" workforce which lines Battery Park's bulwarks and jetties, whose uneventful lives are "pent up in lathe and plaster" as they underwrite the development of new modes of economic and statist powers through their unceasing paperwork. Strikingly, the "ocean reveries" of these laborers invites a direct thematic connection to Bartleby's "dead wall reverie" (29) as he gazes blankly at the "lath and plaster" of his own confines.

This metaphor of paperwork runs throughout "Bartleby," indexing the abuses and social deprivations endemic to the industrial "Paper Age." When the narrator hopes to make arrangements for Bartleby in the Tombs, Mr. Cutlets, the grubsman, assumes the narrator is associated with Monroe Edwards, a notorious convicted forger whose case was widely sensationalized in American publishing (44).[21] Significantly, "Bartleby's" paperwork metaphor coalesces in the fiery erasures of Bartleby's former employment in the "Dead Letter Office at Washington" (45). At the story's conclusion, the narrator imagines the causal relationship between Bartleby's alienation and the task of handling dead letters: "Conceive a man by nature and misfortune prone to a pallid hopelessness, can any business seem more fitted to heighten it than that of continually handling these dead letters, and assorting them for the flames?" (45). These subtexts of forgery and epistolary erasure probe the limitations of written discourse to substantiate communicative efficacy, resulting in what Carlyle calls "'waste multitudes'" which constitute "the ghostly support of "'an inarticulate cry" (qtd. in McLaughlin, 1). "Bartleby's" revision and expansion of Carlyle's metaphoric "Paper Age" inscribes the text throughout,

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[21] H. Long & Brothers published an 1848 fictionalized account titled *Life and Adventures of the Accomplished Forger and Swindler, Colonel Monroe Edwards.*

implicating the bureaucratic system as an insufficient means of support for doctrines of industrial capitalism. Thus, this thematic armature of paperwork underwrites all of "Bartleby" and compels an interpretation of the story which is situated within the interrelated paper-based discourses of finance, text, and bureaucratic labor.

Yet, many interpretations of "Bartleby" fail to account for this covert metaphor and instead situate the story in noticeably modern philosophical and theoretical discourses. Many European theorists and philosophers have undertaken examinations of "Bartleby," such as Maurice Blanchot, Jacques Derrida, Giorgio Agamben, Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, and Savloj Zizek, amounting to what Kevin Attell describes as "an explosion of critical interest… possibly greater than that of any other single text in American literature" (195). Noting the "boundaryless" nature of theoretical and critical interpretations of nineteenth-century fiction, John McWilliams identifies the deficiency of such studies in restoring the historical particulars to this literature (71). Thus, by historicizing "Bartleby," by situating the story within the context of the editorial politics of its initial publication and circulation, it becomes evident that "Bartleby" asserts a critique of economic, theological, and social doctrines that underpin the cultural practices of the emergent middle-class, bureaucratic, and industrialist sects contemporaneous to the mid nineteenth-century. In situating "Bartleby" amid the concerns of the career author and within the editorial politics of the story's initial publication, this analysis seeks to recuperate the ethical problems that the text presented to nineteenth-century readers in the hopes of better understanding the story's resonances with readers today.

"Bartleby's" storyworld is comprised of procedural, legalistic, and bureaucratic themes and characters; it is very much a narrative of the workplace. In the twenty-first-century, the genre of the procedural drama has attained a degree of formal stability and "Bartleby" is a literary

ancestor of such narratives. Popular serialized television shows such as *Perry Mason* (1957-1966), *Law and Order* (1990-2010), and *Better Call Saul* (2015), examine ethical dilemmas and philosophical problems through procedural struggles and through examinations of the dramatic everyday lives of lawyers and legal support staff. In an effort to engage with the ideologies of a popular viewership whose "week days pent" in cubicles and offices, such workplace narratives mirror the lives of a legalistic viewership. Though "Bartleby's" storyworld may appear altogether foreign to contemporary readers, this narrative is a part of a legalistic genre that has its origins in the periodical fiction writing of the mid nineteenth-century. With the rise of skilled bureaucratic labor in urban centers in the United States, the middle-class values of Melville's readers found narrative corollaries in such stories. Narratives of the well-intentioned moral interventions on the part of lawyers in the lives of the indigent, socially outcast, or morally imperiled were relatively common in the 1840s. For instance, John Treat Irving's commercially successful "The Quod Correspondence," serialized in *The Knickerbocker* from 1841-1844, then in single-editions titled *The Attorney* (1842) and *Harry Harson: Or, the Benevolent Bachelor* (1844), is a forerunner of these moralistic narratives of the everyday lives of lawyers.

Though it seems impossible to prove that Melville had read such tales, the circulation of lawyer's stories in periodicals and newspapers that Melville was reading would not have escaped his attention. Published anonymously in the inaugural issue of *Putnam's*, "Andrew Cranberry, Attorney-at-Law"[22] (1853) is an essential text to understanding "Bartleby's" narrative and formal conventions. The similarities in setting and character between "Andrew Cranberry" and "Bartleby" are striking. Both texts narrate the mental functioning of a fastidious, upwardly mobile, somewhat vain attorney inhabiting New York City's urbane, middle-class, cultural elite.

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[22] *Putnam's Monthly,* January 1853

Andrew Cranberry, haunted by a verse from Coleridge's Schiller,[23] relies upon his social

standing (especially his printed business card pronouncing his esteemed title and profession) to

gallantly court, and perhaps to marry, a socially withdrawn lady-milliner. The two form a

seemingly mutual attraction on the basis of a shared love of art: "She knew the poetry of the

poets I loved, the music of the composers most dear to me" (21). When Andrew Cranberry first

proposes, the two meet socially-- she demurs in noticeably chaste terms which adhere to stylistic

norms of the time: "It is a wicked world… that will not let me see a friend without slandering my

reputation" (21). Much like "Bartleby" this text critiques the social isolation of bureaucratic

bachelorhood. However, unlike "Bartleby," "Andrew Cranberry's" conclusion reaffirms middle-

class domestic morality; the story closes with the affluent lawyer's new printed business card:

"Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Cranberry" (23).

   In contrast, a pervasive sense of the degradations of bachelorhood haunts "Bartleby's"

professionally ambitious male characters. Neither the story's narrator, nor his support staff

members Turkey and Nippers, make mention of wives, children, or the idealized virtues of

domesticity that "Andrew Cranberry's" conclusion extols. In "Bartleby's" opening, the narrator

fastidiously records the temperament, apparel, eating habits, work habits, and spending habits of

Turkey and Nippers. He attributes their mental functioning with alacrity, cataloging their

decision-making operations, offering bodily and cognitive explanations for their odd behaviors.

The narrator describes Turkey's morning hangovers; after a few libations later in the day, Turkey

turns ruddy faced, spattering inkblots upon the copies, due to impaired dexterity. The narrator

goes on to catalog Nippers' daily work habits; in the mornings he is bleary-eyed and distracted,

endlessly adjusting the height and position of his writing desk, all morning long "twitching in his

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[23] The verse is from "Hymn to Bacchus" and is translated in the story as "Never believe me/Appear the immortals/Never alone" (18).

chair with a dyspeptic nervousness" (17). *Putnam's* readership, especially those readers whose

domestic values cherished matrimony and family, may have made ready associations between

these nervous, alcoholic, and socially withdrawn behaviors and the professional necessity upon

bureaucratic workers to forgo the domestic tranquility of family and matrimony. In short, to this

readership, these careerist bachelors embody the failure to uphold unifying social doctrines

formative to middle-class cultural practices.

Furthermore, a sentimental novel by John Maitland titled *The Lawyer's Story; Or, The

Wrongs of The Orphans* may have served as a direct source for "Bartleby." Johannes Dietrich

Bergmann argues that Melville probably read a chapter excerpt appearing in the *New-York

Tribune* (431).[24] H. Long & Brother then published the novel as a single-edition, claiming in a

publicity notice that "No tale has ever been written which has attained greater popularity" (qtd.

in Bergmann, 433). These are certainly media outlets that Melville would have casually perused,

if not devoured wholesale, and the level of publicity accorded to Maitland's novel would have

attracted Melville's attention. Bergmann speculates that the story's protagonist and narrator, a

moral-minded, successful, attorney who supervises a supporting office staff and takes on a

mysterious scrivener to assist with an increasing workload, may have served as a direct source

for "Bartleby's" composition. Indeed, the opening sentence of *The Lawyer's Story* is strikingly

similar to "Bartleby's" opening lines and central premise:

> "In the summer of 1843, having an extraordinary quantity of deeds to copy, I engaged a
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> copyist, temporarily, in consequence of his modest, quiet, gentlemanly demeanor, and his
>
> intense application to his duties." (Maitland 1)

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[24] *New-York Tribune*, 18 February 1853

Much like Bartleby, the attorney's new scrivener is "singularly sedate [in] aspect," copies with "incessant industry" (31), and possesses "a countenance… shaded with habitual or constitutional melancholy" (34). Much like "Andrew Cranberry," the novel narrates an ethical dilemma whereby resolution is enacted through unlikely coincidences and the moral interventions of well-meaning, urbane lawyers. Though it appears that Melville may have not only read but appropriated aspects of *The Lawyer's Story* and "Andrew Cranberry," the effect on the shift in Melville's compositional orientation is superficial. However, it is clear that, with "Bartleby," Melville sought to correct the ethical simplifications of the sentimental lawyer's tale through the recounting of a failure to solve an ethical problem.

Though these indirect textual sources may have served as thematic or formal templates for "Bartleby's" storyworld and narration, Melville's direct and personal involvement with the world of Chancery Law may have directly shaped the story's composition. Herman Melville's brothers, Allan and Gansevoort, both worked in the New York Court of Chancery in the early 1840s. It is probable that Melville had discussed the particulars of day-to-day Chancery proceedings with his brothers during their extended employment with the institution. Significantly, Allan and his new wife Sofia resided with Herman and his wife Lizzie all together at 103 4th Avenue in Manhattan; however, Allan lost his position as a solicitor in the Court of Chancery when the institution was abolished in 1847 (Broderick 59). The Melville family had experienced many falls from middle-class standing in their history, and, for the newly-weds Allan and Sofia, the loss of employment resulted in yet another class adjustment. "Bartleby's" narrator blatantly voices his dismay over the loss of income due to the dissolution of Chancery:

> "I seldom lose my temper; much more seldom indulge in dangerous indignation at
>
> wrongs and outrages; but I must be permitted to be rash here and declare that I consider

the sudden and violent abrogation of the office of Master of Chancery, by the new

Constitution, as a—premature act; inasmuch as I had counted upon a life-lease of the

profits, whereas I only received those of a few short years." (14)

For "Bartleby's" narrator, an eminently "safe" man with business connections to John Jacob

Astor, the "sudden and violent abrogation" of the Court of Chancery represents a significant

material loss as well as an adjustment in his social standing. For Allan Melville, a young solicitor

with a newly-minted law degree, the losses and adjustments were far more dramatic-- the

dissolution of his position represented dire economic and social consequences that endangered

his family structure, well-being, and professional mobility.

It is this biographical detail that allows us to recuperate "Bartleby's" organizing themes

of class, property, and tenancy and these themes may serve to correct the sentimental narratives

of moral redemption espoused by the genre of lawyer's tales. Texts like "Andrew Cranberry"

and Maitland's *The Lawyer's Story* reinforce notions of class stability in the bureaucratic

profession and narrate the potential for this social sect to reform moral ills. In no way would

these narratives have aligned with Melville's personal experiences regarding the legal profession

in particular nor the bureaucratic class as a whole. Melville's career frustrations in his dealings

with Harper & Brothers, especially the financially debilitating terms of the contract for *Pierre*

which offered the struggling author a mere twenty cents on the dollar in revenue, and, most of

all, the tremendous losses he incurred as a result of the fire in the Harper's storehouse which

destroyed the back-stock of all his novels, colored Melville's attitude regarding the financial

opportunism of the bureaucratic sect. For Melville, the predominant cultural narrative which

affirmed the benevolence and moral-uprightness of the bureaucracy would have appeared a

pernicious lie, a falsehood that he sought to speak truth to through his fiction.

Superficially, at least, "Bartleby's" narrator aligns with predominant cultural narratives regarding attorneys and bureaucrats: he is affable, Christian, materialistic, seemingly benevolent, vain, and ambitious (but not overly so). The story's opening line, "I am a rather elderly man" (14), immediately conveys the narrator's social standing as an aged, experienced, masculine, conversational voice—a speaker who wishes to make overtures of sociability and to build consensus with the narrative audience. However, the opening line also introduces an important narrative device whereby the reader comes to learn that the story is narrated retroactively. He is "a rather elderly man" looking back on events that had occurred earlier in his "safe" career doing "a snug business" (14), seeking to totalize events which, we must surmise, continue to trouble him even at the time of the story's narration. As a result of the retroactive narration, a polite and studied detachment inflects the story's discourse whereby social and historical details, relayed as if in casual conversation, come to serve as overtures of sociability that both align the narrator's viewpoint with the readership and encode social and historical markers that enrich the story's ethical significance. Due to the detached and retroactive narration, historicizing these overtures of sociability in the narration can be difficult. In "From Wall Street to Astor Place," Barbara Foley notes that this narrative detachment requires the critic to engage in "political" and "psychoanalytic" detective work in order to recover the social, economic, and ethical history which "must be reconstructed from what has been repressed, fragmented and displaced to the margins of the text" by the narrator (88). The reconstruction of this history in the narrator's discourse reveals a set of middle-class and petty capitalist ideologies that must be examined in order to fully understand the ethical significance of "Bartleby."

Most apparently, the narrator's emphasis upon his social connections to John Jacob Astor expressly conveys his allegiance to middle-class ideology, sociability, reasonability, and cultural practice:

> "The late John Jacob Astor, a personage little given to poetic enthusiasm, had no hesitation in pronouncing my first grand point to be prudence; my next, method. I do not speak it in vanity, but simply to record the fact, that I was not unemployed in my profession by the late John Jacob Astor; a name which, I admit, I love to repeat, for it hath a rounded and orbicular sound to it, and rings like unto bullion." (14)

To the narrator, the mere sound of Astor's name, which "rings like unto bullion," evokes images of material richness, attesting to his bourgeois and petty capitalist allegiances, affiliations running counter to Carlyle's indictments of "The Paper Age." Astor, one of the wealthiest men in the world in the 1850s, was the first large-scale real estate tycoon of New York City and his social prominence to the narrator aligns with recurrent analyses of urbanity in Melville's fiction of the mid-century. In *Melville's City*, Wyn Kelley categorizes this fictional analysis of tenancy and real estate in terms that bespeak class-struggle and fraught notions of urban autonomy (194). Certainly, John Jacob Astor's real estate maneuverings exploited these fraught power-lines for material gains and the narrator's allegiance with this historic persona attests to "the downward spiral of social mobility" (194) in 1850s New York.

Furthermore, to Melville's readers, Astor's name would have represented a very different set of associations than those the narrator indexes. Though Astor's enterprising in the urban real-estate market would have been a prominent point of reference among readers, the recent Astor Place Riots invites an even more complex set of relational problems between the narrator and the narrative audience. In "Class Acts: The Astor Place Riots," Dennis Berthold analyzes the

realignment of class relations along lines of nativism, situating Melville's "The Two Temples" amid this public crisis. On May tenth of 1849, a mob largely comprised of working-class nativists, their ire provoked by handbills circulated by the American Native Party, staged a riot protesting a staging of *Macbeth* at the Astor Place Opera House which featured renowned British actor William Charles Macready (430). Due to rioting at a previous performance at the Opera House, Macready had planned to cancel the remaining performances. A petition signed by forty-seven of New York's intellectual and artistic elite, including Herman Melville, Washington Irving, and Evert Duyckinck, persuaded the actor to fulfill his engagement (429). Berthold convincingly argues that Melville's involvement with the petition and the after-effects of the riot positioned him in a complex interrelation of social sects and ethical standpoints that reveals a stark divide between the author and the working classes, a fissure that characterizes his work from this period (431). Thus, though the significance of the name "Astor" to the narrator, with all its connotations of reasonability and sociability, to both Melville and his readership "Astor" was synonymous with class warfare, growing divides between rich and poor, nativist ire, and the fraught coexistence of densely populated, rapidly transforming, ethnically diverse 1850s New York.

The Astor Place Riots are a watershed event in the coalescence of artistic and ideological sects in the middle of the nineteenth-century. Though the boundaries of partisan politics and class divides remained complexly interrelated, the Astor Place Riots resulted in a widespread ideological revision on the part of the artistic and literary elite. The ideological basis for these working class rioters constituted a three-fold agenda which decried immigrants, blacks, and the Whig Party. During the riot, the mob was reported to have cried "Three cheers for Macready, Nigger Douglass, and Pete Williams!" Frederick Douglass had recently scandalized New York

by walking arm-in-arm down Broadway with two white women and Pete Williams was a local

saloon-keeper who hosted interracial dancing (Berthold 434). Local businesses and public

figures that broke with the nativist restrictions upon the intermixing of races and nations had

long been the target of this mobocracy; however, the Astor Place riots indicted New York's

cultural elite as Whig allies and abolitionist sympathizers whose anti-American activities in the

field of culture disenfranchised native laboring classes. This indictment of the cultural elite, often

members of society who deemed themselves sympathetic to the plight of the laboring classes,

resulted in fraught and divided ideological allegiances that significantly affected Melville's New

York literary circle.

In addition to the ideological upheavals resulting from the riots, the event directly

affected Melville's everyday life. His home on Fourth Avenue was a short walk from the Opera

House, and, due to his direct connection with the petition, he would have been a target for

rumored mob reprisals. Furthermore, because the national guard had fired into the crowd of

protestors, killing twenty-three, the escalation of the violence to extend to specific members of

the petition signing cohort would have appeared to be a likelihood, if not an inevitability

(Berthold 437). This dramatic shift in the social landscape as a result of the riots may have forced

Melville to reconsider the relationship between his art and his ideological affiliations. Before the

riots, he was a contributor to a small and loosely associated cohort of Democratic writers

prepossessed of working-class leanings and Jacksonian Democracy who published in magazines

and periodicals such as *Young America* (1851), *Arcturus* (1849), and *The Democratic Review*

(1837-1859), the last of which featured Melville's most pronounced work of literary nationalism,

"Hawthorne and His Mosses" (1850). However, as a result of the dangerous and divisive

controversy resulting from the ideological fallout from the Astor Place Riots, this cohort

attenuated their working-class sympathies and sought to realign their ideological and artistic stances accordingly.

The narrator's encoding of the Astor Place Riot in the margins of the story's discourse invites an examination of the wide range of class upheavals occurring in New York in the mid-nineteenth century. The story's retroactive narration places the time-of-the-telling in the late 1840s or early 1850s. The labor market at this time underwent a resurgence, resulting in an accompanying groundswell of organized labor rights activism: "A burst of strikes hit the city's bookbinding, upholstering, shoemaking, and tailoring shops; at the peak of what turned out to be a successful five-week strike, the tailors mounted a torchlight procession two thousand string, led by two musical band and men carrying the republican banners of old" (Wilentz 350). The emergent labor rights activist movement gained momentum and coalesced in a radicalized social sect that led Walt Whitman to comment in 1850 that "At this moment, New York is the most radical city in America" (39). The narrator's ideological precepts, conveyed through a detached narration that eschews these upheavals to the margins of the text as well as his overtures of sociability, run counter to this social movement which found its footing mid-decade.

The editorial politics at *Putnam's* regarding class divisions is best exemplified by a public interest piece "The Benevolent Institutions of New York"[25] which ran a few months before "Bartleby." This article clearly demonstrates the growing infrastructure for caring for the indigent, wayward, and disabled of New York's rapidly growing population. Reading "Benevolent Institutions" within the historical context of the heightened class tensions post-Astor Place reveals a certain defensiveness on the part of the author, an apparent need to reconcile New York's growing class fissures with Christian doctrines:

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[25] *Putnam's Monthly,* June 1853

"Our great city has the name of loving the dollar well; she ought equally to have the glory of spending it kindly and freely. Our charities appear on the same grand scale as our business. It is a refreshing thing—and in the whirl and struggle of New-York life, it does one good—to turn aside a moment to our great institutions of mercy and world-wide charity—to find that wealth, and talents, and enterprise have at length been employed to make men less selfish, and to bring them nearer to one another, in kindness." (673)

The article proceeds to take the reader on a tour of Manhattan's many charitable institutions to account for the tremendous monetary expenditures of such institutions and to describe the prominence, sturdiness, and humaneness of the buildings themselves, with a noticeable focus upon those institutions that print religious materials, undertake religious education, and engage in missionary works. This public relations piece conveys an editorial politics of casual altruism at *Putnam's*, a social benevolence that reaffirms the Christian ideologies and ethical stances of the periodical's middle-class readers.

In addition, "Benevolent Institutions" may have served as an important source in the development of Bartleby's famous refusal "I'd prefer not to." The article describes The Bloomingdale Lunatic Asylum,[26] an institution founded to advance "*the moral treatment*" (682) of its inmates. The piece describes the duties of the inmates in terms strikingly similar to Bartleby's refusal: "The patients perform some manual labor; but a large proportion either unaccustomed to work, or used to only one kind of work, *refuse to do anything*" (682). The author's standpoint on the link between work and insanity corresponds with the widely-held belief that an unwillingness to participate in the labor market, or an inability to adapt to the professional demands of the workforce, approximates insanity. This public belief in the link

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[26] See *History, Description, and Statistics of The Bloomindale Asylum for the Insane,* by Pliny Earle M.D., published by Hovey & King in 1848.

between work-force withdrawal and mental illness, as well as the belief that treatment for such illness is of an essentially moral nature, plays out dramatically in a pattern of failed reconciliations between Bartleby and the narrator. Just as the Bloomingdale Lunatic Asylum undertakes moral treatments of their inmates, the attorney problematizes Bartleby's alterity only within moral bounds. The narrator's means of reforming Bartleby, his "treatment," is of a moral and a social nature:

> "To a sensitive being, pity is not seldom pain. And when at last it is perceived that such pity cannot lead to effectual succor, common sense bids the soul be rid of it. What I saw that morning persuaded me that the scrivener was the victim of innate and incurable disorder. I might give alms to his body; but his body did not pain him; it was his soul that suffered, and his soul I could not reach." (29)

Thus, the narrator's operative means of solving this dilemma borrows the language of reform: a casual adaptation of Evangelical philosophy and theology wherein the body cannot be sufficiently treated unless the soul is first. This belief justifies the narrator's abuses of his forlorn dependent, since, to the narrator, Bartleby is essentially deficient and unreachable.

The ideologies underpinning the narrator's ethical decision-making promote moralistic interventions premised upon a casual altruism, the sort of "soft ethics" so apparent in "Benevolent Institutions of New York." On a Sunday, the narrator arrives at his office to discover that Bartleby had taken up residence there, day and night, subsisting, as if a rodent, on gingernuts and bits of cheese. This discovery implores the narrator to evaluate his own disposition, deploying readymade sentimental and ideological tropes:

> "For the first time in my life a feeling of overpowering stinging melancholy seized me. Before, I had never experienced aught but a not-pleasing sadness. The bond of common

humanity now drew me irresistibly to gloom. A fraternal melancholy! For both I and

Bartleby were sons of Adam. I remembered the bright silks and sparkling faces I had seen

that day, in gala trim, swan-like sailing down Broadway; and I contrasted them with the

pallid copyist, and thought to myself, Ah, happiness courts the light, so we deem the

world is gay; but misery hides aloof, so we deem that misery there is none." (28)

Here, the narrator finds himself flung into a troubling ethical and ideological dilemma. He must,

as Marx famously implored capitalist societies, "face with sober senses [his] real conditions of

life, and [his] relations with [his] kind" (38). Confronted with the "real conditions of life," the

narrator plummets into an internal conundrum wherein he realizes the material shortfall between

classes—he sees the sociability and comfort of urbane society in stark contrast to the isolation

and indigence of Bartleby's condition. The retroactive narration affords the attorney a totalizing

viewpoint to sentimentalize the fraught nature of class relations, and, in essence, to absolve

himself from meaningful engagement with alterity. The realization that "happiness courts the

light" but "misery hides aloof" reaffirms the awareness-driven narratives conveyed by "New

York's Benevolent Institutions;" however, the expressly social and moral interventions the

attorney attempts to enact in order to rescue Bartleby from social death all fail.

Because the narrator often invokes doctrines of property rights to legitimize his ethical

withdrawals, it is clear that he views Bartleby's autonomy as mastered. Throughout the many

failed reconciliations with Bartleby, the narrator consistently legitimizes Bartleby's abuses on the

basis of his tenancy. For instance, when Bartleby refuses to quit the offices after he has been

dismissed, the narrator demands that Bartleby justify his tenancy: "What earthly right have you

to stay here? Do you pay any rent? Do you pay my taxes? Or is this property yours?" (35). In the

book chapter "Sojourner in the City of Man," Wyn Kelley examines how competing ideologies

regarding property rights and tenancy play out between Bartleby and the narrator. She argues that Bartleby's "self-possession," his immovable bodily presence as well as his unwavering refusal, overpowers the narrator's sense of ownership, one which is merely conveyed by and constituted of words (206). This failure of words, more specifically, of the capacity for paperwork to underwrite and legitimize propriety, can be seen in the narrator's inability to reconcile Bartleby's unwanted tenancy in the legal offices after work hours:

> "Now the utterly unsurmised appearance of Bartleby, tenanting my law-chambers of a Sunday morning, with his cadaverously gentlemanly *non-chalance*, yet withal firm and self-possessed, had such a strange effect on me, that incontinently I slunk away from my own door, and did as desired. But not without sundry twinges of impotent rebellion against the mild effrontery of this unaccountable scrivener. Indeed, it was his wonderful mildness chiefly, which not only disarmed me, but unmanned me, as it were. For I consider that one, for the time, is a sort of unmanned when he tranquilly permits his hired clerk to dictate to him, and order him away from his own premises." (26-27)

Here, Bartleby's tenancy directly undermines the narrator's authority, constituting a rebellion against the narrator's mastery which is underwritten by doctrines of class superiority. Significantly, Melville situates this rebellion amid terms which bespeak thwarted masculinity and fraught homosociality—the narrator slinks away "incontinently," he is "unmanned" and "disarmed" by the scrivener's rebellion. Thus, The narrator's repeated struggles to attenuate his ethical stance towards Bartleby's open rebellion constitutes a pattern of failed reconciliation, resulting in a shortfall that reveals the troubled social underpinnings of fraught class relations in mid-nineteenth century New York City. However, by indexing the fraught "mano a mano" interrelations between Bartleby and the narrator, Melville brings to bear gendered vocabularies

which highlight divisive and hyper-competitive masculine ideologies which undergird class warfare.

Yet, "Bartleby" is not simply a story about class struggle. At the heart of the story is an examination of the limits of free-will and the failures of moral intervention. Indeed, it is this philosophical and theological core that twentieth and twenty-first-century theorists analyze in order to better understand the broad ethical significance of the text. As the story catalogs the many failed reconciliations between the two oppositional ideologies of Bartleby and the narrator, the attorney's moral forbearance becomes untethered. To ground himself in socially-licensed moral teachings, he consults with the evangelical theologian Jonathan Edwards' *Freedom of the Will* (1845): "…in any act of will whatsoever, the mind chooses one thing rather than another; it chooses something rather than the contrary, or rather than the want of non-existence of that thing" (2). This text affirms the ontological centrality of choice as a defining characteristic of ethical action. In other words, choice is the expressly logical function of *preference*. This philosophical claim fundamentally shapes the narrator's mental armatures which deny Bartleby's autonomy: because he prefers not to, his will is not free.

In addition, it is this theological precept that licenses the narrator's disavowal of Bartleby's autonomy. The "moral treatment" espoused by so many of the charities recounted in "Benevolent Institutions of New York" is premised upon the foundational belief that those who receive charity are victims of their own failure to take meaningful action to improve their lives; essentially, that they are not prepossessed of a strong will. In *Revivalism and Cultural Change*, George M. Thomas argues that Edwards' notion of free will is instrumental in the casual implementation a Christian Humanist self among the middle class, a popular notion of identity that embodied the "autonomous 'rugged individual' of petty capitalism" (82). This widespread

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application of free-will evangelical doctrines went hand-in-hand with the implementation of a charity-based relief infrastructure premised upon moral instruction. Such doctrines legitimize the narrator's efforts to lift Bartleby from the depths of economic and social depravity; yet, such teachings absolve him of any ethical responsibility to undertake such altruistic initiatives. Thus, theological notions of selfhood, such as Edwards's, legitimize the narrator's belief that he aids Bartleby out of free will, as the result of elected charity premised upon moral intervention.

Certainly, we can situate "Bartleby" as a part of a broader reform narrative apparent in much of Melville's urban fiction. Carol Colatrella argues that "Bartleby" can be contextualized within an extended social critique of urbanity in Melville's fiction from this period which "describe[s] the insufficiencies of capitalism and Christianity as systems ensuring social and economic equity, especially in environments exhibiting rigid hierarchies with little prospect for mobility" (171). The failed pattern of reconciliation between Bartleby and the narrator clearly indicates that the "rigid hierarchies" of the bureaucratic workplace result in an insufficient means of reform. Read in this light, when Bartleby starves to death in The Tombs, the story advances an acerbic rejoinder to social values which make claims to social stability and equity. Contextualizing The Tombs historically, it becomes clear that the carceral nature of the legalistic and bureaucratic world of the story finds a bitter but logical terminus. The prison not only incarcerated 173 inmates in individual cells and over 400 in a "general population" setting, it also housed "the Courts of General and Special Sessions, the First District Police Court, the House of Detention, and the office of the district attorney sheriff and clerk" (Gilfoyle 526). Thus, the apparatus of the legal bureaucracy, the very system which facilitated the story's ethical dilemma, occupies and constitutes a space of socially sanctioned mass-incarceration.

Bartleby's incarceration is a vital component of a broader critique of the insufficiencies of capitalism, Christianity, and the power apparatus of the industrial "Paper Age." In addition, because Melville's urban fictions of the mid nineteenth-century alert readers to the insufficiency of social institutions to effectively reform or otherwise aid those on the margins of urban society, when the narrator pays a visit to Bartleby in prison, it is in the spirit of the casual humanitarianism described in "New York's Charitable Institutions" that the narrator seeks to reason with Bartleby regarding his incarceration:

> "'It was not I that brought you here, Bartleby… And to you this should not be so vile a place. Nothing reproachful attaches to you by being here. And see, it is not so sad a place as one might think. Look, there is the sky, and here is the grass.'" (43)

Though the narrator directly facilitates Bartleby's incarceration, he seeks to escape culpability by adopting a standpoint that reaffirms essentialist doctrines. It is clear that the narrator sees the cause of Bartleby's incarceration as a failure to assert free-will and his inability to adopt the normative behaviors of the bureaucratic work force. The narrator reasons that Bartleby's incarceration is not stigmatizing, that it is a place befitting his socially withdrawn state of being, and that The Tombs furnishes the inmate with a humane living environment: "Look, there is the sky, and here is the grass." In effect, the narrator reasons that incarceration promotes the same humanitarian outcomes as any other charitable institution. In this final failed reconciliation, the narrator reaffirms the "doctrine of assumptions" (38) which he so ruthlessly implements throughout his dealings with Bartleby. Read historically, this doctrine ethically substantiates the avoidance of social ills by incarcerating those individuals who present a challenge to predominant cultural practices.

Even when the narrator believes he is capable of viewing Bartleby as human, when he

believes he sees Bartleby's social death as profound, this view of Bartleby's is couched in

altruistic, Christian, and humanist language: "A fraternal melancholy! For both I and Bartleby

were sons of Adam" (28). Though this retroactive analysis of his ethical involvement is well-

intentioned, these biblical tropes of fraternity and heredity invite a set of exclusions which

reaffirm essentialist doctrines. Significantly, a few months after the publication of "Bartleby" in

Putnam's, Parke Godwin, a leading contributor to the periodical, authored a review titled "Is

Man One or Many?,"[27] which excerpted and analyzed *Types of Mankind* (1854), an early

anthropological text. Godwin's lengthy and erudite analysis both substantiates the text's

biological case for racial supremacy and situates its argument in the theological doctrines of

revivalism: "For though the primordial forms of Races are distinctive and fixed… the great

triumph of Christianity will consist in educing the spiritual phase of each type of man…" (14). In

addition, an anonymous editorial in *Putnam's,* titled "Are All Men Descendants of Adam?,"[28]

echoes the sentiments evinced by Godwin's review: "The mysterious sympathy which inspires

whole nations with the emotions of a single man… can be satisfactorily accounted for by no

other theory, than that which supposes the moral, religious, and physical unity of the human

race" (89). These editorials demonstrate the casual altruism and revivalist humanism which

defines the editorial politics at *Putnam's*. Furthermore, these writings verify middle-class

ideologies premised upon doctrines of essentialism wherein the operative means of social uplift

is by way of moral and religious redemption.

Thus, "Bartleby" challenges these assumptions and this editorial politics by alerting

readers to the limits of charity and to the social death resulting from violently fraught class

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[27] *Putnam's Monthly*, July 1854
[28] *Putnam's Monthly,* January 1855

divisions. Broadly speaking, "Bartleby" pushes against the common belief that Adamic blood-lineage constitutes the extent of fraternal bonds and asks the reader to look beyond these boundaries. Much like with Melville's early writing to "the fireside people," "Bartleby" draws upon emergent and popular national genre-writing, such as Maitland's *The Lawyer's Story*, to advance a correction of the ideological ethical precepts which unite middle-class readers. Just as *Typee* drew upon the conventions of the travel narrative and the emotional register of the sentimental to indict consular power and doctrines of racial supremacy, "Bartleby" adopts the stylistic conventions and narratives of moral reform from lawyer's tales to advance a critique of the limitations of charity and the casual altruism which underwrites efforts of social reform. In "Bartleby," Melville returns to the subject matter he had sketched in "Loomings," those "landsmen… tied to counters, nailed to benches clinched to desks" (1), indexing and narrating the cultural practices and ideological doctrines of these bureaucratic workers in order to build consensus with a popular readership as well as to challenge the assumptions which underwrite their exploitation.

Correcting "The Great Biographer": Revisionism and Industrialism in Israel Potter

"Seeing that your Highness, according to the definition above, may, in the loftiest sense, be deemed the Great Biographer: the national commemorator of such of the anonymous privates of June 17, 1775, who may never have received other requital than the solid reward of your granite."

-"To His Highness the Bunker Hill Monument," 1854

In addition to Parke Godwin's review of *Types of Mankind*, the July 1854 edition of *Putnam's* also featured the first installment of Melville's only serial novel, *Israel Potter*. Read alongside Godwin's review, it is clear that *Israel Potter* interrogates the same problematic values of exceptionalism and altruism among *Putnam's* readers. Furthermore, like much of Melville's fiction from this period, *Israel Potter* asks readers to look beyond comforting narratives of stability and equity to see the uncomfortable truth of an unjust social landscape. Due to the novel's serial form, the narrative adopts a wide range of generic tropes and appropriates sources drawing upon a panoply of historical and fictional texts. Perhaps more than any other of Melville's works, *Israel Potter* is a hybridized and polyglot text, a sweeping picaresque which voices the historical narratives of the predominant culture in a polyphony of forms, genres, and discourses. Throughout the novel's composition, Melville deftly navigated the editorial politics of the periodical marketplace and adapted his compositional orientation in order to meet audience expectations, maneuvers resulting in social overtures and generous efforts to build social consensus. However, as seen in the dedication, Melville also sought to redress the wrongs

to those historical actors on society's margins whom history had forgotten, to provide these "anonymous privates" with remembrance other than Bunker Hill's reward of solid granite.

As John Samson points out, "Melville's 'Revolutionary Narrative' is vitally political, showing a similar preoccupation with the themes of democracy and elitism, poverty and Christianity, and the interrelations among them in the American mind" (173). Thus, despite the novel's formal devices and generic conventions designed to meet the approval of a popular audience, *Israel Potter* must be considered a work of literary dissent. As George Dekker notes in "The Genealogy of the American Romance," "our major romancers have always been profoundly concerned with what might be called the mental or ideological 'manners' of American society, and that their seemingly anti-mimetic fictions both represent and criticize those manners" (82). However, because of the commercialization of the literary marketplace, the predominant editorial politics promoted literary texts which sought to appease the divisive political leanings middle-class readers ambivalent towards literatures of dissent. By mid-century, the United States had rapidly industrialized and mythologies of chosenness and promise became predominant in the American social order; likewise, historical narratives reaffirmed these beliefs and cultural practices of exceptionalism among popular readers. Throughout *Israel Potter's* composition and publication, Melville adopted source materials to build consensus with the "fireside" readership as well as to assert corrections of their dearly held cultural myths and exclusionary social practices. Thus, in *Israel Potter*, Melville asserts a correction of narrativized Revolutionary history and an indictment of the dehumanizing effects of Industrialism through the carefully veiled formal conveyances of adventure and romance.

Israel Potter, serialized in *Putnam's* from July of 1854 to March of 1855, serves as an excellent example of Melville's compositional shifts because it is the only book-length serial in

Melville's career. As a text, it reveals a long-term engagement with editorial politics and encompasses many shifts in the author's use of source materials. The basic source for *Israel Potter*, Henry Trumbull's *Life and Remarkable Adventures of Israel Potter* (1824), describes Israel's courageous deeds at the Battle of Bunker Hill, his tale of captivity as a prisoner of war, his secretive position as courier for Benjamin Franklin, his eventual descent into abject poverty in London, finally returning to his native Berkshires, senile and defeated. Indeed, Potter's life trajectory is very similar to hundreds of Revolutionary War narratives compiled in Richard Dorson's *Patriots of the American Revolution* (1998). Melville composed sixty pages of manuscript rewriting this basic source, which he then submitted to *Harper's* and *Putman's*. To adapt the novel to conform to editorial politics and meet audience expectations, Melville deployed tropes native to narrativized US historical writing. Franklin's Autobiography (1793), Cooper's *History of the Navy* (1846), the biographical writings of Jared Sparks and Washington Irving, are all evident in Melville's description, style, and analysis of historical events in the novel (Samson 181). The engagement and disengagement with a variety of source materials, leaping from text to text as the composition of this serial progressed, invites rich textual analysis and provides unusually clear insights into the author's compositional process.

Evidence from Melville's journal reveals his intentions to adapt Trumbull's *Life* into a work of fiction as early as 1849, four-and-a half years before Melville began composing *Israel Potter*. When Melville was residing at 25 Craven Street in London, visiting bookshops and checking the newspapers for reviews of *Redburn* (1849), he wrote in his journal that he "[l]ooked over a lot of ancient maps in London. Bought one (A.D. 1766) for 3 & 6 pence. I want to use it in case I serve up the Revolutionary narrative of the Beggar" (*Journals,* 43). The fact that Melville began gathering source materials well in advance of composition, that his research for *Israel*

Potter predates the commercial and critical failures of *Moby Dick* and *Pierre*, suggests that

Melville had shelved this narrative in favor of the far more ambitious aims of these sprawling

single-edition novels. Melville's disparagement of this writing project, as is evident in his use of

the verb "serve up" and the tentative qualifier "in case," could suggest that he viewed this

project, even in its early inception, as one with humble aspirations to simply build consensus

with a broader readership. The disparagement of careerist and commercial writing evident in this

journal passage is consistent with an 1849 letter Melville wrote to Lemuel Shaw: "[*Redburn* and

Whitejacket] are two *jobs*, which I have done for money—being forced to it, as other men are to

sawing wood" (*Correspondence*, 138). It seems that Melville resigned himself to writing projects

like *Redburn, Whitejacket,* or *Israel Potter* simply to recuperate credentials and to establish

himself as a professional author, writing in the popular conventions of his time.

Due to widespread charges by critics of "excessive subjectivity and self-indulgent

metaphysicality" (Dekker 189) in the ambitious single-edition novels *Pierre* and *Moby Dick*, it is

probable that Melville revisited Trumbull's *Life* in an effort to engage with a reading public

whose desire for non-fictional and autobiographical writing demanded narrative works premised

upon facts and personal experience (Post-Lauria 6). In May of 1854, Melville began

correspondence with *Harper's* and with *Putnam's* to publish *Israel Potter* in serialized form, a

proposal that *Harper's* rejected and *Putnam's* accepted.[29] In *Correspondent Colorings*, Sheila

Post-Lauria argues that Melville had originally conceived the first six manuscript chapters of

Israel Potter in keeping with *Harper's* editorial policies, which condoned paraphrased

biographical sketches with sentimental episodes, chronicling "the life and loves of a historical

figure" (196). However, when *Harper's* chose to pass on the serial, Melville outlined it in greater

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[29] Shelia Post-Lauria claims that this is the only text by Melville rejected then "reconceived to meet the editorial policies of [a] competitor" (194).

detail for *Putnam's* to justify his compositional choices in compliance with the competing magazine's editorial practices (197-198). Though *Putnam's* also offered up biographical sketches to appease the public appetite for non-fictional accounts, the magazine never published paraphrased biographies, resisted sentimental episodes, rebuffed the influence of British literary taste, and coveted writing that took up divisive and contemporary politics, editorial preferences which Melville dutifully attended to in his subsequent expansions of the manuscript (Post-Lauria 198-199). Thus, Melville may have expanded his treatment of *Israel Potter's* biographical subject matter to conform to these editorial practices. Melville's original submission to both magazines, the serial's subsequent expansions and digressions, the engagements and disengagements with a variety of source materials, all attest to the author's awareness and adoption of established editorial politics.

Melville's need to recuperate his credentials with "the fireside people" is apparent in his correspondences with G.P. Putnam in May and June of 1854. He had previously submitted "The Two Temples"[30] to *Putnam's*; the magazine subsequently declined to publish it due to the story's harsh satire of the wealthy and influential Grace Church in New York (*Correspondence,* 637). Clearly, the editors of *Putnam's* valued Melville's contributions and feared losing him to the competition because G.P. Putnam himself authored the rejection letter, providing explanation, requested a daguerreotype of Melville for future usage in the magazine, and invited him to "give us some more of your good things" (*Correspondence,* 637). In response, Melville proposed a serial and outlined his plans for *Israel Potter* to Putnam, enclosing the initial sixty pages of manuscript: "I engage that the story shall contain nothing of any sort to shock the fastidious.

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[30] Andrew Delbanco classifies "The Two Temples" as one Melville's "diptych" stories, tales which position opposing narratives to assert a social critique (224-225). *Harper's* published two such stories, "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs" (1854) and "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids" (1855).

There will be very little reflective writing in it; nothing weighty. It is adventure"

(*Correspondence*, 265). Here, "reflective writing" refers to the lengthy philosophical and

encyclopedic digressions of *Pierre* and *Moby Dick*, a style for which Melville was widely

castigated by critics, damaging his reputation with readers and publishers. In proposing a serial

"adventure," Melville implied to Putnam that he had planned to adopt the extant conventions of

this genre and to return to the stylistic norms of Cooper and Defoe (Post-Lauria 190-191),

narrative conventions that first introduced Melville to the reading public with *Typee*.

Melville's engagement with editorial politics, especially in his aggressive solicitation of

the *Israel Potter* manuscript, suggests a degree of personal involvement, an attention to careerist

concern, a self-consciousness of his damaged prestige, which complicates totalizing notions of

subversion in Melville's compositional orientation. In the initial manuscript submission to

Harper's, there is a noticeable lack of social critique, despite the overtly political suggestiveness

of the basic source. This avoidance demonstrates Melville's awareness of *Harper's* non-political

and "unbiased" editorial policy, which sought to provide periodical content "with the most

perfect freedom from prejudice and partiality of any kind."[31] For instance, the opening chapters

of the *Israel Potter* manuscript speak directly to an editorial position in *Harper's*: "[d]ifficulties

are the tutors and monitors of men, placed in their path for their best discipline and

development." [32] The opening chapters, which paraphrase Trumbull's text closely, reaffirm this

widely held moral belief. To attract attention from *Harper's* editors for his submission, Melville

also chose to include a bit of sentimentality, with the invention of a love-interest for Israel not

present in the basic source: "But if hopes of his sweetheart winged his returning flight, such

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[31] "A World at the Start," *Harper's Monthly*, June 1 1850.
[32] *Harper's Monthly,* April 1 1853.

hopes were not destined to be crowned with fruition. The dear, false girl, was another's" (11).[33]

This inclusion adheres to the conventions of the *Harper's* biographical sketch, often a speculative meditation on the lives and loves of historical figures.

Though the editorial policies of *Putnam's* resemble those of *Harper's* in many regards, most notably in the periodical's encyclopedic reviews of literature, theatre, and the fine arts, *Putnam's* published American writers almost exclusively, analyzed the political and social particulars of life in the United States, and sought an audience of educated readers who would covet "the results of the acutest observations, and the most trenchant thought."[34] As such, Melville's treatment of Revolutionary political and cultural issues in the ensuing chapters of *Israel Potter,* especially those chapters beyond the initial manuscript submission to *Harper's*, draw out differences between England and the United States to emphasize the failures of British paternalism and the follies of colonial autocracy. Furthermore, these expanded chapters move away from the narrative scope of the basic source, the simple facts of Israel's life experiences, to convey in-depth historical particulars from the viewpoint of the story's hero. For instance, Melville expanded a paragraph on Potter's role as secret courier to Benjamin Franklin into four chapters, developing an embedded biographical sketch that ironically portrays the founding father, at times, as a "Renowned Sage" (ix) with versatile, generous intelligence, at others, as a condescending and manipulative spendthrift. Trumbull's *Life* makes but a brief mention of John Paul Jones, a detail that Melville expands into long sequences dominated by Jones' fearlessness, embellished with an unlikely friendship with the narrative's genial and soft-spoken protagonist.

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[33] George Dekker argues that this episode is a "patriotic allegory" of "filial forbearance and reluctant rebellion" (191).

[34] *Putnam's Monthly,* January 1 1853.

Israel's adventures also put him into contact with Ethan Allen, the subject of an enormously popular Revolutionary veterans' narrative.

These digressions and expansions from basic source material result in a mock-heroic picaresque, a formal disunity that lead Newton Arvin to assert in his 1950 study *Herman Melville* that *Israel Potter* is "a heap of sketches" (245). The way a reader totalizes the narrative form of the novel largely depends upon the way one chooses to read its central character. Arvin views Israel, in contrast to Melville's assertive seafaring characters such as Ahab and Ishmael, as "an almost featureless recipient of experience" (246), noting the protagonist's lack of agency and the limitations of the reader's access to his reasoning. However, Melville limited Israel's capacity for reflection and philosophical musing in order to prevent the serial from venturing into metaphysical terrain, to keep the book from taking on anything too "weighty," thereby remaining in the bounds of his agreement with G.P. Putnam. Furthermore, Arvin's assertion that Israel is a "recipient of experience," that he is always the subject of events and never the agent, misreads the author's purposes. Viewed in contrast to the Franklinian tradition of autobiographical writing,[35] a genre wherein the protagonist takes action against the inequalities of an unjust social landscape, *Israel Potter* presents the reader with a vital counterexample. Rather than a narrative wherein the individual's struggles and triumphs act as a stand in for revolutionary doctrines of self-determination, *Israel Potter* demonstrates the hero's failures to overcome society's brutal inequalities; thus, Potter is a man who is always the acted upon, the oppressed, the marginalized, and forgotten.

Read in this light, the recurrent episodes of the protagonist's capture, imprisonment, escape, disguise, and suffering in poverty accommodate a theory of formal stability that unites

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[35] Russel Resing notes "The suggestion that Potter may have paraded his goods via wheelbarrow, of course, echoes one of the more famous moments from Franklin's *Autobiography*" (134).

the seemingly disparate "sketches," comprising a unified and strident counterargument to the individualistic discourse that dominates post-Revolutionary autobiographical writing. Russel Reising argues that this challenge to the myth of exceptionalism endemic in narratized United States history "insert[s] a counterversion which… while drawing on familiar sources and quotations, destabilizes our sense of those events we think we know most comfortably" (166-167). Thus, the formal eccentricities of this mock heroic picaresque constitute an outspoken rejoinder to the heroic narratives of revolutionary individualistic discourse and a cataloging of the "environmental constituents" which thwart social uplift (120). Though *Israel Potter* is, in many ways, a text which seeks to build consensus with a middle-class readership through the deployment of readily available biographical and historical sketches, Melville reconstructs the "erased margins of history" (127) to imply that those historical figures well-remembered by history and popular memory such as John Paul Jones or Benjamin Franklin are, in fact, deeply indebted to those individuals that society abuses and history erases.

In *Israel Potter's* dedication, Melville outlines the historical and biographical revisions the text seeks to redress, clearly stating the aims of the text's "most devoted and most obsequious… editor" (viii). Though this preface did not appear in the serial version and was later added to the 1855 single edition, in the preface the "editor" deems the Bunker-Hill Monument "the Great Biographer: the national commemorator of such of the anonymous privates of June 17, 1775 who may never have received other requital than the solid reward of your granite" (viii). Here, Melville asserts that the exclusions of narrativized history concretize in the public monument, resulting in a totalized view of history that fails to attest to the sacrifices and struggles of the many "anonymous privates" who lost their lives to secure independence. In this preface, Melville makes clear that the "editor" of *Israel Potter* seeks to emend such a view of

history by redressing the failure of public memory to provide "requital" for the excluded heroes on the margins of US history. Thus, *Israel Potter* serves as a rejoinder to public commemoration, one which dismantles foundational myths and doctrines of individualism dearly held by "the fireside people." As such, Melville revises exclusionary cultural practices to bestow dignity upon historical actors and agents neglected by popular accounts of narrativized history, those individuals thwarted by the inequalities of a rapidly industrializing and unjust social landscape.

In addition, *Israel Potter's* critique of exclusionist historical narratives extends beyond the politics of Revolutionary commemoration in order to relate directly to the social dilemmas of Melville's times. The first serial installment of *Israel Potter* in *Putnam's* appeared in the July 1854 issue and was subtitled "A Fourth of July Story." Though this sub-title was later dropped from the serial, this commemorative holiday signified a broad range of meanings to various publics in the mid-nineteenth-century. Anne Baker describes the contested significance of Independence Day in the context of increasingly factious debates around slavery in the 1850s. She argues that abolitionists latched onto the Fourth of July[36] as a date that highlights the gross inequality and hypocrisy of a society that cherishes independence from colonial autocracy but protects the rights of slave-holders and preserves governing doctrines of slave holding states (Baker 9). In the same month as *Israel Potter's* first serial installment in *Putnam's*, at an Independence Day Celebration in Massachusetts, William Llloyd Garrison, editor of the abolitionist publication *The Liberator,* famously burned a copy of the US constitution to protest the return of Anthony Burns, an escaped slave, to his enslaver (9). On Independence Day of 1852, Frederick Douglass' famed oratory "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" confidently

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[36] Melville declined an invitation to deliver the "Fourth of July oration" to the citizens of Pittsfield on the basis that he was not "in the habit of doing anything of this sort" and that it "did not lie within the scope of [his] ability" (*Correspondence,* 244).

asserted the obvious exclusions of this holiday, arguing that the occasion only demonstrates "the immeasurable distance" (4) between black and white Americans. Douglass was well aware of *Israel Potter*. The December 8th "Literary Notices" in *The Frederick Douglass Papers* alerted his readers to "a new edition of ISRAEL POTTER" and later praised the March edition of *Putnam's* which also contained a section of the novel (Baker 9). Though Douglass' oratory advances an overtly abolitionist cause, more broadly, he sought to remind the public of the ethical and historical blind-spots in public commemoration, significant exclusions that affirmed narratives of American exceptionalism and highlighted the tenuous limitations of freedom in the United States.

However, *Israel Potter* is not a text designed to address the politics of abolition nor is it a text that speaks directly to abolitionist audiences. In *Shadow Over the Promised Land*, Carolyn Karcher claims that *Israel Potter* advances a social critique of the injustices that befall the white working class in the United States (104-105). Karcher correctly identifies the overt and expressly humanistic critique of the dehumanizing conditions of white industrial laborers. However, by reading *Israel Potter* alongside some of Melville's other novels, an intersectional condemnation of industrial labor practices becomes evident.[37] In the chapter "Israel in Egypt," Melville employs the themes and images of Exodus to condemn the practice of wage slavery. The narrator describes back-breaking labor in a brick yard, invoking biblical imagery: "To these muddy philosophers, men and bricks were equally of clay" (155). Here, Melville critiques the totalizing force of industrial capitalism through a metonymy which reduces the life of the man to the fruitlessness of his labors. The Adamic clay, for Israel Potter, as well as for the growing number of race and wage slaves in a rapidly industrializing world, is not a divine material that God forms

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[37] Midori Takagi describes the practices of industrial race slavery in *"Rearing Wolves to Our Own Destruction,"* highlighting the confluence of oppressions endemic to both race slavery and industrial labor.

into independent selves with self-evident liberties. Read alongside Ishmael's challenging question "Who ain't a slave?" (*Moby Dick,* 10*)*, "Israel in Egypt" can be seen as an intersectional critique of the anti-humanist implications of industrial capitalism, a critique that covertly addresses race slavery in the United States but extends broadly to condemn fundamental oppressions of the individual in the industrial age.

"Israel in Egypt" concludes with a rare glimpse into Potter's thoughts, revealing a vital theological subtext in the novel: "'Kings as clowns are codgers—who ain't a nobody?... All is vanity and clay" (157). This passage directly echoes Ishmael's question from *Moby Dick*, but also introduces and complicates Melville's recurrent examination of the ecclesiastical assertion that "All is vanity" (400). Ilana Pardes describes Melville's preoccupation with biblical allegory as "a critique of the politics of exegetical mapping" which often "challenges presuppositions of biblical belief" to dismantle notions of "chosenness and promise" (2). Thus, Melville invokes Ecclesiastes to complicate individualistic discourse dearly held by middle-class readers. Similarly, in "The Try-Works" chapter of *Moby Dick*, Ishmael contemplates the daemonic force that industrialization exerts upon the individual. A veil of smoke from the try-works, an industrial furnace Melville describes as "an open-field brick kiln" (400), shrouds the Pequod and its crew, its shadow depriving the individual of a humanist self, revealing the depraved egoism of the ship's commercial function, the dehumanizing and unnatural purposes of industrial labor (398-399). In this chapter, Ishmael invokes Ecclesiastes*,* "the fine hammered steel of woe" (400), to metaphorically indict the suffering endemic in industrial labor; subsequently, he locates the ecclesiastical tautology "all is vanity" as the underlying truth that motivates doctrines of industrial capitalism. As such, when Melville revisits this examination of Ecclesiastes in *Israel Potter*, the context is noticeably similar. These two analyses of Ecclesiastes invite the theory that

these two characters, Israel and Ishmael, are linked by experience, perception, and belief—that they are both enacted upon by environmental determinants and that both are the subjects of the dehumanizing forces of industrialization.

In the chapter "City of Dis," Melville's indictment of industrial capitalism becomes apparent in his descriptions of eighteenth-century London, a city portrayed as a smoldering inferno. London Bridge, swarming with a "hereditary crowd," a "gulfstream of humanity… like an endless shoal of herring," retains the historical reminders of autocratic control of this subjugated human swarm: "the skulls of bullocks are hung out for signs to the gateways of shambles, so the withered heads and smoked quarters of traitors, stuck on pikes, long crowned the Southwark entrance" (158). Israel contemplates this social landscape in sweeping terms of corrosion and destruction: "…London, adversity, and the sea, three Armageddons, which, at one and the same time, slay and secrete their victims" (160). These images of urban crowding and industrialization, new features of the American landscape, would have resonated with "the fireside people." Melville's description of London could easily apply to his native New York City, which he described as a "babylonish brick kiln" (*Correspondence,* 195), an urban sprawl that had quickly come to resemble England's industrial slums in its constant carriage traffic, overcrowding, and filth (Delbanco 98-99). In the "City of Dis" chapter of *Israel Potter*, Melville asserts a social critique of urbanization that both affirms the anti-urban views of the American middle-class and upholds this social sect's preservationist doctrines.

Furthermore, this critique of urbanization and industrialism runs counter to the sentimental narratives of paradisal *Typee* which had earned Melville's acclaim with a mass readership. In *Israel Potter's* "City of Dis," Melville's descriptions of late eighteenth-century

London adopt the language of Dante's inferno, a discourse in stark contrast to *Typee's* sentimental themes of nature and beauty:

> "Whichever way the eye turned, no tree, no speck of any green thing was seen—no more than in smithies. All laborers, of whatsoever sort, were hued like the men in foundries. The black vistas of streets were as the galleries in coal mines; the flagging, as flat tomb-stones, minus the consecration of moss, and worn heavily down, by sorrowful tramping, as the vitreous rocks in the cursed Gallipagos, over which the convict tortoises crawl." (159-160).

Strikingly, this description of London's industrial wastelands harkens back to Melville's descriptions of tortoise hunting in "The Encantadas," later published in *Putnam's* in 1854. For Melville, the Galapagos, as indexed in these travel sketches, represent a stark binary to the islands of the Marquesas: they are desolate, arid, remote, and are not subject to normative social and ethical operations. There is a connective thematic thread that runs through the geographic alienation of the Galapagos and this description of industrial England. Like the convict tortoises, abandoned by God and hunted by man, the throngs of industrial laborers can seek no intervening social power to rescue them from their abjection. Descriptions such as these reaffirm the exceptionalist doctrines of Melville's readers in *Putnam's* for they remind this affluent sect that their agrarian and bureaucratic allegiances are not subject to the abuses of industrial labor. However, few readers may have realized that Melville's broad condemnation of the abuses of industrialism extends to the laboring throngs of New York and Philadelphia.

Israel Potter's condemnation of the abuses of industrialism goes hand-in-hand with the novel's rejoinder to the insufficiency of public commemoration and narrativized history. When Israel's inverse odyssey concludes, he returns to his native Berkshires, uncompensated and

unremembered for his service, downtrodden by long-standing poverty and rambling

misadventures: "He was repulsed in efforts, after a pension, by certain caprices of law. His scars

proved his only medals" (169). Here, Melville emphasizes the visible and lasting injury to

Israel's body to illustrate the grotesque scarring to those individuals which society fails to

protect, whose rights are deferred by doctrines of statist and autocratic exceptionalism. Israel's

scars, the only visible reminder of his sacrifice and suffering, relocate the reader's pathos directly

upon the hero's body, attenuating the ethical blind-spots endemic in the intervening

exceptionalist doctrines of his readers. The narrativized mythos cherished by "the fireside

people" in writing by Irving, Sparks, or Cooper does not account for the violent reminders of the

suffering of marginalized individuals and does not commemorate the sacrifices of those suffering

on society's margins.

Though *Israel Potter* advances a corrective of the exclusions of public commemoration

and an indictment of industrial oppression, it must be noted that the novel adopts stylistic and

generic tropes of narrativized history, at times appropriating such texts wholesale. For instance,

in the novel's description of the naval battle between John Paul Jones's The Bonne Homme

Richard and the British Serapis, Melville borrows the stylistic tropes and historical accounting of

Cooper's *History of the Navy,* which recounts the historical details of this engagement.

Melville's description of the battle reads:

> "The battle between the Bonne Homme Richard and the Serapis stands in history as the
>
> first signal collision on the sea between the Englishman and the American. For obstinacy,
>
> mutual hatred, and courage, it is without precedent or subsequent in the story of ocean.
>
> The strife long hung undetermined, but the English flag struck in the end.

There would seem to be something singularly indicatory in this engagement. It may

involve at once a type, a parallel, and a prophecy. Sharing the same blood with England,

and yet her proved foe in two wars; not wholly inclined at bottom to forget an old grudge:

intrepid, unprincipled, reckless, predatory, with boundless ambition, civilized in externals

but a savage at heart, America is, or may yet be, the Paul Jones of nations." (120)

Melville's preface to the naval battle between the Serapis and the Bonne Homme Richard adopts

Cooper's level of detail and emphasis upon violence but indexes the emotional register of the

conflict, the "mutual hatred" between the United States and Britain, in order to build social

consensus with mass-market readers. By concluding with this powerful metonymy, that the

United States is the John Paul Jones of Nations, Melville is clearly playing to the exceptionalist

doctrines of narrativized history. Jones, the exceptional man-of-action, whose military prowess is

only outmatched by his courage, is an obvious stand-in for the ideological capacity for

Democracy to overpower the autocratic colonial reach of Old World powers.

Similarly, in the scenes pertaining to Ethan Allen, Melville again appropriates language

from a source text as a rhetorical key to develop character, create an accurate tone, and to better

craft his text for a popular readership. Specifically, these scenes draw upon *A Narrative of

Colonel Ethan Allen's Captivity* (1838), which can be considered a forebear of Trumbll's *Life*,

except that, unlike Trumbull's Potter, Ethan Allen "returned home to public praise at Valley

Forge from General Washington, salutes from cannons, and punch bowls shared with his Green

Mountain Boys" (Bezanson 201). In the chapter "Samson among the Philistines," Melville

describes Ethan Allen's captivity at Pendennis Castle, where Allen displays legendary nationalist

bravado, though bound and subjected to polite torments at the hands of his British captors.

Potter, impressed into service in the British navy, wanders into Allen's prison cell while on shore

leave and witnesses the captive soldier's impassioned anti-British speech-making, which, to

Potter sounded as though it was "the roar of some tormented lion" (143):

> "Brag no more, old England: consider you are but an island! Order back your broken
>
> battalains! Home, and repent in ashes! Long enough have your hired tories across the sea
>
> forgotten the Lord their God, and bowed down to Howe and Knyphausen—the
>
> Hessian!—Hands off, red-skinned jackal! Wering the king's plate, as I do, I have
>
> treasures of wrath against you British." (143)

Melville directly sourced this impassioned rant against British autocracy from Allen's *Narrative*:

"Vaunt no more Old England! Consider you are but an island!... Order your broken and

vanquished battalions to retire from America… Go home and repent in dust and sackcloth" (43).

Allen's *Narrative* was one of the most widely-read Revolutionary War narratives of Melville's

day, republished in over twenty editions, many of which were reprinted in Melville's lifetime

(Bezanson 201). Though Melville sources this text to lend rhetorical and characteristic accuracy

to these historical events, because Allen's *Narrative* was so firmly ensconced in public

imaginings of Revolutionary History, this referential language builds consensus with mass-

market readers by affirming preordained history.

Revolutionary War narratives such as Ethan Allen's were a dearly held fixture in the

popular imaginations of Melville's readers because they narrated the events of the past in the

literary traditions of the present. In many ways, the antebellum tradition of narrating

Revolutionary history aligns with an influential Jeffersonian attitude: "the earth belongs in

usufruct to the living: that the dead have neither powers nor rights over it… The earth belongs to

the living generation."[38] In his study of antebellum society, *A Season of Youth* (1978), Michael Kammen clearly identifies the endemic exceptionalism in the American popular imagination, arguing that "As an attitudinal consequence of the Revolution, Americans overwhelmingly believed that they had been liberated from the past: alike form the incubus of Old World history and from their own colonial heritage of nonage and oppression" (5). Such notions of historical exceptionalism underwrite the nationalistic editorial politics of *Putnam's*, as is evident in the magazine's "Introductory": "The genius of the old world is affluent; we owe much to it, and we hope to owe more. But we have no less faith in the opulence of our own resources" (1).[39] By positioning a set of established figures in the popular historical imagination, such as Benjamin Franklin or Ethan Allen as marginal to the life of the story's central anonymous private, *Israel Potter* narrates a history aligned with Jeffersonian notions of an America liberated from history.

Furthermore, due to the reactive nature of literary nationalism, many of Melville's readers would have rejected *Israel Potter's* corrective of narativized history. The literary marketplace in the mid-nineteenth-century was comprised of a variety of literary cohorts whose publication and composition initiatives were foundationally shaped by a desire to break from European traditions. In the second volume of Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (1835), he identified the connection between commercialization and populist politics in American letters: "Democratic literature is always infested with a tribe of writers who look upon letters as a mere trade; and for some few great authors who adorn it, you may reckon thousands of idea-mongers" (64). In 1837, the *Knickerbocker* responded to de Tocqueville's assessment of American letters in a strident and nationalistic editorial titled "Liberty vs. Literature and the Fine Arts": "Since the period when genius became emancipated from all other patronage but that of

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[38] From a letter to James Madison, Paris September 6 1789.
[39] *Putnam's,* 1 January 1853.

an enlightened public… we hear no more if its perishing for want, or pining in hopeless obscurity."[40] Though this editorial response to de Tocqueville clearly demonstrates the energy and enthusiasm of literary nationalists, the piece also advances the belief that American history was somehow "emancipated" from the abuses of autocratic European "patronage." More than any other novel by Melville, *Israel Potter* responds to and aligns with a clear set of editorial politics-- the novel adopts the agenda of the literary nationalists, their political rejoinders to the aristocratic Old World as well as their Democratic doctrines of American chosenness.

However, the editorial politics of the newly commercialized literary marketplace left little room for *Israel Potter's* overt corrective of the exclusions of public commemoration. In *American Romanticism and the Marketplace* (1985), Michael T. Gilmore argues that the "commercialization" of literature brought all aspects of American social life "under the dominion of exchange" (4), resulting in public ambivalence towards literatures of dissent. However, *Israel Potter* may escape this structural ambivalence. The texts which this novel takes as sources, such as Trumbull's *Life*, Franklin's *Autobiography*, or Cooper's *History of the Navy*, have tremendous capability to circulate among and between the high and low cultures of Gilmore's "dominion of exchange." As a result of the novel's appropriation and emendation of these narrativized histories, *Israel Potter* must be viewed as a part of the "Culture of Reprinting," as thoroughly documented by Meredith McGill. She argues that "Antebellum writers were subject to multiple markets and publics, particularly under the system of reprinting, where texts achieved remarkable mobility across elite and mass cultural formats" (13). In the case of *Israel Potter*, the text's "mobility" results from its engagement with appropriated source materials with the capacity to reach "multiple markets and publics." As a result of this "mobility," *Israel Potter* built prestige for Melville among a variety of literary cohorts, most apparently with the elite and

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[40] *Knickerbocker Magazine,* July 1837.

middle-class readers of *Putnam's*, but also, significantly, with abolitionists such as Fredrick Douglass.

In the novel's correctives to the exceptions and exclusions of narrativized history, doctrines which concretize in the Bunker Hill monument, "The Great Biographer," Melville's revisionist message to his readers is clear. *Israel Potter* demonstrates the insufficiency of public commemoration to address the actors on history's margins and, by appropriating and emending source texts that affirm these exclusions, the novel attains the capability to reach a range of publics and readerships. However, the commercialization of the literary marketplace, especially the editorial politics of the periodical marketplace, undeniably requires authors to adjust compositional orientation to attend to the expectations of mass-market readers. As a result of the *Harper's* non-partisan editorial politics or the literary nationalist editorial politics of *Putnam's, Israel Potter's* historical and social critiques, the text's capabilities to "preach the truth to the face of falsehood" (*Moby-Dick*, 49), remained subject to a structural polity wherein literary dissent was required to withdraw from the field of culture. Though the novel's more evident and incisive critiques of industrialism and narrativized history are apparent, the imperatives of editorial politics required Melville to craft a light adventure designed for mass-market readers. Thus, *Israel Potter* can be seen as an example of Melville's writing for the "fireside people": the text adopts accepted formal conventions, yet it also offers correctives by drawing out stark contrasts between the values of Melville's readership and the narrative's subject matter.

Though *Israel Potter* is clearly a text designed to reach a popular reading audience, in many ways, the text's political ideologies had already become outmoded. Though the novel makes impassioned affirmations of American chosenness, though it appropriates texts from the canon of national origin myths, *Israel Potter's* political register oscillates between social

correctives, scathing political critiques, picaresque historical satires, and light adventures in regional color. Thus, *Israel Potter* can be viewed as the inheritor of the Democratic ideologies Melville passionately extoled in "Hawthorne and his Mosses,"[41] published in 1850. The most conspicuous rhetoric in the review consists of many attacks on the "literary flunkyism towards England," (546) a viewpoint which *Israel Potter* incessantly narrates to please the Democratic mass-market. However, it appears that the loftier claims from "Hawthorne and his Mosses" regarding the vital role of American literature, the belief that America's writers would lead the world out of its autocratic past and into a Democratic future, in *Israel Potter* seems muted, perhaps even quietly betrayed:

> "…we should refrain from unduly lauding foreign writers, who breath that unshackled democratic spirit of Christianity in all things, which now takes the practical lead in the world, though at the same time led by ourselves—us Americans." (548)

Israel Potter's incisive critique of the dehumanizing effects of industrialism, as well as the novel's corrective of the exclusions of public commemoration, indicate an attenuated politics which gives voice to this strident nationalism with reservations. In the case of *Israel Potter,* regarding the Democratic possibilities of national literature, it appears that Melville's recurring inner-conflict to both challenge the assumptions of his readers and craft texts for the mass-market resulted in an attenuation of the author's literary politics.

It would seem that the commercialization of American literature in the mid nineteenth-century required Melville to call into question the uses, means, and values of "truth"[42] in his

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[41] *The Literary World,* August 17 and 24, 1850.
[42] Here, "truth" can also be interpreted as "authentic" or "factual." Sheila Post-Lauria notes that the predominant literary culture of this time was "suspicious of fiction" (5). Likewise, this readership viewed fictional texts as sentimental or sensationalized (6).

fiction. *Israel Potter* demonstrates the insufficiencies of popular tropes of narrativizied history, yet the text itself is largely comprised of such narratives, resulting in a narrative which undermines the very "truth" it hopes to support. In Melville's correspondence with Hawthorne in 1851, he calls into question the reading public's ambivalence towards "truth," especially those "truths" that underwrite dissent or legitimize efforts of reform:

> "But truth is the silliest thing under the sun. Try to get a living by the Truth—and go to the Soup Societies. Heavens! Let any clergyman try to preach the Truth from its very stronghold, the pulpit, and they would ride him out of his church on his own pulpit bannister. It can hardly be doubted that all Reformers are bottomed upon the truth, more or less; and to the world at large are not Reformers almost universally laughingstocks? Why so? Truth is ridiculous to men." (*Correspondence*, 191)

It is clear that Melville's believed that the commercialization of the literary marketplace frustrated his ambitions and thwarted his capability to design texts which "speak the truth to the face of falsehood" (*Moby-Dick*, 49). In this letter, he clearly identifies the ambivalence of mass-market readers to embrace literatures of dissent or narratives of reform. Mass-market readers almost universally reject such narratives because they undermine the widely-held assumptions and sensibilities which legitimize the injustices of capitalism, industrialism, and exceptionalism, the very beliefs that underwrite the assumed equity and civility of middle-class society in the United States. The remarkable achievement of Melville's periodical fiction, then, is the capacity of these stories to adopt the forms, conventions, and discourses of popular ideology while simultaneously advancing poignant, "truthful," and incisive narratives of dissent.

Coda: "The Great Art of Telling the Truth" and Melville's Narratives of Dissent

"For in this world of lies, Truth is forced to fly like a scared white doe in the woodlands;
and only by cunning glimpses will she reveal herself, as in Shakespeare and other masters
of the great Art of Telling the Truth,--even though it be covertly, and by snatches."

--"Hawthorne and his Mosses," 1850

Categorically speaking, the periodical writings examined in this study, "Bartleby" and
Israel Potter, and perhaps all of Melville's fiction from the 1850s, can be deemed narratives of
dissent. The rise of industrial labor practices and resultant class divisions which Melville probed
in "Bartleby" or the analysis of the insufficiency of public commemoration to acknowledge
historical actors on society's margins in *Israel Potter* constitute broad rejoinders to the
predominant ideologies endemic to the literary marketplace of the 1850s. In embarking upon an
examination of the social in his fiction, Melville utilized the periodical marketplace as a means
of building consensus with a broad readership. However, as a result of the demands placed upon
authors by an editorial politics of non-partisanship, Melville crafted fictions which encoded these
narratives of dissent by "Telling the Truth" to "this world of lies" "covertly, and by snatches."
The literary marketplace of the mid-nineteenth-century demanded that Melville withdraw his
fictional dissent from the field of culture in order to reach a broad readership and attend to
marketplace expectations of mass-mediacy, thereby crowding the structural capacity of these

writings, "like a scared white doe in the woodlands," to the margins of these incisive fictions. However, Melville successfully navigated these editorial politics of non-partisanship, in both *Harper's* and *Putnam's*, to craft fictions with the capacity to circulate among both popular and elite readerships, between the middle-classes, upper-class, and laboring-classes, in order to index the transformation of the American social landscape and narrate the betrayal of social doctrines which promote equity and stability.

In many ways, the emergence of mass-mediacy and the commercialization of literature in the United States in the mid-nineteenth-century revise the established norms of literary patronage. Furthermore, Melville's writings for this literary marketplace demonstrate an ideological shift which corresponds to this transformation of the patronage model. In *Literary Patronage in England*, Dustin Griffin describes how "authors resisted or challenged the claims of patrons, and patrons reaffirmed their traditional privileges" and how this contested system played out in the "cultural economics" and "the theatre of partisan politics" of eighteenth-century England (44). In the literary economics of patronage, the exchange of cultural works by authors and artists with the socially elite results in the transmission of a body of ideologically sanctioned works which, in turn, bestow upon their makers "a rise in status [that] carried economic value at a time when income and access to economic resources were closely correlated with rank" (19). As a result of the commercialization of the literary marketplace in the United States in the mid-nineteenth-century, as well as a dramatically transforming socioeconomic landscape, cultural shifts which are underwritten by post-revolutionary democratic doctrines and evangelical notions of selfhood, this model of patronage dramatically altered.

The rise of the periodical marketplace is perhaps the most apparent, compelling, and verifiable revision of the economic practices of literary exchange at this time. The anteceding

and predominant models of literary exchange impelled a structural polity whereby cultural works serviced the ideological and political uses of the elite in exchange for social prestige. In the emerging periodical marketplace in the mid-nineteenth-century, authors exchanged ideas with a broader public and, in turn, initiated a dialog with the ideologies, political affiliations, and cultural practices of the many publics of what must be conceived of broadly as a heterogeneous and amorphous readership. Melville's work of literary nationalism, "Hawthorne and His Mosses,"[43] makes the bold claim that "American genius [does not need] patronage in order to expand" and proposes a new model of patronage premised upon a democratic ethos:

> "As for patronage, it is the American author who now patronizes the country, and not his country him. And if at times some among them appeal to the people for more recognition, it is not always with selfish motives, but patriotic ones." (553)

Here, there is a noticeable etymological interplay between Melville's notions of "patron" and "patriot": both words derive from the Latin root, "pater," meaning "father" (*OED*), indicating a paternalistic view of the relationship between the author and the public. Yet, as a result of the commercialization of literature, it seems Melville attenuated these paternalistic principles of literary nationalism. As a result, in order to address a broad readership, to effectively "patronize the country" in a commerce-driven media climate, Melville turned his attentions directly upon society in his fiction, especially upon groupings of middle-class or bourgeois cultural practices in this society, to more effectively target a popular reading audience. Thus, the old models of patronage, which often encouraged the creation of cultural works for an elite audience, had been revised to broaden the scope of cultural production to appease the politics and ideologies of

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[43] *The Literary World,* August 17 and 24, 1850.

popular audiences. Clearly, in "Hawthorne and his Mosses," Melville appears steadfastly committed to the democratic possibilities of this new model of public patronage.

However, the texts examined in this study demonstrate a degree of cynicism on the part of the author, which may indicate Melville had begun to withdraw from these altruistic ideologies of democratic literary nationalism. In "Bartleby," the narrator's predominant voicing indexes the betrayal of the lower classes by well-meaning bureaucrats and ambitious petty capitalists. Though many of today's readers view Bartleby as heroic, ultimately Bartleby's rebellion results in his imprisonment and death. In *Israel Potter*, Melville revises the nationalistic possibilities of literature by advancing critiques of public commemoration and narrativized history. His historical revisionism condemns the uses of democratic ideologies to legitimize practices of exceptionalism and the abuses of industrialism. Thus, these texts voice dissent against social practices that Melville believed betrayed the spirit of the constitution and undermined social equity and stability. Furthermore, the narratives of dissent examined in this study must be considered part-and-parcel of Melville's broader literary ambition of "The Great Art of Telling the Truth." Though these texts advance these narratives of dissent, such provocative "truths" are told "covertly" and "in snatches." In his writings for the periodical marketplace, Melville carefully embeds these narratives of dissent amid socially sanctioned forms and discourses to build consensus with a popular readership.

Yet, the explanation for Melville's withdrawal from the democratic idealism of "Hawthorne and his Mosses" is not readily evident. Certainly, the critical and commercial failures of *Moby-Dick* and *Pierre*, the punitive contract for *Pierre* with Harper & Brothers, as well as the broader climate of appeasement and sentimentality in the literary marketplace may have resulted in Melville's revision of his altruistic stance regarding the democratic possibilities

of nationalistic literary paternalism. One watershed event that may have contributed to the abandonment of these ideals could be the Astor Place Riots and the class upheavals of the late 1840s. The Astor Place Riots in particular resulted in a panicked adjustment in the interrelated sects of New York City's laboring-class nativists and upper-class cultural community, the precise social landscape that Melville documents in stories such as "Bartleby" or "The Two Temples." The transformation of the socioeconomic landscape and the radicalization of democratic ideals at this time urged Melville to reexamine his stance regarding the formative and shared ideologies that undergird American Democracy. As a result, Melville's fiction of the 1850s, especially his writings for *Putnam's*, adopts a detached and analytical narrative tone, an authorial voice preoccupied by social ills and somewhat prepossessed of an adversarial stance towards his readership. The narrative tone that inflects these writings indicates a shifting balance and a tentative indexing of the relationships between the author, audience, and nation. As a result, the narratives of dissent in these writings reveal in "cunning glimpses," through carefully crafted formal conventions, embedded within overtures of sociability, transmitted covertly through flexible and mobile texts and references, just beyond the text's margins.

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