Melville’s England

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Scholarship on Herman Melville has a tendency to treat the sea as a destination in itself, but in one of *Redburn*’s autobiographical moments the narrator confesses that initially his “thoughts of the sea were connected with the land; but with fine old lands, full of mossy cathedrals and churches, and long, narrow, crooked streets without side-walks, and lined with strange houses” (45). When in literary trouble, Melville rebounded by employing the earliest furnishings of his imagination, using England as his setting and his theme. In his examination of the political, economic, and above all cultural ties between Britain and the United States, Melville anticipated the analytical models used by transatlanticist scholars today: At times he treated England and America as uncanny doubles and trips abroad as akin to time-travel, with each country seeing the other as both a point of origin and a vision of the future. Elsewhere, Melville tracked the circulation of people and objects throughout a unified—and dehumanized—Anglo-American world. Critics are often tempted to treat Melville’s English writings, like his trips to England, as a vacation from his real work, but a deep engagement with British culture, and his attempt to write his way into it, was Melville’s life’s work. He is never writing only about England; produced at moments of professional crisis, Melville’s transatlantic fictions include interrogations of the global marketplace and the possibilities for art. Through readings of *Redburn*, the diptych stories, and *Israel Potter*, this dissertation aims to explicate what Melville’s English works have to say about England, America, commerce, art, and the author’s own place in the British literary heritage he valued so highly.
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For under-employed young men in 19th-century America, there were two basic options: Go West, or go East. Going West—overland or by canal—involved taking on the frontier, abandoning established society and seeking to create something new. Going East, on the other hand, involved sailing to the Old World and accepting its terms, grappling with the pre-history so often denied in ahistorical America. In 1839, unable to find work on the Erie Canal, 19-year-old Herman Melville joined the crew of a merchant-ship traveling between New York and Liverpool; he was away for four months. When a second attempt at the Erie Canal and a journey through the American West failed to yield gainful employment, Melville set sail yet again, remaining at sea for some four years, during which time he worked on a whaler and served in the U.S. Navy. This second set of voyages, which took Melville around the Pacific and the islands of the South Seas, was a sort of compromise between going East and going West: Melville went West geographically, traveling to lesser-known parts of the Western hemisphere, and also metaphorically, to the imagined West, the undiscovered country sparsely populated by interesting people who were destined to be conquered. But Melville also went East, in the sense that he joined the crews of ships, accepting their rules and entering into their hierarchy. Scholarship on Melville has long emphasized the hardy, frontier Melville who paid social calls on cannibals, in part because the West provides a convenient metaphor for artistic originality. Melville’s writing reflects his willingness to explore unmapped territory and his openness to all varieties of information and experience, so admirers of
his work have often presented him as both a literary and literal pioneer. The reality of both Melville’s seafaring life and his writing life was far more complicated. Just as the young sailor had to start at the bottom and work his way up, gaining experience and receiving the gruff tutelage of more senior officers, as a writer Melville was constantly conscious of his predecessors, and he spent his literary career trying to write his way up the hierarchy of great authors.

For all that Melville’s review “Hawthorne and His Mosses” has rightly been characterized as a declaration of American literary independence from Britain, it is significant that throughout the essay Melville’s touchstone for literary greatness is the epitome of English authorship, William Shakespeare. As was the case for most American writers in the mid-19th century, the catalog of British authors Melville read and studied is lengthy. There has been significant scholarship tracing echoes and influences of the British literary tradition in Melville’s work. Merton Sealts’s *Melville’s Reading* demonstrates how avidly Melville kept up to date with British writing and how many books he purchased while in London. William Spengemann lists “Shakespeare, Burton, Browne, Milton, Coleridge, Carlyle, and De Quincey” as the authors without an understanding of whom we can never comprehend *Moby-Dick* (231). Rob Grey’s essay on “The Legacy of Britain” nicely encapsulates the influence of Shakespeare, Milton, and Thomas Browne, as well as other British literary antecedents, on Melville’s writing. Paul Giles’s chapter on Melville and Carlyle shows the stylistic and philosophical affinities between the two authors, who “both chose playfully to balance their neoplatonic idealism against the voices of imperfect narrators, narrators who can act for the reader as conduits between familiar everyday circumstances and the more abstract regions of metaphysics.”
(233). As Amanda Claybaugh points out, “trans-Atlanticism is not an impulse that some authors feel or some critics pursue: rather, it is the condition under which all works in many periods were written, published, read, and reviewed” (2008 443). A writer working in America in Melville’s day was, by definition, a writer of Anglo-American literature.

The Old World, especially England, is deep in Melville’s cultural consciousness. Recounting in fictionalized form the childhood fantasies that eventually sent him to sea, Melville wrote: “[D]uring my early life, most of my thoughts of the sea were connected with the land; but with fine old lands, full of mossy cathedrals and churches, and long, narrow, crooked streets without side-walks, and lined with strange houses” (*Redburn* 45). Scholars on Melville have a tendency to treat the sea as an end and a destination in itself. This is likely due to the weight of attention and appreciation awarded to *Moby-Dick*, which is indeed about an industry that requires endless roaming of the seas. For Melville, however, the sea initially was a way to get somewhere, and the somewhere was Europe. As his father, Allan Melvill, had been an importer of luxury goods, Melville had a sense of ocean travel as inexorably linked to Europe and the European cultural heritage. Thus for Melville to join the crew of a packet sailing to Liverpool constituted a particularly personal—and painful—engagement with the past: He was opting to retrace as a low-ranking sailor the routes his father had traveled in gentlemanly style. Ten years after making his first journey to England, Melville chronicled his Liverpool experiences in *Redburn: His First Voyage*, the most autobiographical of his novels. Not long afterward, Melville traveled to England for the second time, retracing not only his father’s steps but his own. This time, Melville slept in a first-class cabin, not the hold, and he was traveling on literary business, to search for an English publisher for *White-Jacket*, his fourth book.
In his journal entry for November 4, 1849, the 30-year-old author records with a mixture of excitement and self-deprecation: “This time tomorrow I shall be on land, & press English earth after the lapse of ten years—then a sailor, now H.M. author of “Peedee” “Hullabaloo” & “Pog-Dog” (Journals 12). The professional writer knows he has come up considerably in the world, but he is not sufficiently confident—or conceited—to call his books by their proper names.

Melville’s career was in an uncertain state during this second visit. His first two books, *Typee* and *Omoo*, which present fictionalized accounts of his voyages to the South Seas, had been well-received. On the strength of this initial success, he had married and set up a home in New York. Then his third book, *Mardi*, for which he harbored high hopes, bombed. Melville wrote *Redburn* and *White-Jacket* in a spirit of retrenchment: *Mardi* had departed from realism in favor of a sort of Swiftian fantasia; the next two books adhered as closely as possible to realist conventions. *Mardi* had continued, in modified form, the story of its author’s South Seas adventures; the next two books abandoned the imagined West for stories of the known world, whether the port cities of the Old World or the ships of the U.S. Navy, another established environment with set rules and engagement models. Just as he initially envisioned going to sea not as a way to discover new places, but rather as a means of making contact with “fine old lands,” when in literary trouble he rebounded by employing the earliest furnishings of his imagination, using England as his setting and his theme. Melville ran aground creatively again in the 1850s. On returning from his 1849 journey to London and the Continent, in a fit of enthusiasm and inspiration that lasted for months, Melville wrote his masterpiece *Moby-Dick*. Immediately thereafter, in a misbegotten attempt to write a commercial hit, he
produced *Pierre, or the Ambiguities*. Melville’s unremitting labor on these two big novels was not rewarded: *Moby-Dick*’s reviews were tepid, and *Pierre*’s reception was a disaster. Having rapidly lost all his critical prestige and much of his audience, Melville entered a new phase in his writing life, one in which he aimed lower than before but garnered a broad readership. During this period, Melville wrote about England on a regular basis, producing the three “diptych” stories, each of which paired a scene from America with a scene from London, as well as *Israel Potter*, a novel of the Revolutionary War, much of which is set in England.

Scholars often give Melville’s English fictions short shrift: *Redburn* is treated at best as an apprentice-piece, at worst as a trove of biographical data; the diptych stories are dismissed as “five-finger exercises” or the like; *Israel Potter* is seen as lazy and derivative. Studies on Melville usually focus on the so-called “major” works or else group his works by genre or period, and with the exception of Arnold Goldman’s excellent article “Melville’s England” (1978), no one has grouped the works set in England together as a collective object of study. There is a certain degree of critical bias at work here: When not entirely fixated on *Moby-Dick*, scholars have tended to be interested in Melville’s postcards from the edge of civilization, *Typee* and *Omoo*. Of late, in response to the emerging interest in American domestic fiction and the women writers who produced it, and perhaps also because Melville’s all-male worlds have been thoroughly mined, critical attention has been focused on *Pierre*. The next adjustment that is due would be to set aside the critical legacy that reads “Hawthorne and His Mosses” too literally, that sees Melville as an unrepentant member of the Young America movement who is nearly exclusively interested in America and engages with British
literature only to rebel against it.\textsuperscript{x} We must also resist the critical temptation to treat Melville’s English writings, like his trips to England, as a vacation from his real work. A deep engagement with British culture, and his attempt to write his way into it, was Melville’s life’s work. While being well-versed in British literature was standard for American writers of Melville’s generation, less standard was Melville’s attempt to write serious literature\textsuperscript{xi} set in England that would still retain an American perspective.\textsuperscript{xii} Other writers foundered in this attempt: Washington Irving’s best-selling sketches of British scenes are pleasant to the point of toothlessness, for which Melville rebukes him in “Hawthorne and His Mosses.” Nathaniel Hawthorne himself, in the years after Melville produced his English fictions, struggled and failed to complete a novel set in England, despite his experience as a consul in Liverpool. The attempt to capture England in fiction that would appeal to readers on both sides of the Atlantic\textsuperscript{xiii} is no easy task.

Even in works set explicitly in England, Melville was never writing only about England. His English fictions are expressions of crisis, written at moments when the author had to regroup and reevaluate whether he should be aiming at commerce or art, and these works take both commerce and art as their themes. It is no coincidence that Melville turns to writing about the world’s cultural and economic superpower at moments when he is in financial difficulties. His English works are intensely commercially-minded, conceived in cynicism with a naked appeal to the genteel American reader’s preferences, and expressive of nearly naked frustration over the difficulties of earning a living and the illusory nature of the American dream. That said, Melville never lets an English setting be mere literary wallpaper; he employs England as an explicit foil for America, whether as a model for emulation or a warning of what may come. The English
works are also written at times when Melville hits artistic dead-ends, when his most ambitious efforts (*Mardi*, *Moby-Dick*, *Pierre*) have met with resistance, so Melville’s English fictions include interrogations of what art should be, what literature is meant to do, and what models may be useful for the artist. This project aims to understand and explicate Melville’s English works and what they have to say about England, America, commerce, art, and Melville’s place in Anglo-American literature.

In her survey of recent transatlantic literary studies, Laura Stevens identifies “three tropes of transatlantic analysis”: the cracked mirror, the seamless garment, and the circulatory system (96). According to Stevens, transatlanticist scholars tend to follow one of three models: Some treat American and European authors as though they share the same literary project and their works are components of a unified whole, “threads in a seamless garment” (Stevens 100). The “cracked mirror” scholars see American and British authors as uncanny reflections of each other. This is largely Paul Giles’s approach in *Transatlantic Insurrections* (2001) and *Virtual Americas* (2002); Robert Weisbuch’s *Atlantic Double-Cross* (1986) posits a similarly bifurcated but more oppositional model of literary engagement, one in which American writers of the 19th century are forever rebelling against the overwhelming British cultural influence. Lawrence Buell’s seminal essay “American Literary Emergence as a Post-Colonial Phenomenon” (1992) sees the dual presence of Britain and America, and the expectation of having readers on both sides of the Atlantic, as creating a sort of cracked mirror within each American literary work, arguing that “some of the most provincially embedded American Renaissance texts bear at least passing direct witness to anticipating foreign readers” (425). More recently, Elisa Tamarkin’s *Anglophilia: Deference, Devotion, and Antebellum America* (2008) traces
19th-century Americans’ fascination with English culture, manners, and history and shows that Anglophilia was as powerful a force in the emergence of American culture as the defensive stance of Anglophobia.

Then there is the model that has come to dominate the transatlantic approach to the study of literature, an approach that conceives of transatlantic cultures as interacting via “vast networks of thought and feeling, webs of influence, or circulations of people and objects” (Stevens 95). Among the circulating objects of particular interest to scholars are books. Meredith McGill’s *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834-1853* (2003) describes how the initially decentralized American literary marketplace, in which unauthorized reprints of texts were disseminated widely, made possible the democratization of knowledge even as it delayed the emergence of a full-fledged national literature. While McGill and others have focused on the circulation of physical books, original and reprinted, in the absence of established copyrights, scholars such as Michael Winship have recuperated the authority of literary texts, arguing that contracts between publishing firms and courtesy practices within the book trade often made for a de facto observance of international copyright in the United States, or at least established texts and ideas as units of value. In that vein, Amanda Claybaugh’s *The Novel of Purpose: Literature and Social Reform in the Anglo-American World* (2006) demonstrates how 19th-century British and American social reformers collaborated across national boundaries, and how their exchange of ideas in turn influenced the development of realist fiction in both countries. This flux between nations and between realms of thought is the essence of the transatlanticist approach today. Kate Flint encapsulates the project of contemporary scholars as working “to replace the language of the frontier with that of the
oceanic; to substitute for notions of nationhood that depend on ideas of pushing forwards and outwards, of expansion and conquering, a concern with fluidity, transmission, and exchange” (325).

There is something to be said for all three analytical frameworks: The seamless garment best represents how writers in Britain and America experienced English-language literature, as a whole. The cracked mirror shows how writers on each side of the Atlantic viewed each other’s government and forms of social organization, and it is the basis for most scholarly comparison. As well, the circulatory system is an apt metaphor for the ways in which money and ideas flowed between Britain and America over the course of the 19th century. However, the more transatlanticism relies upon the metaphors of the circulatory system or the ocean, with their implications of unconscious movement and exchange, the more literary scholarship tends to exclude the author. This is understandable: Because there was no international copyright for much of the 19th century, American authors had little chance of becoming known when cheap reprints of British best-sellers were widely available. And because these reprints were profitable, American book publishing and printing developed as a far more regional, less centralized industry than the British equivalent. Scholars are understandably attracted to these images of dispersal and dissemination, which provide a handy lens through which to view the tentative beginnings of literature in America. But the 19th century was a turning-point, “the era in which the gravitational center of the English-speaking world shifted from Europe to America,” as Spengemann puts it, and by mid-century we see the seeds of American economic, political, and cultural dominance (226). In 1849 the Illustrated London News ran an essay titled “Signs of Decay,” which declared:
We must, sooner or later, yield our place to the more prudent, the less embarrassed, and the more vigorous offshoots of our race, and consent to occupy the easy chair of our senility. Nor is there anything to regret in this. What is there in our own corner of the globe that it should for ever expect to give the law to all others? The civilization that is removed is not destroyed; and the genius of our people can exert itself as well on the banks of the Ohio, or the Mississippi, as on the banks of the Thames; and rule the world from the White House at Washington, with as much propriety as from the Palace of St. James (402).xviii

As America became a political and economic power, its cultural rise became predictable, even inevitable. By the 1850s, the polarity of influence began to reverse and American authors to influence English-language literature.xix Would *Middlemarch* or *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* be quite the same if their authors had not read *The Scarlet Letter*?

In acknowledgment of the rise of the American rights-bearing author, rather than providing a systemic account of social networks or the literary marketplace, this dissertation chronicles one writer’s experience of transatlantic exchange. Though never, in his lifetime, as popular as Hawthorne, Melville remains the most expansive and ambitious American artist of the 19th century. Over the course of his career he lost popularity and thus influencing power, but his evolution as a writer is representative of the development of English-language literature throughout the century. As Spengemann puts it:

[N]o other writer so clearly epitomizes the drift of English literature in the nineteenth century, from the enlightened primitivism of *Typee*, through the unabashed ‘romanticism’ of *Moby-Dick* and the troubled ‘Victorianism’ of *Clarel*, to the ‘Modernist’ accommodations in the late poems to what Frost called ‘a diminished thing.’ … Melville bestrides the entire nineteenth century, demonstrating the complex web of British and American writing in the fabric of English literature and the impossibility of tracing out its varied patterns without due attention to both warp and woof (227).

When writing about England, Melville anticipates the approach of transatlanticist scholars and employs all three analytical tropes—the cracked mirror, the seamless
garment, and the circulatory system. In *Moby-Dick*, Melville refers to the Great Lakes as being “shored by two great contrasting nations as the Atlantic is,” and he employs the contrasts between the two countries throughout his English fictions (267). In *Redburn*, Liverpool is a glimpse of New York’s dystopian future. In “The Two Temples,” Melville again presents England and America as distorted reflections of each other, with London’s cultural institutions presenting a sacred alternative to the profanity that stands for religion in New York. “Poor Man’s Pudding and Rich Man’s Crumbs” juxtaposes Old and New England as two halves of a consistent world in which the poor are permitted to starve. “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids” depicts a fully globalized world in which raw materials and industrial products circulate internationally, and exploited factory workers in one country support comfortable lifestyles and cultural attainments in another. Finally, in *Israel Potter*, the two countries are both components of a unified and uniformly heartless world and ironic doubles of one another—the supposedly calcified Old World is a place where a young man’s talent and character can be recognized by a king, whereas the New World is a place where a democratic government refuses to pay its veteran soldiers a pension.

The first half of this dissertation examines Melville’s fourth novel, *Redburn: His First Voyage*, which is based loosely on his trip to Liverpool in 1839. In Chapter One, “Melville, His Voyage,” I address the limits of Melville’s literary nationalism and his evolution from the Young Americanness of “Hawthorne and His Mosses” to the Anglophilic nostalgia of *Redburn*. I interpret the episode in which Redburn reality-tests *The Picture of Liverpool*, a guidebook to the city, and finds it obsolete as Melville’s ambivalent comment on his literary inheritance from England. This chapter also inquires
into Melville’s expanding artistic ambitions, which alter dramatically as he prepares to write *Moby-Dick*, and I offer Sir Richard Westmacott’s monument to Admiral Nelson in Liverpool, described in detail in *Redburn*, as a model of Melville’s emerging aesthetic, which is characterized by inclusiveness: The guidebook that Melville offers as his exemplum is not great literature; it is essentially a reference-work, but one eccentric enough to express its writer’s personality. Similarly, the statue is not meant to stand alone as a self-contained work of art—it is meant to do the work of memorializing Nelson, yet it is complex, thought-provoking, and even (in its cluttered, muddled catholicity) experimental. The fact, as well, that Melville incorporates a work of visual art so completely into his novel is a template for his practice in the more visual elements of *Moby-Dick*. Chapter Two, “Exiled to the Promised Land,” focuses on Harry Bolton, a British dandy Redburn meets in Liverpool, and Harry’s experiences as an immigrant to New York. This chapter is about character: Harry’s unconvincing literary characterization as a failure of authorial craft; *Redburn* as a *bildungsroman* and a life at sea as one of initiation; and 19th-century assumptions that successful immigration was dependent upon the immigrant’s character.

The second half of this dissertation looks at fiction Melville wrote after the failure of his most ambitious novels. Chapter Three examines the diptych stories, paired sketches in which one half is set in the United States and half is set in England. These stories provide Melville with an opportunity to explore—and explode—classic binaries: country versus city, England versus America, rich versus poor, man versus machine, the religious and the secular, the sacred and the profane. He also takes the opportunity to satirize religious hypocrisy, the sentimentalization of poverty in domestic fiction, and the
worldwide complacency of the comfortable. Chapter Four looks at *Israel Potter: His Fifty Years of Exile*, with an eye to Melville’s satiric portrayal of the American Founding Fathers, his descriptions of poverty in England, and his excoriation of America’s treatment of its soldiers and veterans. In my Afterword I move from Melville’s England to England’s Melville, to his work’s initial reception and eventual revival in the United Kingdom. Looking at Melville’s reputation in the UK, I examine the extent to which he succeeded in writing his way into the British literary heritage he valued so highly.

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1 Some scholars see this latter choice as capitulation. Ziff, for one, argues that “[w]hen young Melville went East to the Atlantic rather than West to the frontier, he chose… to accept his bottom position in society rather than contest it” (263).

ii There were two literary hierarchies, one of great artists and one of rich authors, and little overlap between the two. Melville’s toggling between artistic and commercial goals invariably tripped him up.

iii The spelling of the family name was changed after Allan’s bankruptcy and death (Delbanco 18).

iv I mean the American reviews, of which Melville was most aware. For the more positive British reception, see the Afterword to this dissertation.

v Giles 239.

vi e.g. James Duban’s *Melville’s Major Fiction: Politics, Theology, and Imagination*.

vii e.g., Richard Harter Fogle’s *Melville’s Shorter Fiction*, or R. Bruce Bickley’s *The Method of Melville’s Short Fiction*.

viii e.g. William Dillingham’s *An Artist in the Rigging: The Early Work of Herman Melville*.

ix e.g., Robert Weisbuch’s *Atlantic Double-Cross*, which sets Melville and Dickens at odds in a sort of literary blood contest.

xi I am seeking to exclude romances and light literature, for which aristocratic English settings remain a persistent cliché.

xii The aspiration to maintain uniquely American qualities in his writing extends beyond Melville’s British-set fictions; Spengemann points out that in writing *Moby-Dick* “Melville was trying to write a novel in English that would yet be non-British” (231).

xiii For ways in which Melville and other American writers of the 19th century anticipate and cater to a transatlantic readership, see Lawrence Buell’s “American Literary Emergence as a Post-Colonial Phenomenon.”

xiv I use the term “Anglo-American” rather than “trans-Atlantic” advisedly; though Melville’s worldview was cosmopolitan, even global, his literary world centered on England and the United States.

xv In this 2004 essay, “Transatlanticism Now,” Stevens is still in a position where she must declare Transatlanticism to be a field in its own right. By the time Amanda Claybaugh and Kate Flint offer their précis of the field in 2008 and 2009, respectively, the field is established, in need of reform possibly but not justification. Indeed, though Claybaugh is correct when she notes that curricula and articles are still generally divided along national lines, the institutionalization of the field is otherwise complete (444). As of this writing, there are four major transatlanticist journals: *Symbiosis: A Journal of Anglo-American Literary Relations*, founded 1997; *Transatlantica*, published by the French Association of American Studies, founded 2001; the *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, published by the Transatlantic Studies Association (TSA) and Routledge, founded 2002; and *Atlantic Studies*, published by Routledge, founded 2004. The Michigan State University has a graduate journal called *Atlantikos: A Journal of Transatlantic Scholarship*, founded 2006, and articles with a transatlantic orientation are published throughout the major journals on 19th-century literature. There are transatlanticist book series at Edinburgh University Press,
Ashgate, Lit Verlag, and Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. On top of the annual conferences organized by the The Transatlantic Studies Association (TSA) and The Middelburg Center for Transatlantic Studies (MCTS), numerous one-off transatlanticist conferences have been held in the past decade.

In his opening to this book, Giles argues that “conceptions of national identity on both sides of the Atlantic emerged through engagement with—and, often, deliberate exclusion of—a transatlantic imaginary, by which I mean the interiorization of a literal or metaphorical Atlantic world in all of its expansive dimensions” (1).

I do not mean to oversimplify Winship’s argument here; he acknowledges that in the absence of an international copyright American authors felt they were competing against pirated editions of better-known UK authors, and British authors were well aware that they were missing out on profits from the American market. For a case study in how the trade in both physical books and the intellectual property contained in texts worked, see Winship’s “The Transatlantic Book Trade and Anglo-American Literary Culture in the Nineteenth Century.”

Melville anticipates this line of thought in Mardi: “‘Tis the old law: --the east peoples the West, the West the East; flux and reflux. And time may come, after the rise and fall of nations yet unborn, that, risen from its future ashes, Porpheero shall be the promised land, and from her surplus hordes Kolumbo people it” (512).

Weisbuch gripes that “Americans matter far less to their British contemporaries than the British do to the Americans,” but that proportion evened out eventually, and he acknowledges “that an American influence began... in the fifties and that it increased in power... as the century progressed” (26, 30). For examples of America looming large in the British mind, see Paul Giles’s Transatlantic Insurrections.
Chapter 1

Melville, His First Voyage: An American Artist Discovers the Old World

“Poverty, poverty, poverty, in almost endless vistas: and want and woe staggered arm in arm along these miserable streets.”

-- Herman Melville on Liverpool, Redburn

“The discoverer of America was the maker of Liverpool.”

-- inscription on the statue of Christopher Columbus, Sefton Park, Liverpool

In 1839, his family bankrupt and his life’s path undetermined, 19-year-old Herman Melville took a temporary job: For four months, he was a cabin-boy on a merchant ship sailing from New York to Liverpool and back. Any letters or journals from this period are lost, but the young man’s appetites for travel, shipboard life, and the sea itself must have been whetted, as two years later he joined the crew of the whaleship Acushnet. This famous second journey lasted nearly four years and furnished material for several books, including Typee, which made Melville’s name in his day, and Moby-Dick, which keeps it alive in ours. The young writer did not chronicle his first trip abroad, however, until his literary career was well under way. When he finally did write about his English experiences, Melville did so under financial pressures that forced him to work at breakneck speed and with half a heart. He thought little of the result, dismissing Redburn, His First Voyage as “a thing, which I, the author, know to be trash, & wrote it to buy some tobacco with” (Journal 23).

Early Melville scholars mined Redburn for biographical information; later, the mythic critics traced the patterns of what Andrew Delbanco calls “an association between going-to-sea and coming-of-age that in antebellum America was almost formulaic, yet for many young men proved nonetheless to be true” (28). More recently, Redburn has become a site of inquiry for those interested in Melville’s ideas about transatlantic relations – both political and cultural.
Pioneering articles on this theme by Sacvan Bercovitch and Arnold Goldman claim that in *Redburn* Melville rejects England entirely: “[*Redburn*] has discovered that there is no England for an American, that England is not the father of an American man” (Goldman 73). Similarly: “In the detailed contrast of the actualities of Liverpool with Redburn’s father’s description of cultured Europe, Melville is exploring and rejecting America’s transatlantic ties” (Bercovitch 219). Even in *Atlantic Double-Cross*, writing about *Clarel*’s affinities with the theological questioning going on in Britain, Robert Weisbuch characterizes Melville as “the writer who earlier most aggressively opposed British habits of thought” (276). In *Melville’s Major Fiction*, James Duban revises this oppositional reading, arguing that in *Redburn*’s seemingly anti-English moments Melville actually critiques American triumphalism by letting his naïve protagonist “retreat[] to clichés that calumnize England and the rest of the Old World as standing in wretched contrast to America’s messianic and millennial youth” (39). Duban demonstrates how evenhandedly Melville counters the misery of Liverpool’s slums with the heartlessness with which America treats its immigrants, figured in the novel by the steerage passengers on the return voyage and the hapless figure of Harry Bolton.7

Scholars focusing on *Redburn*’s critique of urban life – a strand of critical thought going back at least as far as Newton Arvin8 and elaborated upon in Wyn Kelley’s *Melville’s City* – note that in *Redburn*, New York and Liverpool are essentially the same, perverse twins, or “mirror images of insufficiency” (Buell MAD 226).9 We are introduced to this theme as soon as Redburn’s ship anchors in Liverpool, when one of his shipmates, who said goodbye to his wife in New York, is greeted by a second wife (191). This vignette prepares the reader for future doubles and parallels, which abound. Surprised and chagrined by the numerous similarities between Liverpool and New York, Redburn begins by mourning the absence of picturesque
otherness central to the tourist’s experience, but his aesthetic complaint quickly moves to the ethical realm:

> It was the humiliating fact, wholly unforeseen by me, that upon the whole, and barring the poverty and beggary, Liverpool, away from the docks, was very much such a place as New York. There were the same sort of streets pretty much; the same rows of houses with stone steps; the same kind of sidewalks and curbs; and the same elbowing, heartless-looking crowd as ever (278).

If, when he first arrives, Redburn observes superficial physical resemblances between the cities, over the course of his stay, as he fails to win the compassion of the “elbowing, heartless-looking crowd,” he discovers their moral similarities as well (278).

> When literary critics rely on Freud’s terminology to say that “American and British authors experience the uncanny as they read each other, seeing a culture that resembles but reconfigures their own,” they are giving a new intellectual context to an insight already present in Melville (Stevens 97). In his first two narratives, Melville sets up a Before and After duality that carries through to Redburn. Whereas Typee and Omoo explore an Edenic “savage” civilization before it has been colonized and again after its colonial Fall, Redburn blurs the distinction between the Before and the After. In Redburn, England is no longer just a point of origin; it is also an outcome to be welcomed or avoided.

> Like the urbanist scholars and others, Wai-Chee Dimock notices that rather than finding one of the two cities superior to the other or even different from it, Redburn insists upon the sameness of Liverpool and New York. This was a common observation in Melville’s time, Harriet Beecher Stowe and Nathaniel Hawthorne, among many others, noticed the similarities between the cities and complained that Liverpool “looked so much like what they had left behind” (Mulvey AAL 38). Mulvey explains:

> The identity of New York and Liverpool was established at the very beginning of the nineteenth century. The great and continuous trade between the two made them
eventually the leading ports in their lands. And as they grew together so they grew alike (AAL 38).

Thus, when Melville lets his narrator grumble that on Lord-street “I thought I was walking down a block in Broadway,” he is making a common-place remark in keeping with the travel journalism of the time (278). Dimock dwells on the emotional distress that the cities’ sameness causes Redburn, and she offers a possible explanation:

For the narrator’s ‘mortification’ is surely Melville’s own as he finds himself back where he started, performing the ‘same’ job he thought he has outgrown, catering to the ‘same’ readers he thought he has transcended—as if Mardi’s ‘voyage thither’ had never been (81).

After all, Melville wrote Redburn at a crucial stage in a writer’s career: He had just had his first failure. When Mardi, for which he had cherished high hopes, failed critically and commercially, Melville was left heartbroken – and broke – and was reduced to writing what he referred to as “a little nursery tale” (Correspondence 141). Dimock is less interested in Melville’s writerly discontent than in the imagery he uses to describe it; her larger thesis is that the doctrine of Manifest Destiny opened the way for 19th-century American literature to represent power struggles spatially, and that the doctrine therefore inspired Melville to describe his personal struggles through a narrator who travels the world yet remains trapped (81-2). While Dimock’s critics are right that her insistence upon Manifest Destiny as Original Sin and catch-all explanation ultimately makes her field of vision uncomfortably narrow, she is onto something when she connects the transatlantic comparisons of Redburn to Melville’s image of himself as an artist.

Elsewhere in his career, Melville deploys transatlantic characters and comparisons as a way of paradoxically both emphasizing and disguising social critique by playing on stereotypes or subverting them. These feints were necessary for a writer who aspired to tell the truth to a
transatlantic readership. Perhaps because of Melville’s need to gesture at various positions without professing them, *Redburn* is full of objects – such as, famously, the glass ship at his parents’ house – that he reads like texts, offering lengthy pictorial descriptions (Wenke 82; Robillard 47). While Melville’s lifelong concerns with poverty, slavery, morality, and human connection are all present in *Redburn*, at this delicate moment in the young writer’s career, the transatlantic theme is frequently not only a political context but also an occasion for talking about art, both literary and visual. Thus, in the moments at which Melville most explicitly examines the political, economic, and cultural ties between Britain and America, he is also evaluating the role of the work of art in the world. This is not simply an instance of what Lawrence Buell would call the American mind trying to decolonize itself, as in “Hawthorne and his Mosses”; rather, Melville is introducing aesthetic and philosophical questions that span and even transcend national – and international – politics. *Redburn*’s guidebook sequence explores questions of tradition and influence, of what relationship we should have with the culture of previous generations, and how American art can differentiate itself from that of the British motherland. Similarly, the monument to Admiral Nelson introduces new ideas about the scope of art and its reach – what art can contain, and how it can influence its audience. Melville is thinking about destiny, but not of the Manifest variety; in *Redburn*, Melville links the national destiny to that of the artwork, worrying ceaselessly about the possibility of posterity.

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“Every age makes its own guide-books”: Melville and Literary Nationalism

“Let us away with this Bostonian leaven of literary flunkeyism toward England. If either must play the flunkey in this thing, let England do it, not us. And the time is not far off when circumstances may force her to it.”

--Herman Melville, “Hawthorne and His Mosses” (1850)
Melville grew up in what was essentially a debased version of middle-class British culture; from sartorial fashion to interior design, the models for Americans’ “nervous emulation” were British, and literature was no exception (Delbanco 74). However, by the time he came of age and began to write, the American intellectual community had declared its intentions, if not its independence. Whereas in 1820, the Reverend Sydney Smith could plausibly ask in the pages of the *Edinburgh Review*, “In the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book? or goes to an American play? or looks at an American picture or statue?” thirty years on, when Melville added “Hawthorne and His Mosses” to the chorus of rebuttals, American literature had come a long way (qtd. Lease 9). The absence of international copyright laws still meant that American publishers could print works by established British writers—guaranteed hits—without having to pay those writers royalties or risk an investment in untried American authors (Peach 11). Nevertheless, the American literary scene developed, and in the Romantic fervor of the early 19th century, calls for a national literature proliferated. Herman Melville began to write in the midst of the contending nationalisms of the 1840s and was therefore acutely conscious of writing in the English language, within the confines of English genres. Before Melville could invent his own genre, he had to face England head-on.

*Redburn* may have been planned as a “plain, straightforward, amusing narrative of personal experience… no metaphysics, no conic sections, nothing but cakes & ale,” but the novel’s story of an American encountering the Old World for the first time is more than the light read its author had intended; it reveals a writer working out his relationship with his ancestors, literary and otherwise, and a young American testing his country against its own professed ideals (qtd. Leyda 306). Wellingborough Redburn’s pedigree and biography accord at many points with Melville’s: Though his ancestors fought in the Revolutionary War, his own father, a once-
prosperous merchant, has died bankrupt. His family’s financial state forces young Redburn to try to make his meager living by manual labor, despite his gentleman’s upbringing and manners, which make him the butt of shipboard jokes. In all of these circumstances, however, Redburn is more than a stand-in for Melville; his family’s downward mobility and his sense of its fallen glory make him a representative American of his generation, which was “raised under the oppressive shadow of the Founding Fathers and frustrated by the failure of these Fathers and their traditions to pass on power to the sons” (Bell 563-4). Thus, though the Redburn family has impeccable Yankee credentials, in losing his father, Redburn has lost his connection to the family history. Most readings of the novel see this loss as primarily related to class, but it also has to do with nation: Redburn’s father, like Melville’s, was an international businessman who traveled frequently, bringing European style to America. With his cosmopolitan father gone, Redburn must work out his own relationship to the Old World. Redburn is full of debates, stated and implied, about what the United States should import from Europe: Do new immigrants bring energy and hope or squalor and disease? Are British social forms really a good model for American life?

While he worked at these ethical and political questions in Redburn, Melville was preparing to answer their aesthetic corollaries: What should be the relationship between American and European letters? What would authentically American writing look like? In Melville’s time, American literary nationalism offered two answers to this question of European influence: One could overtly take up European themes and ideas and join the international conversation, or one could try to suppress European influences and create something new. William Spengemann, who locates Emerson and Whitman at the two ends of this continuum, notes that “[i]n either case, ‘Europe’ plays a weighty, conflict-producing role, measured by
citation or elision, as the case may be” (423). When he was writing Redburn, Melville was still caught in this dilemma: In its form and diction, his hasty attempt at a conventional work reads much like British novels of its time, but Melville uses its pages to convey his emerging sense that American writers must write something new.

The main vehicle for this sentiment is Redburn’s highly symbolic guidebook. Modeled closely on a real book, The Picture of Liverpool; or, Stranger’s Guide, the guidebook provides Melville with filler, opportunities for satire, and a useful tool for contrasting past and present, Redburn’s Senior and Junior (Thorp 1148). In a sequence that spans several chapters, the young man, “a new Telemachus,” wanders the streets of Liverpool, equipped with his father’s old guidebook to the city (Bowen 105). As one critic, bordering between cynicism and writerly practicality, comments, “the guide gives Wellingborough something to do during his stay in Liverpool, so that Melville, by sending him on various exploring trips about the city, guidebook in hand, adds several easily designed chapters to his novel” (Thorp 1148). These chapters do far more than fill space, however. Redburn’s oft-thwarted attempt to retrace his father’s steps, to reconnect with his father’s world – and with the Old World – is the literal and figurative center of the novel, “the crown and essence of Redburn’s First Voyage” (Bercovitch 219). Over the course of his rambles, pedestrian and verbal, Redburn discovers the sharp divides between social classes, between his father’s world and his own, and between literature and life. The implications of the sequence for Melville’s own literary practice are manifold.

Before he sets foot in Europe, Redburn’s idea of England is an amalgam of the books he has read, and his interests are half pastoral, half antiquarian. Eager to “snuff” England’s “immortal loam,” the young Anglophile cherishes a childhood fantasy of seeing “fine old lands, full of mossy cathedrals and churches, and long, narrow, crooked streets without side-
walks, and lined with strange houses” (194, 45). Liverpool does not quite fit the bill. Redburn is star-struck at first, “meditating profoundly upon the fact, that I was now seated upon an English bench, under an English roof, in an English tavern, forming an integral part of the English empire. It was a staggering fact, but none the less true” (196). However, amazement quickly turns to disappointment. Sitting alone in the tacky pub where his ship’s crew takes its meals, Redburn looks out at the “smoky, untidy yard, bounded by a dingy brick-wall, the top of which was horrible with pieces of broken old bottles, stuck into mortar,” and listens to the street-noises, which he identifies as “a confused uproar of ballad-singers, bawling women, babies, and drunken sailors” (196-7). In a passage that contains both the naiveté and shock of the young Redburn and the “ironic nostalgia” and “comic deflations” of his older self, Redburn muses (Giles 56):

And this is England?
But where are the old abbeys, and the York Minsters, and the Lord mayors, and coronations, and the May-poles, and fox-hunters, and Derby races, and the dukes and duchesses, and the Count d’Orsays, which, from all my reading, I had been in the habit of associating with England? Not the most distant glimpse of them was to be seen (197).

The qualifying phrase, “from all my reading,” indicates that Redburn’s England has hitherto been a literary construction. Unlike most of the mistakes he makes over the course of the novel, this error is not Redburn’s alone: “American travelers in Europe made their way through a landscape already heavily inscribed by poets, travel writers, and even novelists” (Stowe 14). More specifically: “Redburn’s plight emphasizes the overdetermined quality of the nineteenth-century urban traveler… Redburn’s naïveté emphasizes the way cities are imagined before they are experienced” (Rachman 663). In fact, later in the novel, Redburn feels a sense of déjà vu when he spies “a handsome Moorish arch of stone” – only when he returns home does he realize that he had seen a picture of the place in the Penny Magazine years before (282-3). It is significant that Redburn seeks out Gothic architecture; Mulvey observes that “for the sentimental
traveller, England was exclusively the England of castles, churches, cathedrals, and palaces” and “perceived England was England minus America” (AAL 19). Melville plays on this idea by making his protagonist one of these “sentimental travelers,” and letting his realist narrator, an older version of the same character, include all the details a sentimental traveler would prefer to ignore. Redburn is now getting his first hint that his idea of Liverpool is “highly filtered, highly literary,” though he may not yet realize just how far from reality his preconceptions have strayed (Rachman 661).

While crossing the Atlantic, Redburn tries to memorize his father’s guidebook and to master Liverpool’s geography. When he first goes ashore, he feels confident in his knowledge of the city: “Great was my boyish delight at the prospect of visiting a place, the infallible clew to all whose intricacies I held in my hand” (217). This is not mere youthful hubris; Redburn’s expectations are in line with how guidebooks construct their own function and “the ideal tourist,” an “unseen seer who dominates the world around her by observing it, processing it, and ultimately comprehending it” (Stowe 51). However, after several wrong turns and false starts, Redburn begins to see a pattern: When he tries to visit his father’s old hotel, he discovers that it has been torn down. When he seeks the old fortress near town, he discovers that it has been replaced by the Old Fort Tavern. This sequence could be read as Melville the autodidact’s ironic commentary – a precursor to Ishmael’s “A whale-ship was my Harvard and my Yale College” – on the value of “book-learning” in the real world. Redburn, after all, spends much of his sea-voyage trying and failing to read Adam Smith’s The Wealth of Nations. Here, however, Melville is not discrediting books so much as asserting that most have an expiration date: “Dear delusion!” Redburn laments. “It never occurred to my boyish thoughts, that though the guide-book, fifty years old, might have done good service in its day, yet it would prove but a miserable...
cicerone to a modern” (218). Whereas in “Hawthorne and His Mosses,” Melville brings up posterity and obsolescence to argue that Americans should write new books with new, uniquely American forms, in *Redburn* this sentiment is complicated by the protagonist’s attachment to the old book, which is presented only half-ironically.

Surprised and sorry at his guidebook’s failure to guide, Redburn tells himself: “Guide-books, Wellingborough, are the least reliable books in all literature; and nearly all literature, in one sense, is made up of guide-books... Every age makes its own guide-books, and the old ones are used for waste paper” (224-5). The American reader of Melville’s day would have cheered this sentiment, as the United States had taken a savage beating in the pages of British guidebooks and travelogues of the 1830s and ’40s. While British guidebooks to the United States from 1810 to 1830 or so concentrated mostly on economic opportunities, first for middle-class farmers and tradesmen, then for laborers, in the 1830s British writing on America stopped being polite, moving from instructive how-to guides on immigrating to the United States “to the more discursive analytical books of the succeeding decade” (Adams 249-50). From Captain Basil Hall to Frances Trollope to—insult of insults—Charles Dickens, British travelers trafficked in stereotypes of tobacco-smoking, -chewing, and -spitting rubes boasting of their society’s attainments from the comfort of their rocking-chairs. Though subsequent British writing on America regained its equilibrium and lost some of its vitriol, Americans continued to reread Trollope’s *Domestic Manners of the Americans* and Dickens’s *American Notes* (the sting of which was exacerbated when *Martin Chuzzlewit* was published in 1846) and to seethe. When Redburn calls guidebooks “the least reliable books in all literature,” he is playing to the gallery (224). Whether Melville lets Redburn maintain this coded but decidedly nationalist stance remains to be seen.
The first complication to Redburn’s declaration is in the realm of religious orthodoxy. When Redburn says that old books “are used for waste paper,” this could conjure for the patriotic reader the pleasant notion of Fanny Trollope’s words meeting an undignified fate, but it could also hint that there is a time and a season for all things under heaven. Lest the reader draw sacrilegious conclusions about the continued usefulness of all old books and ideas, Redburn is quick to emend, “But there is one Holy Guide-Book, Wellingborough, that will never lead you astray, if you but follow it aright; and some noble monuments that remain, though the pyramids crumble” (225). This moment is not altogether convincing, in part because Redburn’s beliefs and tone are not consistent. As Tolchin puts it: “Melville … creates a strange tonal effect in Redburn by sugarcoating his narrative persona’s depressive rage with Christian pieties” (159). When Melville excludes the Bible from the category of doomed books, is he pandering to the unsophisticated readers of a project he has designated from the start as commercial and unworthy? Lawrance Thompson makes this case, referring to the guidebook episode as a “sly anti-Christian joke” and arguing that at another point in the novel “Melville is making a fool out of Redburn in order to use his religious clichés simultaneously as pap for any Christian reader who happens to be simple, and as a satirical thrust, straight into the wide-open mouth of that same reader” (84, 80). While Thompson captures Melville’s rejection of religious hypocrisy, he is too dogmatic to see what other critics have called “the Christian challenge” of Redburn (Rowe 61). However ambivalent Melville may have been about many aspects of Christian theology, the novel’s far-ranging social critique provides ample evidence that Melville is not invoking the Bible in a purely calculating manner. Rather, it seems likely that he is expressing the naïve and easily-challenged faith of his youthful protagonist. When Redburn addresses himself by name twice over the course of this short passage, he indicates that he is trying to pull himself together,
to comfort himself by shoring up his identity and values. These values can certainly be read as compromised: Comparing the use of the Bible in *Redburn* and *White-Jacket*, Lackey argues convincingly that when Redburn invokes the Bible, he generally does so in ways that absolve himself of personal responsibility for what he sees (247). This position differs from Thompson’s; Lackey is not claiming that Melville is making an anti-Christian point here, just that he is portraying Redburn as inadequately Christian. In this view, we need not question Redburn’s religiosity so much as the practical application of his religious feelings.

If Redburn’s professed reverence for the “holy Guide-Book that will never lead you astray” raises questions, so must this passage’s seeming lack of remorse for the old books that must be pulped or, worse, “used for waste paper” (225). *Redburn* is suffused with a sense that behind every artwork, there is an artist. As a young child, Redburn “examined again and again” the European furnishings in his parents’ home, “wondering where the wood grew, whether the workmen who made them still survived, and what they could be doing with themselves now” (46). While this moment’s main purpose is to set the stage for Redburn’s Anglophilia, his curiosity about the carpenters and craftsmen demonstrates that he was aware that cultural artifacts have a personal and geographic point of origin. Given this awareness of the person behind the work, it is unlikely that Redburn—or, for that matter, Melville—takes pleasure in the image of old books being destroyed.

Melville seeks to strike an Emersonian note in his formulation, but his philosophical differences from Emerson show through. In his 1837 Phi Beta Kappa lecture on “The American Scholar,” Emerson declares, “Each age, it is found, must write its own books; or rather, each generation for the next succeeding” (67). If a society worships old books and dogmas, he argues, “Instantly the book becomes noxious; the guide is a tyrant.” Worse:
Meek young men grow up in libraries, believing it their duty to accept the views which Cicero, which Locke, which Bacon, have given; forgetful that Cicero, Locke, and Bacon were only young men in libraries when they wrote these books (67).

Melville’s Redburn is one of these meek young men. He is far from eager to relinquish his guide-book, and with it his heritage. That heritage is literary (a book), cultural (a British book about an English city), and familial (his father’s book). These are among the many reasons why Redburn does not want to accept that his book is of no use to him. Even after several disappointments, when he is on the verge of an epiphany about the book’s continued efficacy, Redburn retreats from the discovery:

Well, well, Wellingborough, thought I, you had better put the book into your pocket, and carry it home to the Society of Antiquaries; it is several thousand leagues and odd furlongs behind the march of improvement… Put it up, Wellingborough, put it up, my dear friend; and hereafter follow your nose throughout Liverpool…

No! – And again I rubbed its back softly, and gently adjusted a loose leaf: No, no, I’ll not give you up yet (226-7).

In light of the similarities between Melville’s language here and Emerson’s in “The American Scholar,” it is tempting to interpret Redburn’s guide-book sequence as an endorsement of Emerson’s declaration of intellectual independence. We can read the above passage thus: Redburn, refusing to give up a book he knows to be out of date, represents American culture sentimentally clinging to its culture of origin. When Redburn strokes the book, he is behaving childishly, signaling a cultural regression. As a necessary stage in the development of a national culture, Americans must put away childish things, including old—and foreign—books.

However, Melville’s famous willingness to see both sides of every question complicates any reading of this passage. He does not proffer an easy “out with the old, in with the new” sentiment. Instead, as one critic points out, “[t]he loosely Emersonian dictum—‘Every age makes its own guide-books’—does not affirm an ahistorical relativism but the need to make new books out of the old” (Wenke 85). It is clear in “Hawthorne and His Mosses” that Melville
agrees with Emerson that it is time for a national American literature. However, the marginalia in his copy of Emerson’s essays (purchased in the 1860s, but read much earlier, before he could afford to buy it) indicate that he takes issue with Emerson’s stance toward other cultures:

In writing of Americans’ going to Europe for culture, Emerson queried, “You do not think you will find anything there which you have not seen at home?” This statement caused Melville to observe, “Yet, possibly, Rome or Athens has something to show or suggest that Chicago has not” (Braswell 326).

If anything, Melville differs even more sharply in his attitude toward old books. Unlike the transcendentalist sage, Melville is willing to spare a sigh for the books that history will forget. Elsewhere in his copy of Emerson’s essays, Melville ends a lengthy marginal comment with the following sentence: “Another species of Mr. Emerson’s errors, or rather blindness, proceeds from a defect in the region of the heart” (qtd. Braswell 331). No such criticism could be leveled at Melville, who presents his argument about culture in movingly personal terms. While Redburn’s rubbing the guidebook could certainly illustrate American cultural subservience to Britain, the gesture must also be read literally, as a young man patting an object given to him by the father he misses terribly. By anthropomorphizing the book, Redburn gains the chance to be kind to his father in the old age he never reached: “Poor old guide-book, thought I, tenderly stroking its back, and smoothing the dog-ears with reverence” (225). The pathos and harmlessness of this sentimental gesture hint at Melville’s attitude toward the old books and ideas that Emerson would gladly jettison. Writing after one of his own ambitious creations had failed in the marketplace, Melville must have seen not only the promise of newer, greater works, as per Emerson’s vision, but also the sorrow of obsolescence.

Hence, the allusion to the pyramids is ambiguous: As monuments to personal and cultural arrogance, they deserve to disappear, rebuked, like the statue of Ozymandias in Shelley’s poem. However, they also bear witness to a complex, sometimes glorious civilization that should not be
entirely forgotten. In the image of the pyramid, cultural and political power are fused. In the next chapter, “The Docks,” Redburn contrasts “the miserable wooden wharves, and slip-shod, shambling piers of New York” to the “long China walls of masonry; vast piers of stone; and a succession of granite-rimmed docks” of Liverpool, and comments that “the extent and solidity of these structures, seemed equal to what I had read of the old Pyramids of Egypt” (229). If, in his admiration of the architecture and engineering of the docks, Redburn fails to see “the connection between Liverpool’s commercial dominance and the poverty of its citizens,” his return to the pyramid motif hints that Redburn is on his way to that discovery (Kelley 129). Melville’s ambivalence is even plainer when Redburn reads the populations statistics in his guidebook and feels embarrassed for its writer, who gloats at the immensity of the town. In fact, the population of Liverpool has quadrupled between the book’s publication and Redburn’s arrival. He begins to draw his own conclusions:

For the cope-stone of to-day is the corner-stone of to-morrow; and as St Peter’s church was built in great part of the ruins of old Rome, so in all our erections, however imposing, we but form quarries and supply ignoble materials for the grander domes of posterity.

And even as this old guide-book boasts of the, to us, insignificant Liverpool of fifty years ago, the New York guide-books are now vaunting of the magnificence of a town, whose future inhabitants, multitudinous as the pebbles on the beach, and girdled in with high walls and towers, flanking endless avenues of opulence and taste, will regard all our Broadways and Bowerys as but the paltry nucleus to their Nineveh (215-6).

In this passage, which later goes on to suggest that the great civilization that will eventually develop north of the Harlem River “may send forth explorers to penetrate into the then obscure and smoky alleys of the Fifth Avenue and Fourteenth Street,” Melville expresses faith in a particular kind of progress (216). In this vision, human endeavors, like the population, grow larger and larger, and they remain rooted in a tradition but expand beyond what their forebears could ever have imagined. There is, however, a sadness to this passage, which extrapolates
from Liverpool’s example onto Manhattan, and predicts that New York will balloon beyond its
denizens’ imaginings\(^4^6\) and one day be ploughed under – \textit{vanitas vanitatum et omnia vanitas}.
This lesson in humility is hardly pleasant.

Melville’s choice of Nineveh as a parallel to New York is ominous, first because the
Babylonian empire of which Nineveh was the capital is no more, and second, because Babylon
figures in the Bible as the original Evil Empire, destroyer of the first temple in Jerusalem. Thus,
the literary nationalism of \textit{Redburn} is tempered in comparison to the Yankee assertiveness of
“Hawthorne and His Mosses.” Melville is not merely saying that New York is the new
Liverpool, that the British empire is on the wane and America on the rise; he is also anticipating
the eventual corruption and demise of the growing American empire. This is the sort of
concession that, in a debate, makes one’s own argument sound more reasonable. That is, if
Melville grants that no civilization lasts forever, he clears the way for a claim that American
civilization will dominate the foreseeable future. The down-side to this line of reasoning is
obvious. Should we rejoice in human progress, accept that bigger is better, or mourn what has
vanished? \textit{Redburn}’s tone may vary at times due to authorial carelessness,\(^4^7\) but authorial
ambivalence has as powerful an effect.

Throughout \textit{Redburn}, the personal figures the national and vice versa. Redburn
“identifi[es] his own orphanhood with that of the nation,” and he sees his guidebook as a stand-in
for all of literature (Rowe 62). Ann Douglas finds a useful way of talking about this tendency
when she refers to Melville as “temporarily blurring the distinction between ‘Marxist’ and
‘Freudian’ material” in \textit{Redburn} and \textit{White-Jacket} (303). Douglas posits that “Melville was
perhaps the first major American author to sense that the essential question for the American
writer and intellectual was ... whether he would focus on personality or on societal structures as
causal agent” (298). In Redburn, Melville does both, using Redburn’s personal woes as a stand-in for national problems, and returning to the complex personal arena whenever nationalist ideology would offer too simplistic an answer. Hence, when Redburn contemplates the obsolescence of one book, he comes to think about an entire culture’s waning, which then brings him back to thinking about his particular book and the personal associations that make him wish to preserve it. A struggling writer who never found out what posterity had in store for him, Melville could not rejoice at the idea of literary obsolescence. Nor is it clear, in Redburn, that he believes in it. Despite his fiercely-worded renunciation of the guidebook, in the next chapter, when Redburn wanders the docks and rails against the “pompous vanity” of columns and cenotaphs as monuments to heroism, he tells himself that “more enduring monuments are built in the closet with the letters of the alphabet, than even Cheops himself could have founded, with all Egypt and Nubia for his quarry” (231). Despite the guidebook’s problems, Redburn still believes that the ultimate memorial for oneself is a book.

Thus, in the guidebook sequence, Melville instills in the reader a sense of the person behind each book. The guidebook is introduced as a possession that even the older, wiser, narrating Redburn has held onto and finds precious:

> But let me get it down from its shrine, and paint it, if I may, from the life. As I now linger over the volume, to and fro turning the pages so dear to my boyhood, – the very pages which, years and years ago, my father turned over amid the very scenes that are here described; what a soft, pleasing sadness steals over me, and how I melt into the past and forgotten! Dear book! I will sell my Shakspeare [sic], and even sacrifice my old quarto Hogarth, before I will part with you (208).

When he first describes the guide-book, Melville rewrites the Picture of Liverpool in an affectionate parody. But by the time the book is put to the test and found wanting, the reader is attached to it in its own right. Having been walked through the guidebook, the reader shares
Redburn’s experience of finding in it the antiquity, quirkiness, and personal touch lacking in the city itself. How much worse for Redburn, whose mocking fondness for the book’s author is nothing compared to his feelings for its previous owner. The thought that “this precious book was next to useless. Yes, the thing that had guided the father, could not guide the son” depresses Redburn less because he wishes to uncover Liverpool’s hidden architectural treasures, than because he is looking for a connection to his father (224). Using Redburn’s personal predicament, Melville makes a larger argument for a cultural inheritance being valuable in itself, no matter how incorrect the facts or outmoded the beliefs. It is no coincidence that Redburn presents his trip to Liverpool as a religious pilgrimage:

My intention was in the first place, to visit Riddough’s Hotel, where my father had stopped, more than thirty years before: and then, with the map in my hand, follow him through all the town, according to the dotted lines in the diagram. For thus would I be performing a filial pilgrimage to spots which would be hallowed in my eyes (220).

In this period, the European tour is frequently described as a religious pilgrimage. What is unusual here is that Redburn is not genuflecting at the altar of famous works of art or architecture. Rather, he is seeking out the more modest locations where his father dined, prayed, or read while in town on business, and he is close-reading a book that hardly aspires to the status of literature, much less great literature. One critic attributes the young sailor’s affection for the old guidebook to his having the sort of “encompassing mind” that can distinguish between good and bad art “and goes further, appreciating the good and appropriating what is useful from the mediocre” (Robillard 54). While Redburn’s aesthetic sensibility may well be of a proto-Post-Modernist, hi-lo, so-bad-it’s-good variety, it is important to remember that Redburn sees himself as being on a pilgrimage that is primarily “filial,” rather than cultural – where Melville’s interests lie is another story (220). Some critics – quite properly – question Redburn’s filial piety along the same lines as they do his Christian piety: “Even though Redburn keeps harping on his
father’s ‘sacred memory’, the contrasts he continually draws between his own poverty and his father’s genteel trappings serve to indict Walter Redburn for leaving his son impoverished” (Tolchin 167). However, anyone who has lost someone they love will recognize Redburn’s impulse to retrace his father’s steps. Melville did: Not long after writing *Redburn*, on his second trip to England, Melville thought about his brother, who had died in 1846. In his journal, he wrote: “No doubt, two years ago, or three, Gansevoort was writing here in London, about the same hour as this—alone in his chamber, in profound silence—as I am now” (*Journals* 28). However, when Redburn notes with the excitement of a devout Christian on the Via Dolorosa,53 “Yes, in this very street, thought I, nay, on this very flagging my father walked,” he is setting himself up for a fall (220).

While Redburn sees his quest as primarily filial, and we are meant to take his desire for a connection to his father seriously on its own terms, Melville also uses his protagonist’s familial search to discuss the larger American cultural problem of paradoxical connection with and disjunction from Britain. When, as a child, Redburn looked at his parents’ furnishings and wondered “whether the workmen who made them still survived, and what they could be doing with themselves now,” he demonstrated that he was not only interested in the origins of the culture in which he lived but also in what had happened to the workmen since they had made the furniture, that is, what had happened to Europe since its point of divergence from his own culture (46). Though Redburn retains these initial impulses long enough for his older, narrating self to list them as part of his impetus for going to sea, as he grows up, he loses the tendency to look for concrete evidence, such as the furnishings, for his ideas about other places, and his idea of England changes to accommodate the books he reads.54 Thus, when on his rambles in Liverpool, he finds a “cloister-like arch of stone,” Redburn is overjoyed: “[Its] gloom and narrowness
delighted me, and filled my Yankee soul with romantic thoughts of old Abbeys and Minsters...” (221). His fantasies are informed by what seems in the novel to be a specifically American lack, a desire for antiquity and mystery only the Old World can provide.

In reality, Redburn’s yearnings are typical of Americans of his generation but not exclusive to them. British literature of the same period contains similar fantasies about Southern Europe. As Buzard puts it: “Invested with pent-up psychic energy, that which lay across any appreciable boundary (Atlantic, Channel, Alps) could be shaped into a vessel for deferred wishes. Britons constructed the “Continent” in this way, Americans a larger “Europe” that included Great Britain (CP 32). This parallel did not, however, keep American writers from perceiving their problem with local color to be unique. In his famous preface to The Marble Faun (1859), Hawthorne explains his use of a European setting thus:

> Italy, as the site of [the author’s] romance, was chiefly valuable to him as affording a sort of poetic or fairy precinct, where actualities would not be so terribly insisted upon as they are, and must needs be, in America. No author, without a trial, can conceive of the difficulty of writing a romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity, in broad and simple daylight, as is happily the case with my dear native land. ... Romance and poetry, ivy, lichens, and wallflowers, need ruin to make them grow (854).

In this striking example of antebellum-era denial, Hawthorne rebels against the tenets of literary realism. His rebellion relies on commonly held assumptions of his generation that make “virtually every place ‘on the Continent’ or ‘in Europe’ describable in terms of its opposition to the modern and familiar” (Buzard CP 32). Hawthorne’s Italy is saturated in the same way that Western portrayals of the East are said to be, and his America (in this preface, if not in his novels) is emptied out, lacking the romantic and the picturesque.

In Redburn, Melville is doing something entirely different. Before arriving in England, Redburn shares the romanticist view of a Europe that is ancient, picturesque, and above all
immune to the quotidian. However, almost immediately upon his arrival, Redburn learns that Liverpool—and by analogy England—has changed with the times. When the guide-book and the living city fail to match, he wails:

   Ah me, and then times alas! Am I to visit old England in vain? In the land of Thomas-a-Becket and stout John of Gaunt, not to catch the least glimpse of priory or castle? Is there nothing in all the British empire but these smoky ranges of old shops and warehouses? is Liverpool but a brick kiln... This boasted England is no older than the State of New York (227).

Redburn knows that he is being unfair, but he is doubly disappointed: England has failed to provide him with a link to his father, and it has abandoned its own heritage. The old castle that has been replaced by a pub is emblematic of this betrayal. When Redburn declares that England is no older than New York, he is not only stating the fact that most of modern Liverpool was constructed in the 19th century but also asserting that if the castles and minsters of old have been destroyed, then England has forfeited its birthright. This comparison works both ways, however: In accusing England of betraying its cultural and architectural heritage, Melville is leveling the same charges at the United States. After all, just as Liverpool’s fort was replaced by The Old Fort Tavern, in New York City, “the Battery, the old Revolutionary fort, was now a public promenade” (Kelley 127). Thus, Melville is not necessarily making national distinctions when he both marvels at and deplores the speed of urban change. After all, if England is plowing its history under, so is America. Though Melville rejects the mindless privileging of the Old World over the New, he is mostly hostile to easy dichotomies that would reverse the hierarchy. In Redburn’s criticisms of Britain, the British example is meant to warn Americans against their own culture’s proclivities.

   Even the admonition that “your father’s guidebook is no guide for you,” which is in part a coded nationalist gesture, can be read in largely generational terms (224). The literary
progenitor to the Liverpool section of *Redburn* is Washington Irving’s *The Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon*, which also brings a young American to England and explores “the question of England, the patrimony of America’s culture, and the meaning of an American’s desire to retain or revive the connexion” (Goldman 70). However, whereas Irving maintains a light and sentimental tone, and his protagonist enjoys England immensely, the English section of *Redburn* is bleak and despairing. Redburn’s conclusion that “[e]very age makes its own guide-books, and the old ones are used for waste paper” can be read as a general statement about the generation gap, or it could be Melville’s declaration that *The Sketch Book*, specifically, has had its day (224-5). This is particularly likely in light of “Hawthorne and His Mosses,” in which he repudiates Irving as “that very popular and amiable writer, [who,] however good, and self-reliant in many things, perhaps owes his chief reputation to the self-acknowledged imitation of a foreign model, and to the studied avoidance of all topics but smooth ones” (Mosses 247).

The latter sin of omission may well be the greater one, in Melville’s calculus. After all, much of *Redburn* relies upon a variety of foreign models. But Melville, whose struggles with censors and bowdlerizers eventually taught him to be tactful to the point of mysteriousness, is saying that Irving’s attempts to please two audiences go too far. Melville is not advocating a complete rejection of England but rather a deep engagement with Europe in general and English literature in particular. He simply wishes to change the rules of that engagement, to have a relationship with England that is neither his father’s relationship with it nor Irving’s. Allan Melvill made his living bringing European fashions to Americans (Delbanco 19-20). As for Irving, the career diplomat’s attitude toward England was one of conciliation, and *The Sketch Book*’s response to British criticism of American literature is less than pugnacious:

Let it be the pride of our writers, therefore, discarding all feelings of irritation and disdaining to retaliate the illiberality of British authors, to speak of the English nation
without prejudice, and with determined candour. While they rebuke the undiscriminating
degotry with which some of our countrymen admire and imitate everything English,
merely because it is English, let them frankly point out what is really worthy of
approbation. We may thus place England before us as a perpetual volume of reference,
wherein are recorded sound deductions from ages of experience; and while we avoid the
errors and absurdities which may have crept into the page, we may draw from thence
golden maxims of practical wisdom wherewith to strengthen and to embellish our
national character (Irving 49).

There is nothing in this paragraph from “English Writers on America” with which Melville could
disagree. Like Irving, he finds elements of English culture praiseworthy. Like Irving, he wishes
to leave behind the dross of the Old World while preserving what is best in it. Like Irving, he
believes that writers should tell the truth. However, Melville departs from Irving in his sense of
which truths may be told.

The protagonist of The Sketch-Book loves Liverpool, and the protagonist of Redburn
hates it. Whereas at first it might seem that Melville is simply disputing Irving’s conclusions, in
fact, he is objecting to the evidence Irving marshals for his assessment. Like The Picture of
Liverpool and most guidebooks of the time, The Sketch Book leaves out evidence of
industrialization and poverty. As Stowe notes: “The most common treatment of the lower
classes in guidebooks … is simply to write them out of existence” (48). Much of the Liverpool
section of Redburn is an exercise in writing the omitted back in, and the novel’s most famous
scenes describe poverty so abject that some of Melville’s British reviewers refused to believe
they were based in fact (Parker 333). Ultimately, Melville is not rejecting Irving’s European
affiliations so much as saying that he wants to be a different kind of writer, one who tells the
whole truth.

With regard to Melville’s differentiating himself from Irving, it is worth noting that the
full title of Irving’s book is The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent., and the full title of
Melville’s book is Redburn: His First Voyage. Being the Sailor-Boy Confessions and
Reminiscences of the Son-of-a-Gentleman, in the Merchant Service. This is not to say that in calling his protagonist “the son of a gentleman,” Melville is setting up a direct line of descent from Irving’s book to his own. Rather, these titles reflect the authorial stance of each writer. Irving and Melville’s reasons for crossing the Atlantic were similar: Melville was a cabin-boy, and “Irving came to the mouth of the Mersey in 1815 to lend a hand with the Liverpool end of his brothers’ hardware business” (Mulvey AAL 4). However, when it came time to turn their experiences into fiction, the two writers took different paths. Thus, Irving’s protagonist is a “gentleman” who does not mention any financial reason for coming to England, whereas Melville’s protagonist is just what he was, the déclassé son of a gentleman who has come to England to try to earn a meager wage. Comparing Irving to Frances Trollope, Mulvey observes that each traveled abroad on a business venture that ended in bankruptcy, and yet:

Both writers presented a picture of men, manners, and society as they would have them to be and a picture of themselves as they would have others believe them to be. To do so, they both adopted a social voice that presumed equality with a gentlemanly reader. And why not? (AAL 6).

In Redburn, Melville tries to show why not. By using a protagonist who has the articulacy but not the status of “a gentleman,” he can narrate precisely what is usually left out of travel-writing: “the ordinary shops, eating establishments, warehouses, dockyards, custom-houses, railway stations, and other indications of an ongoing quotidian life” (Buzard CP 31). To these prosaic elements, Melville adds Dickensian portrayals of sickening poverty without any softening Dickensian sentiment. Late in the novel, after describing the squalid conditions under which steerage passengers emigrating to the United States live – and die – aboard his ship, Redburn wails:

We may have civilized bodies and yet barbarous souls. We are blind to the real sights of this world; deaf to its voice; and dead to its death. And not till we know, that one grief
“Civilization” is a loaded term in Melville’s work and in American literature as a whole, and here it demonstrates the inadequacy of the genteel point of view. When Redburn (sounding suspiciously like Melville) says that “we are blind to the real sights of this world,” he is making a large-scale argument about man’s inhumanity to man, but he is also indicting the limited vision of the mere “sight-seer” (383).59

Hence, though Redburn is roundly mocked by his fellow sailors for his pretensions to gentlemanly status, Melville would probably not have objected to how Irving presented himself through his alter ego so much as to how Irving described what he was seeing. In contrast to Irving’s vision of a model city, Melville’s sordid Liverpool is explicitly not that of tourists.60 After the final disappointment in his guidebook, Redburn seeks to convince himself that the fault lies not in England but in his own circumstances:

But Wellingborough, I remonstrated with myself, you are only in Liverpool; the old monuments lie to the north, south, east, and west of you; you are but a sailor-boy, and you can not expect to be a great tourist, and visit the antiquities, in that preposterous shooting-jacket of yours (227).

Whereas most travel literature positions itself as superior to tourism and tourists, the penniless Redburn is reduced to aspiring to the conditions of a tourist, a role constructed by guidebooks as combining attributes of “students or pilgrims,” as well as “consumers” (Stowe 35). Redburn studies his destination beforehand and greets it with the proper reverence, but as he does not have the funds to be a consumer, problems of access bedevil him throughout his stay in Liverpool. Over and over, the young man’s interactions with the British culture he had hoped to encounter are hindered by the shabbiness of his clothing and the emptiness of his purse. However, these very liabilities to Redburn’s experience of Liverpool become a boon to his
account of it. Barred from the fashionable life that has already been described in books, Redburn is able to see clearly and describe the city as it is. In the guidebook episode of Redburn, Melville is staking a claim for realism, which is not always his chosen mode. Immediately after abandoning the guidebook, Redburn describes Liverpool’s docks, the source of its prosperity, and Launcelott’s-Hey, a site of literally sickening poverty. Because Redburn has a job and is poor himself, he sees more of Liverpool’s commerce and of its misery than the average narrator of his time. In deciding what to include in his rendering of Liverpool, Melville takes a negative cue from Irving and even from his source The Picture of Liverpool. As for a positive cue, Melville found in Liverpool an example of art that includes all levels of society.

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England Expects: A New Model for Melville’s Art

“After dinner went to Exchange. Looked at Nelson’s statue, with peculiar emotion, mindful of 20 years ago.”
-- Herman Melville on his first night back in Liverpool, Saturday, Nov 8th 1956 (Journals 50)

When Redburn’s tour of Liverpool reaches Exchange Flags, the city’s main commercial center, he notices that his guidebook does not mention a vast statue in the center of the square. The memorial to Admiral Nelson was erected in the years since The Picture of Liverpool was printed and his father visited the city. Melville had numerous reasons for including a description of this piece of public art: First, he was interested in sculpture as an art-form, so much so that when, in 1857, Melville was too ill and discouraged to attempt new works of fiction, he began a series of lecture tours, and his first topic, unlikely as it may have seemed to audiences expecting tales of South Seas adventures, was “Statues in Rome.” That same year, Melville planned a book called Roman Frescoes that was never published (Charvat PA 256).
Second, Melville admired Nelson, as did most of his generation. Third, Melville was connected through his father to one of the people responsible for the statue’s existence, William Roscoe. Finally, Melville describes the Nelson memorial in great detail because the complex group of statuary treats themes – heroism and sacrifice, misery and injustice – that matter deeply to him, in a manner that he can adapt to his own ends.

To begin with the Roscoe connection: In one of the novel’s semi-autobiographical elements, when Redburn pores over the marginalia in his father’s guidebook, he finds the notation, “Dine with Mr Roscoe on Monday” (210). William Roscoe was a major political and intellectual figure in Liverpool at the beginning of the 19th century. A poet, historian, and anti-slavery crusader, Roscoe famously sacrificed his seat in Parliament (as MP for Liverpool) by voting to abolish the slave trade in 1807 (Yarrington PS 25). After the Battle of Trafalgar, Roscoe was one of the first to campaign for a Nelson memorial in Liverpool. He presided over the town meeting of November 15th, 1805, in which the subscription for the statue was initiated (Yarrington PS 24). When the memorial was finally unveiled in 1813, Roscoe wrote a pamphlet commemorating the occasion (Busco 50). Noting that the long poem quoted in The Picture of Liverpool mentions Roscoe, Redburn posits that such references are meant to elevate Liverpool’s status:

Indeed, both the anonymous author of the Guide-Book and the gifted bard of the Mersey, seem to have nourished the warmest appreciation of the fact, that to their beloved town Roscoe imparted a reputation which gracefully embellished its notoriety as a mere place of commerce (214).

Melville suggests that the guidebook and the poem it quotes seek to present Roscoe as a natural outgrowth of Liverpudlian culture. In The Sketch Book, however, Washington Irving attempts to glorify Roscoe by suggesting that he has developed in opposition to his background, as he was “[b]orn in a place apparently ungenial to the growth of literary talent” (Irving 17). Melville sides
with Irving on this issue and goes even further: Irving damns Liverpool for being primarily a place of business, and therefore not conducive to intellectual development, but Melville slyly implies that Liverpool’s “notoriety” was due not only to the city’s commercial nature, but to the nature of its commerce (214). Though slaves were not transported via Liverpool, the city made much of its 18th-century fortune through its role in the Triangle Trade.65

Roscoe represents an ideal in both *The Sketch Book* and *Redburn*, but, as Arnold Goldman points out, in *Redburn* Roscoe signifies mostly through his absence. In *The Sketch Book*, he figures as “merchant, man of letters, and public benefactor,” but in *Redburn* the late Roscoe is yet another missing landmark (Goldman 71). While the older Redburn could dine with him, “[n]o such connexion is available to his son” (Goldman 71). It can be argued that in his absence, Roscoe is more obtrusive than he would be were he alive and available for tea. Dead, Roscoe becomes analogous to Redburn’s dead father, compounding the young man’s isolation and sense of disinherita, and Roscoe’s heroic role draws attention to Redburn’s sense of belatedness and futility. As one scholar describes Redburn’s situation, “[h]e must worship the fathers (whether Lord Nelson, Captain Riga or his own father) without the expectation that he himself will ever reap the rewards of fatherhood, the rewards of access to power and authority” (Bell 564). Of course, Roscoe himself lost his access to these when, like Allan Melvill and Walter Redburn, he lost his fortune. In *The Sketch Book*, Irving offers the view that someone with Roscoe’s vast inner resources could never be poor, and, as an indication of this superior sensibility, Irving quotes the poet’s valedictory ode to the books he has been forced to sell (18, 20-1). Melville does not mention Roscoe’s fate,66 but in describing the bankrupt state of the Redburn family and the misery of its youngest member, he rejects Irving’s sentimental minimization of poverty.67
Though Roscoe’s fight to abolish slavery is never mentioned in the studiedly uncontroversial *Sketch Book*, he was most famous in this role (Kaplan 296n19). Thus, when Melville mentions Roscoe by name three times in *Redburn*, he is invoking the abolitionist cause.68 This brings us to the main reason why Melville includes a discussion of the Nelson memorial in *Redburn*: The striking group of statuary, with its slightly cryptic allegory, gives him an opportunity to speak about slavery and provides a model for doing so. Melville’s critiques of slavery are normally oblique: “Instead of making slavery his single, overriding concern—as did abolitionist novelists like Richard Hildreth and Harriet Beecher Stowe—Melville focused on the oppression and exploitation he had known as a sailor and generalized about slavery by analogy” (Karcher 2). In *Mardi*, Melville takes a different tack, offering clichéd antislavery images such as “a man with a collar round his neck, and the red marks of stripes upon his back” (515). While this is not the only reason why *Mardi* failed, in *Redburn* the newly commerce-minded writer wises up and takes no chances, offering someone else’s image of figures in chains instead of his own.

When Redburn first encounters the Nelson memorial and notes that his guidebook does not mention it, he tries to make excuses for the book, suggesting that the monument “was but a slight subsequent erection, which ought not to militate against the general character of my friend for comprehensiveness” (222). The Nelson monument looks like this:69
Melville – if not Redburn – is being ironic; Richard Westmacott and Matthew Cotes Wyatt’s monument is immense and dominates the little plaza it occupies. Though Redburn is not yet willing to concede that the omission refutes his guide-book’s version of the city, he all but admits this when he offers his own lengthy description of the memorial, thus indicating that it is worthy of notice and of inclusion in a book. True to the guidebook’s – and the 19th-century historian’s – mode of focusing on the rich and the powerful, Redburn begins with the idealized figure of Nelson being crowned by Victory and simultaneously taken by skeletal Death, and he
appreciates the sculptor’s artistry: “A very striking design, and true to the imagination; I never could look at Death without a shudder” (222). Initially, Redburn is interested in the tragic hero and in his own sensational response to the monument.

However, Redburn’s response to the statue moves quickly from aesthetic to moral. His focus on the monument’s upper tier soon expands to include the rest of the figures. Directly below Nelson and the allegorical figures sit four chained men. Redburn takes his time with these:

At uniform intervals round the base of the pedestal, four naked figures in chains, somewhat larger than life, are seated in various attitudes of humiliation and despair. One has his leg recklessly thrown over his knee, and his head bowed over, as if he had given up all hope of ever feeling better. Another has his head buried in despondency, and no doubt looks mournfully out of his eyes, but as his face was averted at the time, I could not catch the expression. These woe-begone figures of captives are emblematic of Nelson’s principal victories; but I never could look at their swarthy limbs and manacles, without being involuntarily reminded of four African slaves in the marketplace (222).

The four chained figures can be explained in a variety of ways. Melville believes that each represents a victory, and the conventions of Renaissance sculpture support him: “Such figures were a traditional means of representing a monarch’s dominion over the four quarters of the globe, for example, Pietro Tacca’s four bronze slaves for the Monument to Ferdinand I, de Medici (1615-24, Livorno)” (Yarrington NCH 325). Local conditions both reinforce and complicate this interpretation: Nelson was revered in Liverpool for having secured the seas for British trade, which was essential for the city’s prosperity (Yarrington PS 22). Melville shared in this admiration; later on, when Redburn explores the docks, he regrets that the people of Liverpool named streets after “those naval heroes, who by their valor did so much to protect the commerce of Britain, in which Liverpool held so large a stake” when they could have named the docks after them instead, creating living, functioning monuments relevant to their achievements (230). Redburn’s praise of Admiral Nelson is not merely Melville’s gesture to his British readers. Perhaps because of his own seafaring background, Melville was interested in Nelson:
his journals of voyages to England in 1849 and 1856 frequently mention various busts and paintings of Nelson and sites related to his life. In fact, Melville took a detour on his last day in England in 1849 to see Nelson’s ship the *Victory* in Portsmouth.\(^7_7\) His admiration for Nelson’s heroism, however, does not preclude a healthy skepticism about some of the economic and political practices that Britain’s naval victories facilitated. It is thanks to Nelson that Britannia could be said to rule the waves.

World domination has always had its downside, however: One of the commodities whose transport Nelson’s victory guaranteed was African slaves, a key source of income in Liverpool. Very few Africans actually passed through Liverpool, but the ships that carried them were owned by locals and docked there, and the cotton and tobacco they picked was unloaded in Liverpool.\(^7_8\) At the beginning of the 19\(^{\text{th}}\) century, Liverpool’s economic well-being depended in part on the continuance of the slave trade. In 1806-7, when Wyatt’s design was selected for the Nelson memorial, the future of the slave trade was a subject of Parliamentary debate and local anxiety. Thus, the memorial, placed as it is in the city’s commercial center, could be read as a gesture of thanks to Nelson for his aid to the slave trade, or, somewhat euphemistically, “an expression of the City’s commercial interests” (Yarrington NCH 325).\(^7_9\) This reading would seem more plausible were it not for Roscoe’s involvement in the selection of the design; he would not have permitted a monument that glorified slavery. The other flaw in this reading is the design itself, with its well-muscled “Michelangelesque” slaves whose sorrowful faces and agonized postures “could equally suggest the suffering and nobility of the enslaved” (Yarrington CH 129, NCH 325).
Recent scholarship posits that the chained figures on the monument are not African slaves but French prisoners of war. The thinking behind this is as follows: Though England was fairly covered with monuments to Nelson in the early 19th century, the only memorial that includes chained figures is in Liverpool. In fact, two designs submitted for the Liverpool memorial contained such figures, which indicates that there must be a local resonance to such images (Yarrington PS 26). Yarrington finds this resonance in the 4,000 French prisoners of war who were held in Liverpool during the Napoleonic wars (PS 25). Whether Wyatt and Westmacott intended the “slaves” to be literal slaves or mere prisoners, they offer a dramatic contrast to the figure of Nelson who looms above them, triumphant even at the moment of death. As the memorial alludes to the losers in the recent international military conflict, P.O.W.s, it also reminds its viewers, including Melville, of the losers in the world’s economic structure – slaves. These allusions make for an ambiguous tribute to the fallen commander, and Melville takes advantage of and deepens that ambiguity. When Bell uses Melville’s description of the Nelson memorial to demonstrate that “throughout Redburn, heroic symbols of authority and tradition are transmuted into emblems of raw power and social injustice,” he ignores the fact that this transmutation has been effected not by Melville but by Wyatt and Westmacott (561). When
Melville discusses the slaves at the base of the pedestal, he is not giving the statue a new meaning so much as emphasizing one of the work’s many existing meanings, and therefore cannot be held accountable for any offense caused by the description. Melville has chosen his reference well; the monument’s design, which places the chained figures “nearest to the spectator where their obvious spiritual and physical suffering have a greater emotional impact than the spiritual elevation of the hero above,” guides the viewer to think about the suffering of the oppressed rather than the demise of the (literally) high and mighty (Yarrington PS 26). In emphasizing this reading of the monument, Melville reprises a gesture he has already used in *Mardi*, where the base of a statue is covered with placards “offering rewards for missing men,” otherwise known as runaway slaves (515).

Melville repeats this move again when, later in his travels through Liverpool, Redburn encounters a second piece of public art (coincidentally also the hand of Sir Richard Westmacott), to which he refers as “George the Fourth’s equestrian statue” (281). As with the chained figures on the Nelson memorial, the real action is at the statue’s base, where, instead of a monarch, Redburn spies a crowd, and addressing them

a pale, hollow-eyed young man, in a snuff-colored surtout, who looked worn with much watching, or much toil, or too little food. His features were good, his whole air was respectable, and there was no mistaking the fact that he was strongly in earnest in what he was saying (281-2).

As Redburn listens, it emerges that the speaker is a Chartist. Almost as soon as the import of what he is saying dawns on Redburn, the police swoop in to break up the meeting: “Presently the crowd increased, and some commotion was raised, when I noticed the police officers augmenting in number; and by and by, they began to glide through the crowd, politely hinting at the propriety of dispersing” (282). Within minutes, the crowd and the speaker disappear. The dream-like quality of this sequence is sinister; the “politely hinting” is either Redburn’s ironic
understatement of the police’s show of force or else, if it is to be taken literally, a paraphrase of a threat that was itself understated but no less real. To compound the impression of corrupt authority, the passive voice of “some commotion was raised” implies that the pretext for dispersal could very well have been created by the police themselves (282).

Melville was far from being politically radical, but his portrayal of the Chartist is overwhelmingly sympathetic. The young man’s “respectable” looks – which Melville makes sure to associate with the word “good” – and the fact that his youth mirrors that of the lonely protagonist, immediately establish him as a positive figure (281). Second, the speaker’s evident poverty and illness echo the many chapters filled with misery that have preceded this moment. Relying as they do on a young man wandering the city with no money to spend and nothing to do, Redburn’s Liverpool chapters are essentially plot-less. This means that Melville could have placed the Chartist speaker anywhere in the central third of his novel, but he chose to bring him in after the police who refuse to help the dying family in Launcelott’s-Hey, after the dock-wall beggars with their placards telling tales of woe, and after the dead-house, near which the desperate “are constantly prying about the docks, searching after bodies,” for which they can garner a meager reward (251). So thoroughly does Melville prepare the reader to feel that something is terribly wrong in this society that by the time the Chartist appears, he seems impotent rather than mistaken. Though Redburn does not “abandon the thinking of his own class,” as Gilman puts it, so far as to adopt the speaker’s politics, he gives him a hearing and his full human sympathy: “I do not know why, but I thought he must be some elder son, supporting by hard toil his mother and sisters; for of such many political desperadoes are made” (Gilman 141; Redburn 282). Though branding the speaker a “desperado,” an epithet noteworthy for its acknowledgement of the desperation that may lead to criminality, Redburn also imagines the
speaker as someone very like himself, a young man with too many responsibilities who is buckling under their weight.  

The sincere Chartist’s physical position mimics that of the slaves at the base of Nelson’s monument, and he resembles them as well in his noble appearance and utter powerlessness. The figure at the top of the pedestal, however, is another matter. Melville describes the equestrian statue as being of King George IV, but it is in fact of George III. This minor lapse of memory is significant in that it permits Melville a more caustic irony than the facts would have: Instead of encountering the kindly, stammering, garden-wandering monarch of *Israel Potter*, Redburn, who came to England to see kings, must look at a statue of the irresponsible playboy, the corrupt ruler lording it over hungry people from his high perch.
Many critics have commented on Redburn’s class identification evolving over the course of the novel.85 When he first sets sail, he clings to his sense of being the son of a gentleman, seeking to make friends with the officers and the captain: “As the narrator’s pointed commentary on his younger self makes clear, at this first stage of the voyage, Redburn, like most ambitious young men, instinctively identifies not with the lowly and oppressed but with their lords and
masters” (Rowe 60). That dream dies hard. As Redburn retraces his father’s path through Liverpool, he tries to attend the same church as his father and to read the paper at the same gentlemen’s club, only to be rebuffed. In the sadistic repetitions of the *bildungsroman*, Redburn must make many attempts before he realizes how far he is from his father’s class:

> How differently my father must have appeared; perhaps in a blue coat, buff vest, and Hessian boots. And little did he think, that a son of his would ever visit Liverpool as a poor friendless sailor-boy… And then I thought of all that must have happened to him since he paced through that arch. What trials and troubles he had encountered; how he had been shaken by many storms of adversity, and at last died a bankrupt. I looked at my own sorry garb, and had much ado to keep from weeping (221).

Many see, in passages like this one, a veiled condemnation of the parent who failed to provide. What no one seems to notice is how much Redburn grows up over the course of one page, as he goes from jealousy and self-pity to compassion and empathy for his parent. If, in the last line, Redburn weeps, it is not purely for himself. His “sorry garb” is an extension of his father’s troubles, which he has come to understand.

Redburn repeatedly undergoes this same procedure, in which he feels sorry for himself and then recollects the plight of others. It is significant that immediately after this moment in which he dwells on his own and his father’s woe, Redburn comes across the Nelson memorial, and the chained figures turn his attention away from himself. Even his aesthetic response to the monument, in which Death brings out a sensational “shudder,” soon yields to his moral response to the pain on the faces and in the poses of the chained statues (222). As Redburn overcomes the solipsism of adolescence, he is also learning to see the poor and oppressed upon whose shoulders the powerful sit. The young Redburn cannot help but relate the four chained figures to images he has seen before:

> And my thoughts would revert to Virginia and Carolina; and also to the historical fact, that the African slave-trade once constituted the principal commerce of Liverpool; and that the prosperity of the town was once supposed to have been indissolubly linked to its
prosecution. And I remembered that my father had often spoken to gentlemen visiting our house in New York, of the unhappiness that the discussion of the abolition of this trade had occasioned in Liverpool; that the struggle between sordid interest and humanity had made sad havoc at the fire-sides of the merchants; estranged sons from sires; and even separated husband from wife (222-3). 89

Redburn associates the chained figures with Liverpool’s slave-trading past automatically, almost against his will, but these resonances slipped by the monument’s committee of subscribers, which included proponents of slavery such as John Bolton and John Gladstone. Even when the monument was unveiled, no one objected to the chained figures’ inclusion (Yarrington PS 26). In its forceful aesthetic impact, ambiguous allegory, and subtle social critique, the Nelson memorial has precisely the effect Melville eventually achieves in Moby-Dick: Though many can recognize allusions to their own ethical or political affiliations in the work, the artist tips his hand only rarely. Over the course of Redburn, when Melville compares England and America, he emulates the Nelson memorial’s strategy; inevitably, patriots of each country will find much to please and much to vex them.

In fact, Redburn’s encounter with the monument to Nelson serves as a useful case-study not only for examining Melville’s attitudes toward slavery, but also for working out his sense of the relationship between England and America. In the vast majority of 19th-century travel-writing, America stands for the European future, and visiting Europe offers a chance to explore America’s past (Mulvey AAL 25). If indeed “space travel is time travel,” then the astonishing innovation in Melville’s transatlanticism is that he sees England as America’s future—that is, if Americans do not mend their ways (Mulvey TM 4). 90 In the jeremiad tradition, Redburn seeks to warn his fellow Americans against the national sin. Redburn is horrified by the Nelson memorial’s chained figures not only because the image itself is fearsome and sad, but also because he can see the analogy between England and the United States. At this moment, he has a
The passage delineating Redburn’s reflections on the slave-trade, like the Nelson memorial itself, was crafted for mixed company. If, throughout Redburn, Melville must keep in mind that he is writing for both British and American readers, when he discusses slavery, he must also find a voice that can be heard in both the Northern and the Southern halves of the (just barely) United States. Buell reads Melville as “studiously devious in anticipation of being read by both patriotic insiders and Tory outsiders, whether literal foreigners or Yankee Anglophiles” (ALE 425). As Buell implies here and elsewhere, the native and foreign audiences for a work of art are not necessarily in different countries; they can represent two tendencies within one culture. When Redburn’s “thoughts would revert to Virginia and Carolina; and to the fact that the African slave-trade once constituted the principal commerce of Liverpool,” he is openly indicting the American South, and so he must also invoke the “unhappiness” engendered by the end of the slave trade in Liverpool, thus acknowledging the damage to business interests that a similar change in American policy would entail (222). However, those business interests are not exclusively Southern, so Melville must also catch the conscience of his Northern readers. He does so in the novel’s repeated emphasis on the similarities between Liverpool and New York, which may also imply that New York is just like Liverpool in its relation to slavery. When Redburn first arrives in Liverpool, he spies “lofty ranges of dingy ware-houses” that “[bear] a most unexpected resemblance to the ware-houses along South-street in New York” (189-90). The sarcastic slide from “lofty” to “dingy” is a rebuke to the real urbanizing England for its failure to be as picturesque as the imagined pastoral-yet-sublime England, but the fact that
Liverpool’s warehouses look like those in New York bears a message for Americans: If New York’s warehouses are like Liverpool’s, then perhaps New York shares other economic practices with the English city. The British slave trade has ended by the time Redburn visits Liverpool, but even in its heyday, as there were never many slaves in Liverpool, the most visible evidence of the practice was in the stateliness of some of the city-center’s architecture. Similarly, slavery was abolished in New York State in 1827, which means that readers in New York may have felt free to wring their hands over Southern abuses because they believed those hands to be clean. In linking New York to Liverpool, Melville is hinting that having economic ties to slavery constitutes complicity.

The fact that Melville had to contend with what post-colonialist critics call a “two-audience phenomenon” within his home country as well as when thinking of his transatlantic readership explains why the forcefulness of his anti-slavery rhetoric wavers slightly (Buell MAD 217). Melville is most outspoken when he aligns abolition with “humanity” and the slave-trade with “sordid interest,” and quieter when he mentions that Liverpool’s “prosperity... was once supposed to have been indissolubly linked” to the slave trade (222). The implication here is that Liverpool has since formed a new economy based on other sorts of trade and that America’s Northern and Southern states can similarly find new sources of income. However, the timeframe for this evolution is unclear, and Melville reveals his gradualist tendencies when Redburn describes what abolition did to Liverpool’s peace and prosperity. Economic concerns in particular gain validity from the poverty Redburn encounters, which indicates that the city has not recovered completely. Nevertheless, there is no accident in the fact that Redburn muses on slavery and abolition while standing beneath a statue of Admiral Nelson sacrificing his life for his country. Melville does not mention that the pedestal upon which Nelson dies, and around
which the chained men sit, is encircled by bronze letters spelling out Nelson’s signal at the Battle of Trafalgar: “ENGLAND EXPECTS EVERY MAN TO DO HIS DUTY.” This famous call to patriotic self-sacrifice would have further emphasized the nagging questions that overwhelm the comic and coming-of-age elements of Redburn: What is our duty? What can – and what must – we do for the people around us? What would it mean to live in a virtuous country? Melville believes in personal sacrifice, and despite any tempering notes he ultimately endorses abolition. He does so by invoking again the abolitionist saint, Roscoe:

   And my thoughts reverted to my father’s friend, the good and great Roscoe, the intrepid enemy of the trade; who in every way exerted his fine talents toward its suppression; writing a poem (‘the Wrongs of Africa’), several pamphlets; and in his place in Parliament, he delivered a speech against it, which, as coming from a member for Liverpool, was supposed to have turned many votes, and had no small share in the triumph of sound policy and humanity that ensued (223).

As with the memorial itself, in referring to Roscoe’s poem, Melville is citing someone else’s work of art to make his own point. No crusading Roscoe, he describes the end of slavery in England as primarily a matter of “sound policy” and only secondarily an issue of “humanity” (223). (Of course, this latter move may be intended to convince the reader rather than to express Melville’s inner-most convictions.) Unable to quell the uneasiness the Nelson monument engenders in him, Redburn returns to it obsessively: “How this group of statuary affected me, may be inferred from the fact, that I never went through Chapel-street without going through the little arch to look at it again” (223). Redburn’s reaction is all too natural; no one who sees the striking monument in Liverpool today fails to make the connection to slavery that Redburn makes.
In listing the various figures on the monument, Melville omits only one, a sailor in modern-dress who seems to be bursting from the rigging behind Nelson’s right shoulder in an attempt to defend his leader. The sailor’s inclusion in the design is meant to remind the viewer of Nelson’s funeral, in which common sailors participated to moving effect, and of Nelson’s relationship during his life with those under his command (Yarrington NCH 324; Penny 797). Melville’s omission of this figure in his careful catalogue of all the rest is odd, as he was a sailor himself when he first saw the monument, and his narrator is a sailor. In fact, *Redburn* devotes so much space to complaining about the lot of sailors and the moral influences upon them, that it is
particularly strange that the novel elides this emblem of the nobility of the “common tar” (Penny 797).

Melville’s omission of the sailor can be explained in several ways: The first is that he simply forgot that particular figure. This act of forgetting could be linked to Melville’s artistic sensibility: He remembers all the allegorical figures, as well as Nelson, who is cast in a heroic mold that hides his damaged arm under drapery and offers an idealized image of the rest of his body. This makes sense, as Melville is generally appreciative of both allegory and male beauty. As for the sailor, though a symbol, he is also specific as to period and historical significance, so maybe he is not the kind of vaguely metaphysical image to which Melville was drawn, and so he drops out, as the character of Ishmael does from *Moby-Dick*. This explanation does not seem entirely plausible, however, as much of the rest of *Redburn* is far from the metaphysical realm. It is also not likely that Melville would forget this element in the design, because “representations of the common tar” were a “novel development in the history of sculpture” of just the sort that Melville, a democrat to his marrow, would appreciate (Penny 797). Rather than forgetting the sailor, it is more likely that Melville chooses consciously not to mention him because at this point in the novel he is not concerned with the lot of sailors and the possibility of virtue and fairness in the naval hierarchy (concerns to which he would return in force in *White-Jacket*). Since Melville is using the Nelson monument as an entry-point for discussing slavery, he does not want to mix his message.

Though Melville was a gradualist on the issue of abolition, in *Redburn* his hatred of slavery comes across loud and clear. Even critics who argue that Melville’s stance on slavery and on the status of African-Americans is obscured in his writings agree that in this novel Melville unequivocally opposes slavery and supports equal rights. This critical consensus is based in part
on the description of the Nelson monument but largely on a moment later in the novel when, immediately after gloating that there are almost no native American paupers, Redburn seems to catch himself and recall the kinds of oppression that are prevalent in the United States. He goes on to celebrate the treatment that African-American sailors receive in Liverpool: “In Liverpool indeed the negro steps with a prouder pace, and lifts his head like a man; for here, no such exaggerated feeling exists in respect to him, as in America” (277). As for that exaggerated feeling, the older Redburn is ashamed to report that as a younger man, he was surprised to see interracial couples and

that a colored man should be treated as he is in this town; but a little reflection showed that, after all, it was but recognizing his claims to humanity and normal equality; so that, in some things, we Americans leave to other countries the carrying out of the principle that stands at the head of our Declaration of Independence (277-8).

Using the sort of ironic reversal of expectations that structured his social critique in *Typee* and *Omoo*, Melville is offering an instance in which the English are more egalitarian than the Americans.

Although Melville celebrates the relative enlightenment of Liverpool on racial issues, his more usual thrust in *Redburn* (and in the later diptych stories) is that Britain and America share each other’s shame: America keeps slaves in name, and Britain keeps slaves in fact. Immediately after Redburn encounters the Nelson monument, he is thrown out of a newsroom because of his shabby clothes, and later, just after he renounces his prejudice against interracial couples, the young sailor is himself segregated from the more affluent crowd in church, where he is seated behind pillars whenever possible. As Karcher points out: “Redburn’s trials as a second-class Christian in Liverpool warn the reader that the stigmas attached to race can as easily be applied to class, and that wherever the principle of discrimination is allowed to operate, anyone is liable to suffer from it” (33). If Redburn’s thoughts at the Nelson memorial would seem to privilege
Britain for having already abolished slavery, his treatment at the hands of Liverpool’s sextons evens the score. Just as the guidebook sequence, which is so often read as rejecting England, turns out to be complicated, ambiguous, and unsettled, the description of the Nelson monument, which would seem to be a rare mark of Britain’s superiority to the United States, fails to offer any easy victories. As Buell puts it: “What is most characteristic of Melville’s use of literal and symbolic contrasts between ‘English’ or ‘European’ and ‘American’ positions is their instability—their occasional nature, their shiftingness, their discontinuities, and at times their sheer adventitiousness and fortuity” (MAD 227). To Melville, cultures are contingent, and the relations between them even more so.

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In his attempt to explain why Melville’s later work failed to strike a chord with the “common reader” during his lifetime, William Charvat arrived at a formulation that captures the experience of reading Melville:

> [W]hen in _Mardi_ Melville began to generate ideas out of contradictions within himself, he shifted to a kind of internal dialectic which gave the reader no choice. He involved him in the very processes of thought, made him collaborate in exploratory, speculative thinking which is concerned not with commitment but with possibility. It is the one kind of thinking that the general reader will not tolerate, and the nineteenth-century critic, when he detected it, declared it subversive (PA 268).

Charvat’s analysis of Melville’s authorial practice is acute. Whether or not Melville is oppressing his readers, he certainly forces us to go through his deliberations. Thus, _Redburn_ never finds a victor between smug, snobbish England and cold, arrogant America, nor between the heritage of the former and the possibilities of the latter, but readers on both sides of the Atlantic gain a fresh perspective on their own affiliations.

And while _Redburn_ was not the book that Melville wished to write, it brought him to a new sense of what kind of book he could write. As affectionate critics like Gilman passionately
insist, *Redburn* is more than an apprentice-piece, and to assess it as mere throat-clearing before *Moby-Dick* would be unjust. After all, even Melville admitted that during its writing, “I have not repressed myself much” (*Correspondence* 139). The result of the free hand he occasionally gave himself is that in his attempt to write a commercial and reasonably conventional book, we can glimpse developments in Melville’s analysis of personal and international relations, and of the role of art in both, without which much of *Moby-Dick* could not have been written.

In the guidebook sequence, we see Melville grapple with his literary ancestors like Jacob wrestling with the angel – and like Jacob, he wins by not letting go. When the younger Redburn puts down the guidebook, he is free of the overdetermined, textual city and can draw his own conclusions about what he is seeing. His subsequent account of Liverpool gives new life to the tired genre of the travelogue by describing areas normally excluded from it: The story of the starving family in Launcelott’s-Hey rivals its Carlylean source for sheer emotional impact, and the largely celebratory description of the docks, which compare favorably to “the miserable wooden wharves, and slip-shod, shambling piers of New York,” serves as a precursor to the industrial material in *Moby-Dick* (229). Yet despite the obvious value of the young Redburn’s shedding his literary skin, the older Redburn is more moderate. Though he no longer believes its every word, he retains the guidebook and cherishes it, thus indicating that he has come to terms with his familial and cultural heritage and that he still believes that the most “enduring monuments are built in the closet with the letters of the alphabet” (231).

Although a monument of the lower, literal kind, the memorial to Admiral Nelson also has a profound effect on Redburn: Gazing at it, he has a series of epiphanies that change who he is—his morals develop; his class-identification shifts; and his sense of nationality comes to include British history as a valuable example, both positive and negative. At this stage of Melville’s
career, when he has moved beyond the reportage of *Typee* and *Omoo* but has not yet attained the discipline that would turn a *Mardi* into a *Moby-Dick*, the Nelson monument – which manages to be at once cluttered, grand, over-ambitious, and captivating – offers a model for his expanding art. It demonstrates what Melville wants his art to do: It should encompass many styles and modes of thought. It should open its readers’ eyes to moral, social, and political questions. It should also be beautiful and striking and strange. The Nelson monument serves as an emblem of these artistic possibilities.

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1 P.277.
2 For more on Melville’s debts, see William Charvat’s *The Profession of Authorship in America*, pp.201,237.
3 Melville wrote this in response to a favorable review in *Blackwood’s*. In a letter to his father-in-law, Melville characterized *Redburn* and *White-Jacket* as “two jobs which I have done for money – being forced to it as other men are to sawing wood” (Correspondence 138).
4 Refuting them all, William H. Gilman’s authoritative *Melville’s Early Life and Redburn* sorts the facts of Melville’s life from his fiction, ultimately pronouncing *Redburn* to be “romance with elements of autobiography,” rather than the reverse (204).
5 See, for example, John Seelye’s *Melville: The Ironic Diagram*, or James E. Miller Jr.’s “Redburn and White-Jacket: Initiation and Baptism.”
6 For a more complete account of the evolution of Melville scholarship from the 1920s through the 1960s, see Hershel Parker’s “Historical Note” to the Northwestern-Newberry Edition of *Redburn* (345-50). For an account of the achievements and short-comings of the “mythic” mode of criticism, see James Schroeter’s “*Redburn* and the Failure of Mythic Criticism.”
7 Critical work that focuses on Harry’s fate, notably that of Franklin, Canaday, Bowen and Duban, invariably reads Melville as denouncing America as strongly as England: “Arriving in America, Bolton meets with much of the same exclusion and indifference that Redburn had encountered in England” (Bowen 108).
8 Arvin argues that “Jackson is easily first among the personal embodiments of evil in this book, but in addition to him and to all the personages, and more overpowering than any of them, there is the infernal city of Liverpool, a near neighbor of the City of Destruction itself. That older allegory is bound to occur to one’s mind in thinking of *Redburn* and Liverpool, but even so it was not until the nineteenth century that the great city, any great city, the great city *an sich*, could become just the kind of symbol it did become of human iniquity. In imagining Liverpool as he did, Melville was wholly at one with the deepest sensibility of his age, and in his wonderful series of Hogarthian evocations—in the dark, begrimed, polluted streets, the great prisonlike warehouses, the squalid dwellings, the loathsome haunts of vice and crime, and the beggars, the quacks, the crimps, the peddlers who populate these infested purlieus like moral grotesques—in all this there is a power quite comparable to that with which Balzac’s Parisian Inferno is rendered, or Baudelaire’s *fourmillante cité*, the London of *Bleak House* and *Our Mutual Friend*, or the Dublin of *Ulysses*. Melville’s Liverpool, too, like his Lima, is a City of the Plain” (Arvin 105).
9 Buell uses this phrase in a slightly different context; he is comparing amorphous “American” and “European” positions” (MQ 226). Harold T. McCarthy offers a different image, that of Liverpool as a palimpsest inscribed over New York (401). McCarthy points out that Melville wrote *Redburn* in the wake of the potato famine, which means that the city deluged by starving Irish immigrants was not the Liverpool of 1839 but the New York of 1848. Thus, *Redburn*’s Liverpool is just an outer layer, through which we can see New York. While McCarthy’s image is helpful as a way of describing the blurred distinctions between the two places, most other commentators have noted newspaper and journal articles about the Irish refugees in Liverpool in the late 1840s, so there is no reason to assume that Melville is simply transposing his own experiences elsewhere. Most likely, he combined written accounts of the suffering in Liverpool with what he could see outside his own door.
society. For example, T. Walter Herbert's use of setting as follows: "With the exception of portions of his major works from the use of European settings. The only alien civilizations Melville allows his readers contact

22 For more on Melville's interest in the visual arts, see the collection Savage Eye: Melville and the Visual Arts, especially Christopher Sten's introductory essay, which points to "the need to reassess not only the whole question of Melville's 'sources,' which even most specialists continue to think of in strictly literary terms, but also the larger question of Melville's relationship (and, indirectly, the relationship of other American writers of the previous century), to the arts in America, Europe, the Mediterranean, and other parts of the world" (3). Robert K. Wallace's essay "'Unlike Things Must Meet and Mate': Melville and the Visual Arts" traces Melville's interest in visual art from the varied collection in his parents' home through his trips to Britain and demonstrates the influence of paintings and sculptures Melville saw on his journeys on the imagery and plot of Pierre, The Piazza Tales, and the later poetry. Frank's Herman Melville's Picture Gallery reproduces the pictorial sources for Moby-Dick. For Melville's interest in art criticism, see Merton Seals's Melville's Reading.

23 When theories of post-colonial literature became a part of Melville scholarship, most studies ignored Redburn, because it did not fit the formula of the Western observer Orientalizing and otherwise misinterpreting a non-Western society. For example, T. Walter Herbert's Marquesan Encounters, the first important post-colonialist study of Melville, barely mentions Redburn. In The Feminization of American Culture, Ann Douglas summarizes Melville's use of setting as follows: "With the exception of portions of Redburn and Israel Potter, Melville debars himself in his major works from the use of European settings. The only alien civilizations Melville allows his readers contact
with are those of the South Seas, precisely those which Americans (and Europeans) were then in the process of destroying. The non-American world Melville shows us is the arena for American acquisitiveness: the seas are the locale where Americans conduct their fishing industries and their wars, the South Sea Islands are the places to which they send their missionaries and their sailors. The non-American world of Melville’s narratives is one by definition mutilated by America. Through his main semi-autobiographical characters, usually American sailors and soldiers, Melville acknowledged himself as protagonist and victim of America’s imperialism; he denied himself use of the resources of older and richer cultures” (293). Only in the last fifteen years, thanks in large part to Lawrence Buell’s work on American literature as a postcolonial phenomenon in itself, has this polarity been reversed. In recontextualizing American literature as the product of a former colony rather than a future empire, Buell shows that Melville’s engagement with Britain and British culture is as crucial a part of his development as his observation of the civilizations of the South Seas.

24 As Melville worries, he does so in many voices, leaving generations of critics, beginning with F.O. Matthiessen’s American Renaissance and Merlin Bowen in “Redburn and the Angle of Vision,” to tease out the problems of point of view in Redburn. William Charvat, no great fan of this novel, argued that “When [Melville] had something serious to say in the book, he simply stepped out of the skin of his stock character and talked like Melville” (PA 238). This is true to varying degrees, but it is fair to say that Melville deploys his narrator’s innocent responses strategically.

25 “‘The Americans are queen-mad,’ noted the Mirror in 1838. ‘We have Victoria bonnets, Victoria shawls, Victoria songs, Victoria marches, Victoria mint-juleps, and somebody has just opened a shop in Broadway which he calls ‘The Victoria Hair-Dressing Establishment’” (Strout 84, quoting from Frank Luther Mott, A History of American Magazines 1741-1850 (New York, Appelton, 1930), p.397)

26 In describing the dilemma of American artists in the early 19th century (“How was one to express American ideas and sentiments through European forms?”), Andrew Delbanco makes an analogy between their hybrid or wholly derivative productions and the occasion when, “in 1831, a patriotic divinity student set new words to the old tune of “God Save the King” and called his hymn ‘America’” (76).

27 According to Oliver Wendell Holmes, this declaration came in 1837, in the form of Emerson’s lecture, “The American Scholar,” but when Melville wrote Redburn in 1848, American writers other than James Fenimore Cooper were still struggling to make a name for themselves.


29 Copyrights for American authors were established in 1790 (Charvat LP 8). William Charvat points out that the reprint industry, which was initially an obstacle to the development of American literature, ultimately became a boon: “[I]t was the most successful of the early reprint competitors who developed into the most able publishers of American literary works” (Charvat LP 18).

30 William C. Spengemann puts it thus: “To be sure, the corridors of journalism rang with cries for an American literature free from the pernicious influences of Addison, Pope, Byron, and Scott. But these lamentations attest as much to the popularity and continuing influence of these writers as to any desire on the part of American readers or authors to escape that influence” (220).

31 Spengemann argues clear-headedly and fiercely that English-language literature written in the United States of America is in fact a subset of English literature, but he concedes: “Although we will not understand Moby-Dick unless we know something about Shakespeare, Burton, Browne, Milton, Coleridge, Carlyle, and De Quincey, neither will we understand the book unless we remember that Melville was trying to write a novel in English that would yet be non-British” (231). For a detailed examination of Melville’s international audience, see Buell’s “American Literary Emergence as a Postcolonial Phenomenon.” For the British reception of Typee and Omoo, see Charles Anderson’s “Melville’s English Debut.”

32 Letter to Richard Bentley, June 5, 1849.

33 The similarities between the Redburn and Melville fathers are even more striking than those between the sons: “Redburn’s father, Walter Redburn, and Allan Melvill are both importers of French goods; both arrive at Liverpool on the same day; both know the same Irish notable; both own the books to which Redburn alludes; and both die bankrupt” (Tolchin 157). In the Historical Note to the Northwestern-Newberry Redburn, Hershel Parker asserts that we have no proof that Allan Melvill owned The Picture of Liverpool (346).

34 The main conventions here are those of the travelogue and of the story of the greenhorn sailor.

35 Merlin Bowen suggests that Melville was “so contemptuous” of Redburn because “no other work of his so nearly approaches, in conception and execution, the pattern of the mid-nineteenth-century novel” (100). Nina Baym echoes Bowen’s pronouncement, elaborating: “Redburn was, and remained until Melville wrote his short stories, the
“purest” of his fictions, that is, the work in which to the greatest degree all elements function in a dominating literary situation involving invented characters and a suitable, shapely plot with social and psychological references. The work has a clear genre referent, as well, the bildungsroman. Why did Melville have no respect for the technical achievements of Redburn? Why did its success only confirm his growing disenchantment with the reading public? I propose that he thought too little of it because, as a largely fictional work, it represented a digression from the important business of truth telling to which his new conception of himself and of the author’s role had committed him” (914). Neither Bowen nor Baym acknowledge that the form Melville was working in as British.

Indecently closely, actually. In “Redburn’s Prosy Old Guidebook,” Willard Thorp juxtaposes original and pilfered passages and highlights items that Melville “has touched up maliciously” for satirical purposes (1150).

Indeed, Thorp is not alone in noticing that as soon as Redburn abandons the guidebook, he meets Harry Bolton, his only British companion, which does make it seem like Melville needed a new device to push the book along. Thorp sees this as Melville being forced to make something up after eleven straight chapters of theft (1156).

Jonathan A. Cook sees Harry Bolton as another, less direct, literary borrowing – he convincingly establishes Harry, Redburn’s only British companion, as a genre character, a refugee from the “silver fork” fiction of Melville’s youth (27). Rowe reads Harry as less a double for Redburn (the conventional reading) than “another uncanny image of his cosmopolitan, bankrupt parent” (66).

Melville is not immune to this criticism, either.

Describing Americans who visited Europe before the Civil War, Cushing Strout describes a class of professionals as follows: “Scholars and artists brought home the rich loam of culture to fertilize the green shoots of American civilization” (63). Strout never cites Redburn, despite the novel’s relevance to his study, which implies that he may not have read it. However, his use of “loam” in this context illuminates what cliché Melville is deflating here: What should be moist, fertile, nourishing, reaches Redburn’s nostrils as dust.

Gilman points out that (1) when Melville arrived in Liverpool in 1839, Riddough’s Hotel had not been torn down, but “converted into shops,” and (2) The Picture of Liverpool indicates that the Old Dock will soon be filled in, and therefore that Melville made an artistic decision to make Liverpool’s alterations more dramatic than they were in real life (190-1).

Melville plays this moment for laughs, but many critics have duly noted Melville’s protest against laissez-faire economics, which are dramatized later in the novel when no one but Redburn will aid the dying family in Launcelott’s-Hey.

For samples, see Christopher Mulvey’s wonderful Transatlantic Manners.

Critics have long been divided over what to make of Redburn’s expressions of religious feeling (Tolchin 163, 175 n17). Rowe despair of finding “a coherent ideology” beneath “the unstable tone of the narrator’s voice – sometimes mocking bourgeois piety and its moral hypocrisy through the native responses of his younger self, sometimes seeming to share bourgeois perplexities, sometimes confounding them with his own Christian challenge” (61). Nathalia Wright, whose Melville’s Use of the Bible is a virtual concordance of his Biblical allusions, points to a marginal comment Melville wrote in his own copy of the Bible: “In reply to Paul’s exhortation, ‘Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God,’ he noted, ‘The only kind of Faith—one’s own’” (15). Gilman sees Melville as being in the position of the Christian rebel who adheres to the basic doctrines of Christianity but who freely explores along his own lines of thought of some of the problems it implies” (242). The stirring “Floating Chapel” chapter of Redburn opens itself to such a reading. At any rate, we can probably deduce that Redburn’s strict orthodoxy was not Melville’s.

Paul Giles echoes this verdict: “By affiliating American slavery of race with British slavery of class, Melville appears to project both of these power systems beyond the order of worldly empiricism into a realm where they become imbued with some shadowy, quasi-Calvinistic sense of fate” (58).

In Mardi, an anonymous scroll appears that includes in its many pronouncements: “Time is made up of various ages; and each thinks its own a novelty. … And as in the mound-building period of yore, sovery age thinks its erections will forever endure” (525).

The city’s population expanded from 100,000 to 3 million in Melville’s lifetime (Delbanco 3).

Melville wrote Redburn in under ten weeks, and his correspondence indicates that he padded his narrative somewhat, so much of the challenge to critics of this novel is figuring out which sections Melville may have been invested in, and which are mere filler. I have strong suspicions, based in part on my own observations and in part on Hershel Parker’s “Historical Note” to the Northwestern-Newberry edition and Stephen Mathewson’s “To Tell Over Again the Story Just Told”: The Composition of Melville’s Redburn”, that the entire Harry Bolton sequence is a late and hasty addition (331-2). Though Harry is a British character, even Redburn’s English double, the vignettes that include him do not offer more than superficial insights into Melville’s ideas of Englishness.
contrary to reality because it describes a reality that has disappeared, whereas Irving’s reality is highly selective.

However, 327). However, all people and things be assessed based upon economic utility. and I agree that Melville is emphasizing the importance of the “useless” in a society that insists ever more forcefully

nation; I see it as more as a claim for the continuing importance of art and culture in a developing country. Tamarkin Moby-Dick seems unfair (77).

Melville’s own experiences of poverty—genteel and otherwise—gave his portrayal of Redburn’s situation its depth of feeling. Dimock’s reading of Melville as “an imperial self” whose subjectivity came to be as all-encompassing as the doctrine of Manifest Destiny seems unfair (77).

While writing Moby-Dick, Melville said in a letter to Hawthorne, “What ‘reputation’ H.M. has is horrible. Think of it! To go down in posterity is bad enough, any way; but to go down as a ‘man who lived among the cannibals’! When I speak of posterity, in reference to myself, I only mean the babies who will probably be born in the moment immediately ensuing upon my giving up the ghost. I shall go down to some of them, in all likelihood. ‘Typee’ will be given to them, perhaps, with their gingerbread” (Correspondence 193).

For detailed, side-by-side comparisons of the original and Melville’s rewriting, see Thorp.

In a similar vein, Tamarkin affirms that “Redburn is about the effort to reventrually hold onto an anachronistic sense of England at just the moment that the reality of seeing it makes obvious that its symbolic past is useless… Why… examine social problems, including wage slavery and chattel slavery, while struggling to remember the past of a nation that is not our own, except to suggest that such symbolic investments ultimately may be the answer to these problems?” (182-3). Though she admits that “[i]t takes some effort to see England—the nineteenth century’s most modernized economy—as a repository of traditionalist practices that the United States has cruelly abandoned,” Tamarkin says that Melville and Frederick Douglass’s “belief in symbols suggests an alternative to the kind of positivist thinking that renders persons and things in mechanical terms” (184). Tamarkin sees the Anglophile nostalgia in Redburn as yearning for paternalistic authority that would unify the increasingly fragmented American nation; I see it as more as a claim for the continuing importance of art and culture in a developing country. Tamarkin and I agree that Melville is emphasizing the importance of the “useless” in a society that insists ever more forcefully that all people and things be assessed based upon economic utility.

In Ouatre-Mer, for example, Longfellow says, “to my youthful imagination the Old World was a kind of Holy Land, lying afar off beyond the blue horizon of the ocean” (qtd. Strout 79). For more on this theme, see Stowe, ch. 3 “Guidebooks: The Liturgy of Travel.”

James Duban offers a catalogue of similarities in Melville’s descriptions of Liverpool and those of guidebooks to Jerusalem that he possessed, as well as evidence linking Redburn’s red garment to Christian iconography (39-43). I would quibble only with Duban’s claim that Redburn is “subconsciously equating Liverpool with Jerusalem;” his numerous references to pilgrimage make the analogy seem conscious enough (39). In 1856, several years after writing Redburn, Melville traveled to the Holy Land, where he was thoroughly disappointed by the Via Dolorosa, “a mixture of phony solemnity and vulgar hawking” (Delbanco 256). He describes his pilgrimage in his journals and Clarel.

This is not Redburn’s foible alone: “The traveling class was a reading class, and travel was seen as a preeminently literary activity. Itineraries were drawn up with the monuments of literary history in mind, and the pleasure of travel derived in part from the way it reminded the traveler of past literary pleasures” (Stowe 13). Redburn can hardly be blamed for seeking out the picturesque when “hardly a tourist landed in Liverpool in the antebellum period without heading for ‘the Scott country’” (Stowe 13).

A century and a half later, one can instantly think of at least one “shadow” or “gloomy wrong.”

Irving did help Melville get Typee published, so one could argue that there is an Oedipal murder here (Parker 327).

Actually, The Picture of Liverpool is not as culpable as Irving’s work, as Redburn experiences the guidebook as contrary to reality because it describes a reality that has disappeared, whereas Irving’s reality is highly selective. However, The Picture of Liverpool takes a boosterish tone and glosses over much.

I am using “Dickensian” to define a category of description that will be familiar to readers, but in fact Melville anticipates some of Dickens’s most famous gestures here. The “Launcelott’s-Hey” chapter, with its description of starvation and disease and its exploration of social responsibility (and the irony that euthanasia is illegal, while passively letting entire families die is the norm), is a response to the “Irish widow” passage in ch. 2 of Carlyle’s Past and Present. Dickens made his response five years after Redburn, when he had Bleak House’s urchin Jo die dramatically, but not before infecting members of every social class in the novel.

Notably, when Melville visited London in 1849, he went beyond his guidebooks’ recommendations “in frequently seeking the disreputable districts and the unspeakable horrors of the mid-century slums” (Horsford 173).

In this essay, a “tourist” is anyone traveling for pleasure to a place that has already been thoroughly explored and documented. For far more careful distinctions between the traveler, the tourist, and the anti-tourist, see Paul
Fussell’s “From Exploration to Travel to Tourism” (Abroad 37-50). For more on traveler versus tourist and questions of authenticity, see Mulvey AAL 24.

61 Scholars differ as to whether Melville worked from the 1805 or the 1808 edition.

62 Robillard notes that “Melville studiously attended picture galleries, exhibitions, and museums,” that despite his financial troubles he collected prints and art-books, and that “to a degree probably unusual for his time and situation, he read art criticism, art history, and studies of the works of individual artists and schools of art” (x).

63 The original text of this lecture is missing, but Merton Sealts has reconstructed it from newspaper accounts. Sealts’s rendering of Melville’s lecture does not offer much in the way of original art criticism, but it does contain a claim of the amateur’s right to speak of art: “[A]s it is doubtful whether to the scientific Linnaeus flowers yielded so much satisfaction as to the unscientific Burns, or struck so deep a chord in his bosom; so may it be a question whether the terms of Art may not inspire in artistic but still susceptible minds, thoughts, or emotions, not lower than those raised in the most accomplished of critics” (Sealts 128-9). This sentiment, which Melville may well have held a decade before uttering it publicly, is worth keeping in mind when reading his description of the Nelson memorial.

64 When Melville’s father, Allan Melville, visited Liverpool in 1818, he met “the celebrated Mr. Roscoe” (qtd. Gilman 11).

65 Terry Coleman offers the following economic profile of Liverpool in the 18th and 19th centuries: “By the middle of the nineteenth century Liverpool was a great city, with a population of 367,000. It was the second-largest city in England, and three-quarters the size of New York. Liverpool was a port which had grown rich first with the slave trade and with privateering, and then with the American trades of cotton and emigrants. By the end of the eighteenth century, five-sixths of the English slave trade belonged to Liverpool. In the last year before the abolition of the slave trade in the British Empire in 1807, 185 Liverpool ships carried 49,213 slaves. In the nineteenth century the port received timber from the American north, and cotton from the southern states for the Manchester mills. When emigration started again after the Napoleonic wars, Liverpool became by far the biggest emigrant port, and always remained so” (63).

66 Perhaps Irving’s sketch cut too close; by 1830 Allan Melville was forced to sell much of his own extensive library of French literature (Gilman 15, 72).

67 In 1854 Melville made a similar revision of Catherine Maria Sedgwick’s sentimental portrayal of poverty in “The Poor Rich Man and the Rich Poor Man” (New York, Harper and Brothers, 1836), when he wrote the scathing “Poor Man’s Pudding and Rich Man’s Crumbs.”

68 Elisa Tamarkin points out that by invoking Roscoe’s memory, Melville refuses to debunk the Nelson monument. Instead, he lets the monument stand in for “both the barbarism that was Britian and the civilization that it is” (189).

69 The monument looks like this, but true to Redburnian form, the building behind it has been replaced since this photograph was taken in 1921. This is due not to the sort of cultural neglect Melville rails against, but to the Blitz, which destroyed much of Liverpool’s inner city.

70 Wyatt designed the memorial, but the experienced sculptor Westmacott was called in to cast it, and he ultimately received credit for the work at its unveiling (Busco 50).

71 In 1866 the memorial was moved to a nearby site and was placed on a base that is six feet higher than the original (Yarrington CH 133). The photograph above shows the newer base and site. However, even though in Melville’s time the monument was six feet nearer the ground, it was still impressive – see the 1828 Sears & Co. image reproduced on p.46 of this essay.

72 Robillard points out that Melville’s first three books do not contain any examples of ekphrasis, but that in Redburn he begins to incorporate pictorialism into his descriptions (47). Robillard attributes this change to Melville’s increased access to fine art. To this we must add Buzard’s observation that by the mid-19th century, travelers were conditioned to seek out the “picturesque,” with the result that literary representations of the European continent are essentially pictorial (CP 33). If Melville was to begin using the technique he would perfect in Moby-Dick, he would logically do so in a book set in the Old World.

73 It may seem confusing that Redburn knows this without the aid of his trusty guidebook. In fact, this information is on a plaque near the memorial.

74 Similarly, Nelson’s Column in London, completed in 1843, has a square base with four bronze reliefs (cast from French guns), each of which depicts one of Nelson’s major victories.

75 McCarthy reads this moment as ironic, but he may be giving Melville too much credit—the docks were Liverpool’s main tourist attraction at the time, and Redburn’s descriptions of them largely celebratory.

76 Notably, in Redburn, the only beggar who receives alms from the sailors—who are poor themselves—wears a uniform indicating that he is a veteran of the Battle of Trafalgar and claims that his wooden leg is made of planks
from the Victory – a sailor’s version of the True Cross (261). Melville may have shared in the popular sentiment among mariners toward Trafalgar vets.

77 In a note on Melville’s journal, Herschel Parker explains that the Victory was maintained as a sort of museum in the harbor. “One could visit the ship by hiring a boatman along the public docks, but M did not have the time.” Parker quotes from Billy Budd, Sailor: “Nevertheless, to anybody who can hold the Present at its worth without being inappreciative of the Past, it may be forgiven, if to such an one the solitary old hulk at Portsmouth, Nelson’s Victory, seems to float there, not alone as the decaying monument of a fame incorruptible, but also as a poetic reproach” (qtd. in Journals 379).

78 For a walking-tour of slavery-related sites in Liverpool (which include the Nelson monument and much of Redburn’s route), see the Merseyside Maritime Museum’s Website: http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/maritime/trail/trail_accessible.asp

79 This is Emory Elliot’s recent reading: “Redburn reflects that enabling the slave trade to flourish was one of Nelson’s achievements because the African slave trade was once the primary commerce of Liverpool. Redburn reflects upon how most of the Christian churches had supported and benefited from slavery and that even his own father had played an indirect role in supporting it by doing business with Liverpool merchants” (182). Leaving aside the fact that at no point in this chapter does Redburn reflect on the role of the church in slavery and that his indictment of his father is inexplicit to the point of its existence being doubtful, Elliot offers as plain fact one of the weaker interpretations of the memorial’s meaning.

80 Gilman establishes that this incident is based in fact: “[T]he Liverpool Mercury for July 5, 1839, reported that just such a stripling, about eighteen years of age, was giving outdoor lectures on Sundays about Chartism” (140-1).

81 Gilman’s footnote on this passage is worth reproducing: “In view of Gansevoort Melville’s fervor as a political orator and the dependency of his mother and sisters, this is an astonishing remark” (336n75). Given that Melville did not always agree with his brother’s politics and that the Chartist is sympathetic to the point of being Christ-like, the remark does not seem so astonishing, but Gilman has a point.

82 Schroeter insightfully dissects the “novel of initiation” of Melville’s day as follows: “The least common and more modern variety is the bourgeois tragedy—the story of fineness, beauty, and distinction trampled underfoot by the commonplace, or the theme of gentility in adversity” (290-1). Schroeter’s thesis is that Melville rejects both these possibilities. Bell and others point out that on the voyage home, Redburn’s sympathies are with the steerage passengers, and that he viewed the cabin-passengers with “contempt” (Bell 561-2).

83 Schroeter insightfully dissects the “novel of initiation” of Melville’s day as follows: “The least common and more modern variety is the democratic romance—the story of the ennobling consequences of hard work or the common lot on the privileged or coddled, the story of the snob who is made into a man… The earlier and more common variety is the bourgeois tragedy—the story of fineness, beauty, and distinction trampled underfoot by the commonplace, or the theme of gentility in adversity” (290-1). Schroeter’s thesis is that Melville rejects both these possibilities. Bell and others point out that on the voyage home, Redburn’s sympathies are with the steerage passengers, and that he viewed the cabin-passengers with “contempt” (Bell 561-2).

84 For more on Redburn as bildungsroman, see Christopher W. Sten’s The Weaver-God, He Weaves.

85 See Tolchin, for example, for an articulation of the “rage” he finds just beneath the surface of the narration.

86 Noting the “double-focus” of Billy Budd on father- and son-figures, Bercovitch concludes that “[i]n the end it is Vere who is the victim, the ‘father’ self-condemned by his allegiances and values, presented without overt rancor, left to denounce himself” (228). This description could easily stand in for how Redburn comes to see his father.

87 Sidney Kaplan points out that while Melville’s own family was split on the slavery issue, this paragraph may or may not be autobiographical, as Melville’s language here is similar to that of Dr. James Currie’s Memoir: “The general discussion of the slavery of the negroes had produced much unhappiness in Liverpool. Men are awaking to their situation; and the struggle between interest and humanity has made great havoc in the happiness of many families” (qtd. in Kaplan 296n19).
Olson anticipates this idea as well, though he concentrates on Melville’s South Seas explorations as travels backward through time: “Beginner—and interested in beginnings. Melville had a way of reaching back through time until he got history pushed back so far he turned time into space” (14). In the case of Redburn, the protagonist’s eastward journey takes him to America’s possible dystopian future, as well as back to its origins. In “Melville in the Customhouse Attic,” Hager argues that “Young America exceptionalism worked to conceal that the United States indeed had matured and, in its maturity, resembled England more than ever” (306).

See in particular Buell’s reading of Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s Petals of Blood in “Melville and the Question of American Decolonization,” p.218.

Karcher points out that while Mardi resorted to the clichés of the abolitionist tract, in Redburn Melville “has shifted his attention to the areas of northern guilt” (28).

New York passed its final piece of anti-slavery legislation in 1827. In the American North, only New Jersey held onto slavery longer. For an account of the gradual and ambiguous abolition of slavery in New York State, see Patrick Rael’s essay “The Long Death of Slavery.”

When Redburn does find rural England, it is adorned by numerous “man-traps” and signs announcing them (286-7).

Though the pedestal was replaced in 1866, the words are plainly visible the 1828 image reproduced on p.46 of this essay.

Part of the aim of including images of “common soldiers and sailors” in monuments of the time was the hope that they would come to see the memorials “and imitate the grief and homage of their marble counterparts” (Penny 798). Penny points out that: “The formidable striding tar in the Nelson monument at Liverpool has no obvious ancestor in art, but he has many successors. Above all, there are the servicemen – in more or less belligerent attitudes, justified by a context suggestive of desperate defence – who are found in numerous memorials of the Crimean and of the Great War” (Penny 798).

In a few years’ time, Melville would emphasize his ambivalence by reversing the situation in “The Two Temples,” in which Manhattan’s Grace Church bans the ill-dressed narrator from entering but a London theater welcomes him free of charge.

In a letter to his father-in-law, Melville confessed, “So far as I am individually concerned, & independent of my pocket, it is my earnest desire to write those sort of books which are said to ‘fail,’” by which we learn that Melville believed in the Romantic idea that popular success and mediocrity go hand in hand, whereas works of genius go unappreciated in their own time (Correspondence 139).

Letter to Judge Shaw, Oct 6, 1849 (Correspondence 139).

In fact, the review of Redburn in Blackwoods dismissed this incident as “more than improbable” and “utterly absurd” (qtd. Lease 122).
Chapter 2

Exiled to the Promised Land: Redburn’s Harry Bolton

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?

--Psalm 137:1-4, King James translation

“Equivocal Character”: Who or What Is Harry Bolton?

The previous chapter argues for the enduring value of Redburn, both extrinsically as a window into Melville’s developing thought process and craftsmanship, and intrinsically as a complex work of art. In its effort to emphasize all that is illuminating and affecting in Redburn, my account has thus far omitted the novel’s greatest flaw, namely the Harry Bolton sub-plot. This chapter must give Harry his due. After all, while his characterization is never fleshed out fully enough to be emotionally satisfying, he provides Melville with an opportunity to continue his interrogation of the relationship between Liverpool and New York, the Old World and the New. As one critic notes, “Redburn’s passage to England has been a voyage of discovery about America,” and Redburn’s English foil is introduced “[t]o reinforce this idea” (Fender 173). Together, the two young men serve an emblematic function similar to the paired sketches in Melville’s diptych stories.

Generations of critics have hated Harry Bolton, who, even in a novel churned out in six weeks, stands out as an afterthought. Melville was never interested in psychological realism; his characters are often either icons or ciphers. What they are not, however, is clichés, and this is why Harry seems so anomalous—as we shall see, he is composed out of 90% recycled materials, and we have many signs that Melville is less than invested in this character. Appearing two-thirds of the way into the novel, Harry is initially prominent, then reduced to a few cameo
appearances that are integrated rather awkwardly into the surrounding narrative. At one point, Melville seems to realize he has forgotten about Harry, so he has Redburn interrupt his own narration abruptly with: “As yet I have said nothing about how my friend, Harry, got along as a sailor” (Redburn 335, Parker 332). What little we do see of Harry is difficult to interpret. This may have been Melville’s intent; he certainly recognized his character’s opacity enough to have Redburn say of his friend that “every way, his conduct was unaccountable” (Redburn 314). The air of mystery surrounding Harry makes him seem, while still in England, to be a precursor of sorts to the Confidence Man. Once Stateside, abject and unemployed in lower Manhattan, he becomes more of a Bartleby figure.¹ These interpretive possibilities hinge upon the question of how similar Bolton is to Redburn: If Harry is Redburn’s opposite, then he represents the decadent, dishonest Old World pushing its corrupt temptations on the Adamic American innocent. Conversely, if Harry is Redburn’s British counterpart, reenacting the exclusion and isolation that Redburn experienced in Liverpool, then he represents the disappointed immigrants who discover that America is not the Promised Land so much as the land that devours its inhabitants.

All seems promising, however, when the two youths first meet. After enduring long weeks of loneliness at sea and in Liverpool, accompanied only by his father’s faulty guidebook, Wellingborough Redburn meets Harry Bolton, a young Englishman who is eager to set sail with him to New York. His very first impression of Harry acknowledges him as a type:

He was one of those small, but perfectly formed beings, with curling hair, and silken muscles, who seem to have been born in cocoons. His complexion was a mantling brunette, feminine as a girl’s; his feet were small; his hands were white; and his eyes were large, black, and womanly; and, poetry aside, his voice was as the sound of a harp (Redburn 294, emphasis mine).
This description—which must have felt slightly embarrassing even in Melville’s time—sets the sentimental, melodramatic, occasionally camp tone of Harry’s portrayal. Pegged by some critics as a rent-boy, by others as a refugee from “silver fork” fiction, Harry frequently comes off as the sort of stage-fop who ought to have gone out with Etheredge or Sheridan. True to his anachronistic dandyism, he has gambled away his inheritance in the gentlemen’s clubs of London. Unwilling to spend another day in Liverpool before shipping out, Harry drags Redburn to London for a final hair-of-the-dog-that-bit-you gambling spree, during which, unsurprisingly, he loses what remains of his money. An inveterate name-dropper, he tells tales of the high life with no sense of his audience’s response, to the point where even as naïve and sympathetic a soul as Redburn eventually becomes skeptical: “Now, all these accounts of marquises … and Harry’s having been hand in glove with so many lords and ladies, began to breed some suspicions concerning the rigid morality of my friend, as a teller of the truth” (Redburn 302).

Despite Harry’s effeminate manner and penchant for telling tall-tales, he and Redburn have traits in common, so many that Harry can be read as Redburn’s more dashing double: Hailing from a respectable family in Bury St. Edmunds, he is another distressed son-of-a-gentleman who hopes that going to sea will arrest his downward mobility. He and Redburn are “about the same size” and can share clothes; they are also both educated enough to share a common culture (Redburn 304). At worst a confidence man, at best a benign bluffer in the Allan Melvill vein, at times Harry embodies a rather crude Yankee stereotype of the corrupt Old World.

Once on shipboard Harry Bolton reenacts each of Redburn’s seafaring disasters, only in a more flamboyant and somehow less funny fashion. In every arena where Redburn is merely a gauche beginner, Harry is from another planet: Whereas Redburn is mocked by the crew for
embarking on his nautical career in a hunting jacket, a relic of his decayed gentility, Harry is crucified for wearing “a brocaded dressing-gown, embroidered slippers, and tasseled smoking-cap, to stand his morning watch” (*Redburn* 336). Worse even than these pseudo-aristocratic affectations is the fact that despite Harry’s claim to have been a midshipman with the East India Company, “he *could not go aloft*; his nerves would not hear of it” (*Redburn* 339). This, alas, was the standard test of whether someone working on ship-board was an actual sailor or merely a passenger working to pay his fare.⁸ Faced with his friend’s abject professional—and personal—failure, Redburn laments, “‘Then, Harry,’ said I, ‘better you had never been born’” (*Redburn* 339). Some critics have chafed at the harshness of this rejoinder, hearing its echo of Matthew 26:24, which says of Judas Iscariot: “woe unto that man through whom the Son of man is betrayed! good were it for that man if he had not been born.” Fender, for one, complains that “[t]o compare Harry Bolton to Judas Iscariot may seem a bit heavy. Nevertheless, in the discourse of emigration, he is, like the sailor who scorned Bradford’s Puritans, as good as damned” (174). However, it is also possible to read Redburn as being sympathetic to Harry. Before Matthew, after all, there was Job, whose sufferings were so immense that he shouted “Perish the day I was born!” (Job 3:3). Further, as we will see later on, Melville repeatedly identifies Harry with the Israelites who were exiled to Babylon; when Jeremiah prophesies the Babylonian captivity, he says, “Cursed the day I was born!” (Jeremiah 20:14). Thus, rather than chastising Harry for betraying the can-do spirit of emigration, Redburn may be entering into his friend’s myriad sorrows and foreseeing how difficult Harry will find life outside of his native element.

It is not so much Redburn but the rest of the crew who take issue with Harry’s incompetence. Unlike Redburn, who conquered his fear of the mast in his first crossing, Harry
remains averse—or at least extremely unsuited—to manual labor, leaving the ship’s crew to
cjecture about his reasons for going to sea. Says Redburn:

It was curious to listen to the various hints and opinings thrown out by the sailors at the
occasional glimpses they had of [Harry’s] collection of silks, velvets, broadcloths, and
satin. I do not know exactly what they thought Harry had been; but they seemed
unanimous in believing that, by abandoning his country, Harry had left more room for the
gamblers. Jackson even asked him to lift up the lower hem of his trowsers, to test the
color of his calves.

It is a noteworthy circumstance, that whenever a slender made youth, of easy
manners and polite address, happens to form one of a ship’s company, the sailors almost
invariably impute his sea-going to an irresistible necessity of decamping from terra-firma
in order to evade the constables.

These white-fingered gentry must be light-fingered too, they say to themselves, or
they would not be after putting their hands into our tar. What else can bring them to sea?
Cogent and conclusive this; and thus Harry, from the very beginning, was put
down for a very equivocal character (337-8).

This passage contains almost too many possibilities. Harry’s “equivocal character,” when
combined with his fashion choices, is often read as sexual ambiguity, but this could be a red
herring. After all, while Redburn’s “I do not know what they thought Harry had been,” can
hardly be taken at face-value, Melville’s own father carried trunk-loads of luxurious fabrics
across the Atlantic while his money was running out. Thus, Harry’s accoutrements were not
nearly as exotic to Melville as they are to us. It is important to note too that the ship’s crew, who
are coarse but not stupid, clock Harry as a gambler and a “light-fingered” thief, not as any sort of
prostitute or sexual outcast. When Jackson wants to see Harry’s calves, he is not checking him
out so much as checking for discolorations from leg-irons.

If Harry is not a sexual dissident, or if this is not his dominant characteristic, then he is an
“equivocal character” of another sort. While still in England and through most of his sea-voyage,
Harry comes off like a possible precursor to Melville’s Confidence Man, his charm tinged with
criminality. However, over the course of the voyage, as the bullying worsens and Harry’s joie-de-vivre
dissipates, he becomes a victim. By the time the ship docks in New York, Harry is
entirely vulnerable, the possibility of his being a con man vastly diminished. Reflecting both on the shipboard bullying Harry endures and on his status as an endangered exotic creature, Redburn laments, “How they hunted you, Harry, my zebra!” (*Redburn* 336). Redburn, on the other hand, achieves invisibility on shipboard, both because he has learned the work of the ship and because Harry has replaced him as the ship’s scapegoat. Harry is not, however, the novel’s scapegoat: At the same time that Melville contrasts Harry’s inefficacy with Redburn’s growing competence, he also takes pains to establish Harry’s prettiness in tragic contrast to the squalor of Liverpool and the roughness of shipboard life. These dissonances, in turn, set up Redburn’s intellectual and moral dilemmas surrounding Harry, namely what is Harry doing on the ship, and what should Redburn do with him?

Redburn can’t quite fathom Harry, and the reader has even more trouble doing so. This is the case both because there are noticeable gaps between how Harry seeks to present himself and who he actually is, and because Redburn, who is after all narrating, keeps changing his mind about his new acquaintance. Merlin Bowen suggests that Melville meant for the young Redburn to swallow Harry’s fibs whole, and for the older, narrating Redburn to have a bit more insight, but this design does not quite come together (Bowen 108). Thus, just as we are given very little information about Harry, what we do know is contradictory. His sketchy and ambiguous characterization is one of *Redburn*’s universally acknowledged deficiencies, but critics are divided as to just why Melville strikes such a false note. In his “Historical Note” to *Redburn*, Herschel Parker offers a convincing account of how the Harry Bolton plot could have been added after the novel’s first draft was already completed, in the interest of increasing its length. Bowen, on the other hand, reads the Harry Bolton plot not as filler, but as showing “an artistic intent of considerable complexity—of such complexity, it would seem, that the dun-bedeveled
author found himself unable to carry it out with consistency and effect” (Bowen 107).

Ultimately, both these scholars are correct: Harry is an afterthought, but one Melville tried to marshal in a compelling direction.

So what is Melville doing by including Harry Bolton in the story of Redburn’s first voyage? First of all, he is creating a character to whom he hopes his British readers will relate on national grounds. Second, and rather paradoxically, he is employing Yankee stereotypes of the decadent European as opposed to the manly, hardy American, which are presumably meant to appeal to his readers Stateside. Third, he is borrowing a series of literary conventions from commercially successful fiction writers of the previous generation (Cook 11). Fourth, he is making the transition from talking about tourism—a concern of the comfortable classes—to discussing a burning topic of his day and ours: immigration.

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Immigrant Song: Culture and Capital in Melville’s America

Melville wrote Redburn in 1849, the fourth year of the biggest wave of emigration from Great Britain and Ireland that America had experienced since declaring independence in 1776 (Coleman 20). This massive influx “was generally thought to be the biggest problem confronting the Union, not slavery” (Giles 54). As was so often the case, Melville was in a bind: He was a cosmopolitan former sailor who had spent time in Polynesia and worked side by side with men from many nations; on the other hand, he desperately needed Redburn to be a popular success. Thus, the novel’s emigrants are a varied lot, touching on Melville’s ideals but also reflecting the ossified rhetorical positions of the time. Describing the immigration climate in
mid-nineteenth-century America, Coleman points out that while the Know-Nothings had a particularly rapid rise in the 1850s, “American nativism of the Samuel Morse kind had flourished for years. In 1844 the Mayor of New York had been elected on a nativist ticket. The Irish were always there to be complained of” (227). Thus, we see enormous anxiety—and prejudice—in Melville’s portrayal of the Irish steerage passengers who accompany Redburn and Harry Bolton to New York. Initially these emigrants are mere fodder for folksy anecdotes, as when they spot Ireland and believe that they are glimpsing America, or in the following Rabelaisian but evocative episode:

When the lull of the rain-storms would intervene, some unusually cleanly emigrant would climb to the deck, with a bucket of slops, to toss into the sea. No experience seemed sufficient to instruct some of these ignorant people in the simplest, and most elemental principles of ocean-life. Spite of all lectures on the subject, several would continue to shun the leeward side of the vessel, with their slops. One morning, when it was blowing very fresh, a simple fellow pitched over a gallon or two of something to windward. Instantly it flew back in his face; and also, in the face of the chief mate, who happened to be standing by at the time. The offender was collared, and shaken on the spot; and ironically commanded, never, for the future, to throw any thing to windward at sea, but fine ashes and scalding hot water (Redburn 373-4).

The tone of the narration here is amusedly condescending, possibly because Redburn has himself learned the way of the sea and can thus afford to look down on those who have not, and likely also because this is how even sympathetic observers of emigrants wrote about them at the time.¹⁶ However, these comical bit-players eventually become tragic figures—they starve, sicken, and are buried at sea.

Just as White-Jacket, written at nearly the same time, discusses the flogging that had once been common practice in the United States Navy, Redburn rakes some muck to show middle-class readers the treatment that steerage passengers on immigrant ships received. “Immigrant ships” is a misnomer, of course, as most of these ships were primarily freighters designed to bring cotton and tobacco from the United States and timber from Canada to Britain (Coleman
To subsidize the return trip, ships would take on loads of emigrants, who served as “a kind of ballast” (Coleman 40, 87). In the days of the transatlantic slave trade, slaves were often better accommodated than immigrants, since slave-traders had a financial interest in keeping their cargo alive, whereas once voluntary immigrants had paid their fees, they were no longer of any use to their ships’ captains, who in turn would stint their food and water supplies (Coleman 85-6).

In a chapter grimly titled “Though the Highlander Puts into No Harbor As Yet; She Here and There Leaves Many of Her Passengers Behind,” Melville describes the spread of typhus throughout the steerage: “[I]t was, beyond question, this noisome confinement in so close, unventilated, and crowded a den: joined to the deprivation of sufficient food, from which many were suffering; which, helped by their personal uncleanliness, brought on a malignant fever” (Redburn 374). The apportionment of blame in this passage is notable—though their unclean persons might be considered the emigrants’ own responsibility, the structure of the ship and sheer number of people inhabiting it, as well as the paucity of food, are the primary causes of the disease. Whoever is at fault, however, the “wretched” spectacle of “hundreds of meager, begrimed faces” peering out of “rude bunks,” which reminds Melville of “a crowded jail” and his 21st-century readers of concentration camps, indicates that the misery Redburn saw in Liverpool is coming to the New World:

In every corner, the females were huddled together, weeping and lamenting; children were asking bread from their mothers, who had none to give; and old men, seated upon the floor, were leaning back against the heads of the water-casks, with closed eyes and fetching their breath with a gasp (375).

If the starving family in Launcelott’s-Hey—who in turn hearken back to Carlyle’s Irish widow—are victims and symptoms of an uncaring Old World, what redemption is offered in a journey like this one? Not only are the diseases of the Old World brought to the New, but the loyalties of
the Old Country are left far behind. When the first few passengers succumb to the fever, they are made short work of:

   Orders were at once passed to bury the dead. But this was unnecessary. By their own countrymen, they were torn from the clasp of their wives, rolled in their own bedding, with ballast-stones, and with hurried rites, were dropped in the ocean (Redburn 376).

With their friends and loved ones summarily dumped by “their own countrymen,” emigrants needed no further sign that in the America they would be on their own. A seasoned sailor as well as an idealist, Melville understands the medical necessity for these burials at sea and nevertheless mourns a journey that weeds out the vulnerable; it is not coincidental that Harry Bolton will find his own sea-grave.

   However, before addressing the possibility of failed emigration, Melville presents immigrants who are obviously bound for success. Among them is Carlo, a good-looking Italian organ-grinder in his early teens. Though Melville can’t help but describe Carlo’s clothes as soiled, an essential element at the time in any journalistic description of Italian organ-grinders, he also portrays the young boy as a superb musician, one whose humble instrument can conjure immense splendor: “All this could Carlo do – make, unmake me; build me up; to pieces take me; and join me limb to limb. He is the architect of domes of sound, and bowers of song” (Zucchi 8, Redburn 333). Asked how he earned enough money in Liverpool to fund his journey to New York, Carlo describes his ability to anticipate his audience’s desires without compromising his love for his instrument or his own high standards—the very skills that would have improved Melville’s lot immeasurably. Carlo earns money from the cabin passengers throughout his journey. Though he fades out of the narrative early on, we are left with the sense that he will succeed in the New World, and on his own terms. Given the repetition of negative tropes (filth,
Standing in even sharper contrast to the notion of immigrants spreading poverty and contagion are the German emigrants Redburn encounters in Liverpool: “Old men, tottering with age, and little infants in arms; laughing girls in bright-buttoned bodices, and astute, middle-aged men with pictured pipes in their mouths” (238). The image is wholesome, even cute, and the bubbling alliteration of “bright-buttoned bodices” emphasizes the charm of these very slightly exotic people. In his extended description of the Germans, Melville concentrates on their virtue and piety:

Every evening, these countrymen of Luther and Melancthon gathered on the forecastle to sing and pray. And it was exalting to listen to their fine ringing anthems, reverberating among the crowded shipping, and rebounding from the lofty walls of the docks. Shut your eyes, and you would think you were in a cathedral (238).

While one can hardly help taking the reference to Martin Luther and Philipp Melancthon as a swipe at Catholicism, and while Redburn’s—if not Melville’s—praise for “these sober Germans” as “the most orderly and valuable” of America’s “foreign population” seems like a coded slur against the Irish, we must also take note of Melville’s implication that the emigrants’ prayers consecrate the ship, just as they will presumably make the country to which they are moving a holier place:

They keep up this custom at sea; and every night, in the dog-watch, sing the songs of Zion to the roll of the great ocean-organ: a pious custom of a devout race, who thus send over their hallelujahs before them, as they hie to the land of the stranger (238).

Thus the Germans are portrayed as being both in tune—literally—with nature (and God) and as being the new Children of Israel. Though unfailingly sympathetic toward the emigrants, the allusion is blurry on an important point: Are these Germans the new Israelites heading towards the Promised Land, or is Zion the place from whence they came? The phrase “the land of the
stranger” rather suggests the latter, making the United States into a new Egypt or Babylon. This motif becomes crucial for Harry Bolton.

At sea, though Harry’s lack of nautical skills and obvious class difference thoroughly alienate the crew, he occasionally wins a reprieve from their abuse by singing to them. It is difficult for Harry to overcome his resentment of his audience, so difficult that Melville compares his suffering to that of the Hebrews exiled into slavery in Babylon:\(^{22}\)

A sweet thing is a song; and though the Hebrew captives hung their harps on the willows, that they could not sing the melodies of Palestine before the haughty beards of the Babylonians; yet, to themselves, those melodies of other times and a distant land were sweet as the June dew on Hermon.

And poor Harry was as the Hebrews. He, too, had been carried away captive, though his chief captor and foe was himself; and he, too, many a night, was called upon to sing for those who through the day had insulted and derided him” (Redburn 363).

How should we understand this comparison? Nathalia Wright warns us not to read too much into Melville’s biblical allusions, since so many of them are “deliberately random,” but she acknowledges that the reference to Harry’s Babylonian captivity is more careful than, say, his depiction of the tobacco-deprived crew as “inconsolable as the Babylonish captives” (Wright 36, Redburn 360). If we take the allusion seriously, then Harry’s song serves several functions at once: First, it shows him at his best, thus making a rakish and incorrigible character seem redeemable. We even have some indication that singing expresses Harry’s true self. After all, Redburn notes that Harry’s “voice was just the voice to proceed from a small, silken person like his” (Redburn 363).

Second, with the image of a refined artist performing for a “ruffian crew,\(^{23}\) whom he hated,” Melville, who was himself forced to sing for his supper, as it were, by writing Redburn for the pleasure of the public that had rejected Mardi, probably gave vent to some of the animus he felt toward his readers and the conditions of authorship in general (Redburn 364).\(^{24}\) After all,
when Redburn asks Harry “whether his musical talents could not be turned to account”—no doubt an allusion to the Prodigal Son and his hidden talent—Harry likes the idea of performing in the parlors of the wealthy as long as Redburn will do it with him. When Redburn refuses on the grounds that he can’t sing, Harry loses interest in the project, a hint that the artist’s life is pleasant if it can be shared with friends but difficult to endure on one’s own. When explaining why he and Harry confided so fully in each other, Redburn says, “all of us yearn for sympathy, even if we do not for love; and to be intellectually alone is a thing only tolerable to genius, whose cherisher and inspirer is solitude” (Redburn 364.) On top of the fact that he won’t have the support of a creative community, even on land Harry would have to endure the slings and arrows of his audience’s whims. If, on shipboard, he must entertain thugs, in New York he would have to amuse “ladies in parlors,” which he ultimately sees as degrading (Redburn 366).

Finally, in making a parallel between Harry’s songs and the Hebrews’ singing “the melodies of Palestine,” Melville nationalizes what could otherwise be read as a merely individual talent. That is, Melville portrays Harry’s song as a kind of national treasure, as full an expression of Harry’s culture of origin as the Germans’ song is of their religion. As Canaday suggests, Harry’s “voice may be analogous to the arts of the Old World, still impressive in their undefiled beauty and magnificence despite the decadence” (296). When Harry sings “the melodies of Palestine” on shipboard, he is bringing the best of Britain to the New World. This moment undercuts some of the novel’s more nationalist sentiments, not only in displaying Harry’s—and thus Britain’s—cultural superiority, but in admitting the possibility that a move to America is not an ascent to the Promised Land so much as the start of an exile to Babylon. Harry’s trajectory has none of the ambiguity of the German emigrants’ journey—he is clearly going into exile and leaving the Promised Land behind.
In comparing Harry Bolton on ship-board to a Hebrew captive en route to Babylon, Melville reverses the rhetoric of American exceptionalism. Similarly, in telling the story of Harry’s time in New York he alters the terms of the debate on immigration. In Melville’s day as now, newspaper-readers and policy-makers alike argued over whether immigrants were good for their adopted country; in *Redburn* Melville preferred to ask whether the country was good to its new immigrants. The invention of Harry Bolton may well have come late in the novel’s composition, but Melville uses him strategically to personalize the subject of immigration, something he could not do in the clichéd accounts of the masses of German and Irish emigrants. In addition, writing about an individual immigrant rather than a group lets Melville provide an after-story, an account of what happens to the immigrant in America. The intentional fallacy notwithstanding, we can see where Melville was going with the uneasy parallel of Redburn and Harry as strangers in a strange land: Redburn is the cultural pilgrim disappointed in the Old World, and Harry is the economic migrant who is disillusioned and eventually destroyed by the New.26

When Redburn first arrives in Liverpool after a very difficult voyage over, he realizes at once that the land is more dangerous than the sea, due to the great variety of hustlers who are waiting for him and his fellow sailors:

> Of all the sea-ports in the world, Liverpool perhaps most abounds in all the variety of land-sharks, land-rats, and other vermin, which make the hapless mariner their prey. In the shape of landlords, bar-keepers, clothiers, crimps, and boarding-house loungers, the land-sharks devour him, limb by limb, while the land-rats and mice constantly nibble at his purse (*Redburn* 202).

Here Melville is not so much a writer of fiction as he is a reporter on conditions in the field. In his disheartening chapter on the experiences of emigrants in Liverpool in the 19th century, historian Terry Coleman lists the “runners, crimps, touts, man-catchers, Forty Thieves, boarding-
house keepers, and sharks” who took every advantage of the often-naïve travelers (77). In his history of Atlantic travel, Frank C. Bowen notes that the emigrants’ shops near the Liverpool docks sold food and cooking utensils “of vile quality,” which often came apart early in the journey. “The knowing emigrant bought his provisions from some respectable tradesman in the town well away from the docks, but very few of them were knowing” (Bowen, Frank 42). To make matters worse, these sorrows did not end in Liverpool. In 1850, two years after Redburn was published, a series of accounts in the Morning Chronicle bewailed the conspiracy between criminals in Liverpool and those in New York:

> Even after they have drained him as dry as they can, they are loth to part with him entirely, and they write out, per next steamer, a full, true, and particular account of him—his parish, his relations, his priest, and his estimated stock of money—to a similar gang in New York (qtd. Coleman 77).

Owners of boarding houses near the docks that catered to emigrants in Liverpool and New York paid agents to “travel[] back and forth across the Atlantic in the packet ships and worm[] their way into the confidence of the new settlers.” If these agents did not persuade the emigrants to come to their boarding houses, where “every measure was taken to detain them and every obstacle put in the way of their departure as long as their money lasted,” once in New York, the new arrivals encountered runners who would steal their luggage or hijack it and demand a fee for its return, or else would take the emigrants to boarding houses who paid runners a commission, or would sell them tickets for trains and boats going inland. These tickets were either sold at an enormous markup or else were simply counterfeit (Bowen, Frank 44).

> It should thus come as no surprise that the first thing that happens to Harry Bolton in New York is that he gets ripped off. With trumped-up fines and charges, the ship’s captain swindles Redburn of his wages for the voyage and pays Harry only $1.50 for all his torment.
Harry responds with spirit, making the grand gesture of throwing his meager salary back in his former commander’s face. Frugal Redburn is horrified:

I remonstrated with Harry upon his recklessness in disdaining his wages, small though they were; I begged to remind him of his situation; and hinted that every penny he could get might prove precious to him. But he only cried *Pshaw!* and that was the last of it (*Redburn* 400).

It’s hard not to like Harry’s pride, even as one cringes at the waste. As one critic puts it:

“Harry is not without attractive, dashing qualities: he is, for example, generous towards the thrifty Redburn, both with his money and feelings. But his generosity is too reckless to be anything more than extravagance, or carelessness” (*Press* 179). One could offer another explanation, that Harry is trying to maintain his dignity as an upper-class person, whether or not he has the funds to do so. Indeed, within a page of Harry’s throwing his wages away, Melville shows how the other sailors express their displeasure with less harm to themselves: They moon their dishonest captain. Of course, this sort of street-justice is not available to youths of Redburn and Harry’s gentlemanly backgrounds; maintaining what is left of their former class identification requires that middle-class Redburn stifle himself and upper-class aspirant Harry sabotage himself altogether.

In good spirits after making the gesture he believes has salvaged his honor (and, in one of his few recognizably human acts, having also eaten a hearty breakfast), Harry becomes jubilant, even grandiose, sounding like a young Walt Whitman or the “Nantucket” chapter of *Moby-Dick* as he urges Redburn to “lead on; and let’s see something of these United States of yours. I’m ready to pace from Maine to Florida; ford the Great Lakes; and jump the River Ohio, if it comes in the way” (*Redburn* 394). This is a far cry from the timidity Harry displays on the voyage over, when he requires constant reassurance from Redburn that America is indeed a civilized place, to the point where Redburn complains, “A greater patriot than myself might have resented his
insinuations. He seemed to think that we Yankees lived in wigwams, and wore bear-skins” (367). Stateside, Harry remains set in this illusion, but his attitude seems to have changed. Urbanite though Harry may be, he is ready to stake a claim in America’s frontier—a common ambition for upper-class British immigrants of the period. Historian William Van Vugt describes the amorphous body of immigrants who were recorded as “gentlemen” on ships’ logs and in British government documents:

The numbers of English gentlemen were high enough to attract the attention of many observers, who were often astonished to see these refined, upper-middle to upper-class individuals, wholly out of place on the wild American frontier. Most were interested in agriculture—or, more accurately, the social accoutrements and pseudo-aristocratic lifestyle supposed to come with owning a large estate. They were determined to have a good time (Van Vugt 118).

If we are to believe Harry Bolton’s claims—those improbable tales of “having been hand in glove with so many lords and ladies” that Redburn finds objectionable—then Harry is a typical specimen this population, whose “exact backgrounds and occupations—if indeed they had them—are difficult to determine” (Redburn 302; Van Vugt 118). It is no surprise then, and certainly not a moral failing unique to himself, that Harry has demonstrated no particular physical prowess or practical skills yet is sure he can walk the United States from end to end “and jump the River Ohio,” if need be (Redburn 394). Such grandiosity was the stock in trade of the upper-class emigrant, and the main reason why such attempts at being landed gentry in America generally failed (Van Vugt 119-21).

If, however, we reject Harry’s champagne tastes and aristocratic manners as mere affectations, we must then read his decision to emigrate to America—and its consequences for him—not as a fool-hardy mission of pleasure but as something darker and sadder. If Harry is merely a young man of the lower middle classes seeking a position as a clerk, then moving to New York City is sheer insanity. Most mid-nineteenth century Britons who moved to America
were skilled laborers who knew that their expertise at manufacturing textiles or mining would be valued in the younger, rapidly-industrializing country.\textsuperscript{30} As for those who made the move without having the security of industrial training, historian Rowland Berthoff describes them as “a mixed lot: farmers, rural and urban laborers, clerks, and merely ambitious—or idle—young men” (107). Why should these young men be extraordinarily ambitious or idle? The answer lies in labor statistics from the period. Because Britain’s economy and governmental bureaucracy grew rapidly in the middle of the century, clerks were in demand in England in the 1840s and ’50s. By contrast, there were exceedingly few jobs waiting for them in America, “a discouraging fact that was widely reported in Britain” (Van Vugt 112). Terry Coleman summarizes Samuel Sidney’s advice to prospective emigrants, which he published in a monthly magazine, thus:

To any Englishman of education, unless his position in England had been destitute, a residence in America would be excessively disagreeable… a writer to an attorney would be out of place as an emigrant, but … a cook accustomed to the sea would be all right… London tradesmen had been found even more unfitted than ruined country gentlemen, officers, and the like (29).

Why, then, did so many\textsuperscript{31} white-collar workers leave Britain for the United States in the middle of the nineteenth century? The desire to rise in the world was a primary motivation.\textsuperscript{32} As one 1850s emigrant says in an oft-quoted letter, “I was successful as a clerk and had good positions and good salary but it did not satisfy my ambitions” (qtd. Van Vugt 113, Erickson 396). Historian Charlotte Erickson observes:

These migrants seem to have been more concerned with their long-run prospects in life, especially the eventual social status they might enjoy, than they were with short-term assessments of wages and cost-of-living differentials, such as governed much of the thinking of the industrial workers. Some of them cherished dreams of a really big breakthrough into either fame or fortune not characteristic of emigrants who chose to enter industry and agriculture (396).

A clerk in London would live and die a clerk. A clerk in New York could one day be a manufacturer. Harry Bolton’s grandiose notions make him just the type to think he might effect a
fabulous reversal of fortune in America. Also, as Berthoff notes, even in London’s booming clerkship economy, some young men had no job to lose.

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“Not your brother?”: Harry Bolton’s Unhappy Ending

Whether we see Harry Bolton as ambitious or idle—and most signs point to idle—he is statistically likely to be defeated by New York. As Erickson says of Harry’s whole category of single, professional-class male immigrants from the United Kingdom, “this group of migrants was not outstanding for economic success. Their inadequate social adjustment is even more remarkable” (402). Early in the novel, Melville indicates that the deck is stacked against immigrants, Harry included. When Redburn first sails to Liverpool, he encounters “an English boy, from Lancashire” (70):

It seemed, he had come over from Liverpool in this very ship on her last voyage, as a steerage passenger; but finding that he would have to work very hard to get along in America, and getting home-sick into the bargain, he had arranged with the captain to work his passage back (70).

Who can win against such odds? Sure enough, Harry’s initial exuberance does not last. Shortly after arriving in New York, the two young men part for a few hours, during which time Redburn receives some letters whose “purport compelled my departure homeward” (395). Before he can even break the news to Harry, he sees that a change has come over his friend:

Strange, but even the few hours’ absence which had intervened; during which, Harry had been left to himself, to stare at strange streets, and strange faces, had wrought a marked change in his countenance. He was a creature of the suddenest impulses. Left to himself, the strange streets seemed now to have reminded him of his friendless condition; and I found him with a very sad eye; and his right hand groping in his pocket.

‘Where am I going to dine, this day week?’ – he slowly said. ‘What’s to be done, Wellingborough?’ (395).
What, indeed? This is a point of controversy for the novel’s readers. Critics such as James Duban and Bruce Franklin argue that Redburn should take Harry home with him. Redburn has, after all, observed Harry’s utter helplessness on shipboard and his vulnerability in the strange city.

Instead, in a move that may well remind readers of Bartleby’s employer’s various attempts to shift responsibility for Bartleby onto other shoulders, when Redburn takes off for upstate New York, he leaves Harry in what he hopes are the safe hands of his brother’s significantly-named friend Goodwell:

‘I have no doubt, Goodwell will take care of you, Harry,’ said I, ‘he’s a fine, good-hearted fellow; and will do his best for you, I know.’
‘No doubt of it,’ said Harry, looking hopeless (Redburn 403).

Is Harry’s hopelessness an indictment of Redburn? Franklin takes it to be so, arguing that when Redburn leaves Harry in New York, he “becomes the incarnation of all he has learned to fear and despise. We should understand how Redburn completes his loss of innocence and initiation into guilt—by betraying Harry Bolton, who is the counterpart, in fact the double, of himself” (Franklin 191). According to this interpretation, what Redburn “has learned to fear and despise” is cold-heartedness. When he encounters the starving mother and children in Liverpool, he tries to seek help for them, both from individuals and from institutions. The individuals are disappointing, as a passing woman will say only, “‘that Betsey Jennings desarves [sic] it—was she ever married? tell me that’” (Redburn 253). Possibly even worse than this moral condemnation of the dying mother is the apathetic institutional response. When Redburn seeks help from the police, an officer tells him, “‘It’s none of my business, Jack… I don’t belong to that street,’” an amazing amalgamation of “Am I my brother’s keeper?” and “I’m all right, Jack” (Redburn 254). The lesson of Redburn’s wanderings in Liverpool is that we must help
our fellows whenever we can; how much more so when Harry is someone Redburn knows well? Franklin argues that “if the reader wishes to read this chapter with understanding, he must be able to assume at least tentatively an ethical position which admits of no shilly-shallying with expediency, that charming call of the world” (Franklin 193).

Redburn no doubt presents this moral challenge to the reader. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Harry becomes depressed while Redburn is still in town, before he even knows that his friend will leave soon. Redburn surmises that his friend is overcome by loneliness or homesickness, but we don’t really know what happened to Harry while Redburn was gone, in the same way that emigrants’ families who stayed in the old country didn’t know what had become of the departed until they reestablished contact, and the same way that comfortable, established Americans today don’t really know what immigrants go through. In this moment between Redburn and Harry, Melville models not our indifference to but our plain ignorance of the suffering of the economic migrants who aspire to join our ranks.

Then again, Redburn has problems of his own. What “compelled” Redburn’s “departure homeward” could only be bad news (Redburn 395). As Christopher Sten points out, at the end of the real-life voyage to Liverpool on which much of the novel is based, Melville received word that his family’s furniture was up for auction (364). Given similar circumstances, is Redburn wrong to leave? And is his claim that he is detained upstate by “circumstances beyond my control” mere legalistic blarney, or a hint at a reality so painful that Melville couldn’t bear to write about it, even in fictionalized form (Redburn 404)? Even within the confines of the novel, we know as Sten reminds us, “that Harry does not travel to America in order to be a guest in Redburn’s home” (364). We also know that Redburn goes to sea because his family is in dire financial straits. He says of himself that he “had been well rubbed, curried, and ground down to
fine powder in the hopper of an evil fortune” (*Redburn* 365). It is therefore unlikely that Harry has any expectation of Redburn’s help, though he receives as much support as Redburn and his connections can offer.

Though he is upstate dealing with family matters, Redburn seeks Harry out by mail, and when he can’t reach him he contacts Goodwell, who tells a sad story of having tried and failed to find Harry work. New York’s economy being what it is for office workers, Goodwell can’t help, lamenting to Redburn: “‘But you don’t know how dull are the times here, and what multitudes of young men, well qualified, are seeking employment in counting-houses. I did my best; but could not get Harry a place’” (*Redburn* 404). Goodwell is not exaggerating the dullness of the times; while Melville was writing *Redburn*, New York was full of “newly arrived emigrants, without the sense or the money to get out of the city and travel inland for work” who “wandered aimlessly about the city” (Coleman 160). As we see today as well, recessions hurt everyone, but the immigrant, who lacks connections and vital local knowledge, is most vulnerable.

Ultimately, Goodwell loses sight of Harry, though he hears a rumor that Harry has gone to sea on a whale ship (which is precisely what Melville did some years after his initial voyage to Liverpool, when his attempts to find work on the Erie Canal failed). Remembering that Harry was far from a skilled sailor, Redburn doesn’t entirely believe the rumor, assuming the worst and dwelling on the fact “that, as a friendless, penniless foreigner in New York, [Harry] must have had the most terrible incitements to committing violence upon himself” (*Redburn* 405). The fault, in Redburn’s eyes, seems to lie not in Harry, but in his circumstances. Once in America, Harry’s character loses its comic elements, and he becomes purely tragic, a Bartleby. Like Bartleby, Harry often maddens his benefactor and the reader by not seeming to try hard enough to help himself, but he is also in a very difficult situation. In his tragic guise, Harry is both a
Years later, when Redburn is himself working on a whale-ship—a sign that his family’s fortunes never recovered—he hears a story about a young Englishman who was a bad sailor but a lovely singer, and who perished in a whaling accident. When Redburn excitedly asks for the Englishman’s name and physical description, his interlocutor bursts out: “‘Harry Bolton was not your brother?’” (406). This second echo of “Am I my brother’s keeper?” is nearly the final sentence in the novel. The novel’s title is Redburn: His First Voyage, meaning that it is supposed to tell Redburn’s story. Yet Redburn is aware of and complicit in this usurpation of his place as the main character in his own narrative, so much so that he announces the fact that he will tell us little to nothing of his own homecoming: “I pass over the reception I met with at home; how I plunged into embraces, long and loving: - I pass over this; and will conclude my first voyage by relating all I know of what overtook Harry Bolton” (Redburn 404, italics Melville’s). Why is Harry’s ending more important than Redburn’s ending? What is Melville trying to tell us?

On the level of characterization, Redburn rises and Harry falls with a chiastic symmetry that presages Naturalist plots. Harry the gambler, the dandy, the possible rent-boy, remains an English “zebra” among the rough sailors, whereas over the course of the novel, Redburn the American becomes proficient both as a sailor and as a speaker of the language of men (Redburn 336). From a writerly point of view, in the incomplete twinning of Harry and Redburn lies the germ of an artistic idea, a way of talking about England, America, and the worldwide marketplace that unites them, which would reemerge in Moby-Dick and come into its maturity in the diptych stories and Israel Potter. If in Redburn’s Liverpool scenes we can find veiled—and not so veiled—criticisms of the United States, Melville raises the stakes in appending the story of
an immigrant to America to the experiences of a mere visitor to Europe. Redburn may be miserable abroad, but his sojourn in England can be measured in weeks. When Melville chronicles Harry’s attempt to change his luck with his location, he is putting America to a tougher test than England. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, America fails. If Wellingborough Redburn is disappointed by Liverpool, New York breaks Harry Bolton’s heart.

Critics of this novel who focus on Redburn’s initiation into maturity often argue that when Melville has Harry die at sea, he is indicating that Old World models of manhood are no longer valid in a New World that requires hard—often physical—work and humility. While it is literally true that the mid-nineteenth century American economy had many more openings for skilled and semi-skilled manual laborers than it did for office workers, Redburn’s own struggles—and the similarities between him and Harry—soften any moral valence we might want to assign to Harry’s failure and serve to de-nationalize his fate. Merlin Bowen notes that in New York Harry repeats Redburn’s experience of Liverpool: “Arriving in America, Bolton meets with much of the same exclusion and indifference that Redburn had encountered in England” (108). Perhaps this is why Melville does not bother to tell us what happened to Harry during the few hours in which he became depressed—we already saw it all when we followed Redburn through Liverpool’s grimy alleys. As Benjamin Press argues,

> to read the novel in terms of the New World triumphing over the Old World would be too simple. Redburn and Bolton have too much in common… just as the differences between them are muted, making any neat schematic division into Old and New World representatives impossible, so too are the differences between New York and Liverpool (Press 181).

Thus, Melville’s description of the squalor of Liverpool captures the worst of New York, and his portrayal of New York’s heartless business climate ought to be recognizable to British readers as well. And Harry Bolton is not a mere bad influence, a false friend to be shed; he lives on inside
Redburn. Lawrence Buell rightly reads the Bolton subplot not as a stunted remnant of Melville’s intention of complete parallelism but rather as what should have been a mere episode swollen over-large, an indication that though Redburn has literally and figuratively learned the ropes, he has not yet decolonized himself sufficiently to shed his family’s Anglophilia and cultural subservience (222). Yet while the novel’s final chapter is about Harry’s end, its very last sentence is concerned not with Harry but with Redburn: “But yet, I, Wellingborough Redburn, chance to survive after having passed through far more perilous scenes than any narrated in this, *My First Voyage* – which here I end” (*Redburn* 406). Reading this moment on its surface, we see that Redburn is suffering from survivor guilt. But on a larger scale, in a more symbolic register, Melville, who only a few years earlier had to sound a cry for an American Shakespeare, for a declaration of cultural independence, is beginning to experience survivor guilt on a national level. What kind of world will it be when America rises to its apogee, and the British Empire declines? What room will there be for what, in 1869, Matthew Arnold would call “sweetness and light”? Who will sing the songs of Zion in a strange land?

1 Bruce Franklin makes this case most convincingly in “Redburn’s Wicked End” (193).

2 While some critics, notably Evans, have assumed that Aladdin’s Palace is a brothel and Harry one of its employees, Cook offers convincing evidence that Melville based this setting on Crockford’s, the best-known gambling den of the previous generation, which had bankrupt many a young nobleman (Evans 332, Cook 32-3).

3 Cook explains that the silver fork novels were “novels of fashion…focused on manners, morals, and matrimony in the realm of genteel and aristocratic society, and were widely read among the rising middle class eager for glimpses into the privileged world of the ‘exclusives’ or the ‘haut ton’” (27).

4 The dream-like “A Mysterious Night in London” chapter is set almost entirely within an interior space, the Aladdin’s Palace gambling hall, and with good reason: at the time of its composition, Melville had never been to London. He had, however, read back-issues of magazines that described Crockford’s. Redburn was published “more than a decade after Crockford’s heyday and five years following its final demise” (Cook 32). Parliament had cracked down on gambling in 1844, but Melville was writing about something historically real that he had read about, not something he made up completely. Readers on both sides of the Atlantic found this episode impossible to believe, and Melville even wryly acknowledges the problems with his portrayal of London: “So unforeseen had been our departure in the first place; so rapid our journey; so unaccountable the conduct of Harry; and so sudden our return; that all united to overwhelm me. *That I had been at all in London seemed impossible*; and that I had been there, and come away little the wiser, was almost distracting to one who, like me, had so longed to behold that metropolis of marvels” (*Redburn* 318, emphasis mine).

5 It is worth noting that Redburn meets Harry immediately after abandoning the guidebook and with it his hopes of finding some trace of his father; Harry enters the narrative as a possible replacement. Thus, Rowe reads Harry as
less a double for Redburn (the conventional reading) than “another uncanny image of his cosmopolitan, bankrupt parent” (66).

As Nicholas Canaday puts it: “The Old World in Redburn is characterized by the social evils of Liverpool, the gilded depravities of the Palace of Alladin, and the aristocratic decadence of Harry Bolton—all rather conventional ideas” (298).

As one critic puts it, “although Melville for the most part presents Redburn and Bolton as representatives of the New and Old Worlds respectively, Redburn does not consistently embody the democratic virtues he extols and constantly seeks his Old World heritage, whereas Harry is not so much the opposite of Redburn as an extreme version of him” (Press’ 169-70).

According to Terry Coleman, British government inspectors used this test to see who were really sailors and who were “merely men with blue jackets on,” working their passage as best—or worst—they could. Coleman clarifies that this was only done with government ships going to Australia; private ships going to America were not inspected this way (95).

When Redburn first meets Harry, he muses, “His beauty, dress, and manner struck me as so out of place in such a street, that I could not possibly divine what had transplanted this delicate exotic from the conservatories of some Regent-street to the untidy potato-patches of Liverpool” (Redburn 294).

When Harry decides to go to sea, Redburn is downright alarmed: “[H]is most unseamanlike person – more suited to the Queen’s drawing-room than a ship’s forecastle – bred many misgivings in my mind” (Redburn 299).

Elisa Tamarkin would argue that this is the wrong question, that Harry is in the novel as a living argument against a culture that commodifies people based upon their use-value, and she blames critics for having too programmatic a sense of how characters are meant to function in novels, maintaining that “Harry’s impertinence only puzzles those who need for him to work, like the sailors aboard the ship when he finally goes to sea... There is no place for such impertinence in a culture of utility; Harry Bolton seems as gratuitous to the men as he does to Melville’s critics” (201).

As Lawrence Buell puts it, “Bolton reruns the initiation theme in British guise and thus at least begins to become the protagonist in a subplot that might answer the vicarious needs of the British implied reader as Redburn does the American (in Melville’s imagination of both, of course)” (Buell 222).

Melville and commentators use “emigrant” rather than “immigrant”; according to the O.E.D., both terms were in use in the 19th century, so Melville must be choosing to emphasize the migrants’ countries of origin rather than their destination (“emigrant”; “immigrant”).

“From independence up to the end of 1845 only 1,600,000 people, of all nationalities, had entered the republic. In 1846-55 more than 1,880,000 British and Irish came” (Coleman 21).

Giles continues: “Yet, if there are troublesome affinities between Young America’s drive for cultural independence and the more rampant xenophobia of the Know Nothing Party, which was burgeoning at this time, there are also parallels between Melville’s eventual rejection of Duyckinck’s approach and his desire to encompass broader, less specifically nationalistic traditions in his writing” (Giles 54).

Coleman notes that even Parliamentary reports and charity workers disparaged the emigrants they sought to help: “Emigrants were described by various people—who all knew emigration thoroughly and were sympathetic to emigrants—as disorderly, unbelievably innocent, and lower than civilized” (59).

Coleman notes that British ships tended to be built for freight and American ships designed with human cargo in mind (87).

While Melville acknowledges that starvation and close quarters led to epidemics of shipboard contagion Coleman adds that there were not enough doctors for pre-boarding inspections, so such examinations were cursory at best: “If a man could stand upright, he was fit” (Coleman 78). Doctors were paid one pound per examination, so the temptation to make a lot of easy money quickly was great (Coleman 80). According to Frank Bowen: “It became the usual thing for the sailing ships arriving in New York to have a heavy death roll and in the twenty-two ships which arrived within a period of six weeks in September and October, 1853, there were no less than three hundred sixty-three deaths, many of them undoubtedly cholera” (81).

Coleman argues that emigrants were dirty because there were no bathhouses for them in Liverpool, so by the time they were on the New York-bound ships, whatever washing they had done in Ireland was no longer relevant (Coleman 60).

For a history of Italian organ-grinders in 19th-century London, Paris, and New York, see Zucchi’s The Little Slaves of the Harp.

21 In Mardi, the philosopher Babbalanka asserts the merits of the island “Verdanna,” a stand-in for that other Emerald Isle: “Verdanna inferior to Dominora [England], my lord!—Has she produced no bards, no orators, no wits, no
patriots? Mohi, unroll thy chronicles! Tell me, if Verdanna may not claim full many a star along King Bello’s tattooed arm of Fame?” (493). Benjamin Press argues that Redburn’s “praise of the devout Germans should be set against far less complimentary references to the Irish,” and that “[t]he contradiction cannot be explained away just by attributing one set of views to the young Redburn, the other to the mature narrator, or even to the author. Melville’s democratic beliefs clashed with a self-confessed ‘dislike to all mankind—in the mass’” (Press 173-4).

However much Melville disliked mobs, though, in real life, Melville supported Irish immigration and opposed Nativism (Gilman 238). Redburn’s praise of the Protestant Germans echoes the newspaper rhetoric of the time: “In October 1852 a group of Swedish emigrants from Gothenburg landed in [Boston], and marched through the streets on the way to the railway station, and marched through the streets on the way to the railway station, past the offices of Gleason’s Pictorial, which said: ‘They are what is called Jenny Lind Swedes, being from the better class of agricultural labourers in their own country… All Protestants, hale, hearty. There is room and to spare in our western country for all such emigrants as these’” (Coleman 234).

22 Melville thought seriously about Babylon as a symbol; in his Bible, chapters 25 and 30 of the Book of Jeremiah, which prophesies both the Babylonian Captivity and the return to the Promised Land, were heavily marked (Wright 148).

23 This detail is historically accurate, as we see in Coleman: “William Fitzhugh, a Liverpool passenger broker who had spent all his life in the emigrant trade, and acted for the Black Star Line, said: ‘ours is one of the worst trades in the world for seamen, we get very bad sailors indeed; in fact, we get a class of men who go more to pilfer from the steerage passengers than for the purpose of going to sea’” (95).

24 We see this image again in Israel Potter, when Israel, a prisoner-of-war, is forced by his British captors to dance for their amusement (IP 16).

25 This is a consistent strategy for Melville. Wright notes that his extended Biblical allusions “enlarge and elevate [his material] by imparting to essentially mundane persons and affairs significance far beyond that which they have in themselves” (Wright 37-8).

26 In his search for “The First International Novel,” Oscar Cargill says that an “international novel is one in which a character, usually guided in his actions by the mores of one environment, is set down in another, where his learned reflexes are of no use to him, where he must employ all his individual resources to meet successive situations, and where he must intelligently accommodate himself to the new mores, or, in one way or another, be destroyed” (419). Based on this definition, Redburn is not an international novel because of Redburn’s experiences so much as because of Harry Bolton’s.

27 Coleman is quoting from the Morning Chronicle, London, July 15, 1850.

28 Also: “Harry Bolton has spirit and verve: it is he who turns Redburn’s daydream of visiting London into reality” (Press 180).

29 Yes, moon: “Upon his appearance, the row suddenly wheeled about, presenting their backs; and making a motion, which was a polite salute to every thing before them, but an abominable insult to all who happened to be in their rear, they gave three cheers, and at one bound, cleared the ship” (Redburn 401). I assume this is the gesture we know today, and the three cheers are a nice touch.

30 For detailed analyses of what regions emigrants came from and what areas they settled, see Charlotte Erickson’s Leaving England.

31 And it was many: “At mid-century, British tertiary workers (those in clerical, commercial, and professional occupations) participated in the migration to America in proportions roughly equal to those indicated for them in the general labor force by the 1851 census. An estimated four hundred clerks, seven hundred merchants, and four hundred professionals emigrated directly from Britain to the United States in 1851 alone. Perhaps ten to twenty thousand Britons from these backgrounds entered America during the mid-century period—a number unmatched by any other nationality” (Van Vugt 111-112).

32 For an account of the experiences, values, and intellectual lives of clerks in 19th-century America, see Thomas Augst’s The Clerk’s Tale (2003). Augst argues that in keeping diaries and reading in libraries, clerks sought not only to escape the monotony of their work but also to invest their experiences with moral and philosophical meaning.

33 Erickson later qualifies this observation with the point that the social failure of some immigrants may have nothing to do with their migration but rather be the result of social or familial disruption in the old country. Plus: “Some of these people might be dismissed as chronic misfits, as deviants who mistakenly sought salvation in emigration… Their very susceptibility to the indulgence of self-pity and their tendency to be disappointed in other members of their families suggest indirectly some of the strengths in adaptation of migrants who moved within networks of family or trade.
In some instances, the problems can be traced directly to the migrant’s situation in America, however” (Erickson 404).

34 James Duban condemns Redburn for betraying American ideals: “Redburn fails miserably in demonstrating on a personal basis the attributes that he considers characteristic of the Redeemer Nation. And that the text invites a political reading of Redburn’s relationship with Harry is evident from Redburn’s remark, ‘I stood toward [Harry] in the attitude of the prospective doer of the honors of my country; I accounted him the nation’s guest’ (Duban 1983 46).

35 In “Redburn’s Wicked End.”

36 The phrase, which made its way from the British navy to the United States armed forces over the course of the 19th century and remains with us today, evolved from “Damn you, Jack, I’m all right” to that motto of the Thatcher era, “I’m all right, Jack” (Rees 2005 p.123; Rees 2006 p.96; OED; Lighter 234).

37 James Duban notices this echo as well (Duban 1983 50).

38 Nicholas Canaday Jr. refers to this as “the motif of Redburn as New World democrat and Harry Bolton as Old World aristocrat” (292).
Chapter 3

Counterparts: Melville’s Diptych Stories

“Our New World bold
Had fain improved upon the Old;
But the hemispheres are counterparts.”

--Herman Melville, Clarel

Herman Melville wrote Redburn during a period when the scope of his art was expanding and his already fairly successful career was poised for a triumph. Still in his twenties, his masterpiece Moby-Dick germinating within him, Melville was distraught at the failure of Mardi and disgruntled at having to churn out Redburn and White-Jacket, but he knew that his best work was yet to come. It was, however, a different Melville who turned to magazine fiction in the 1850s. Moby-Dick had earned mixed reviews and less money than Melville’s previous books, and its successor Pierre, which was meant to be commercial, was received with the headline “HERMAN MELVILLE CRAZY”¹ (Delbanco 178-9). To make matters worse, in late 1853 a fire in the Harper & Brothers warehouse destroyed all the unsold copies of Melville’s books, which meant that the author would be charged a reprint fee for any subsequent orders from his backlist. Melville estimated that the fire cost him some $1,000 (Sealts 1987 488).

When Melville’s novels were consigned to what then seemed certain oblivion, he retreated to an earlier stage in the development of America’s literary culture: He became a magazine writer. Edgar Allan Poe wrote in Graham’s Magazine in 1846 that the “whole tendency of the age is Magazine-ward,”² but in point of fact periodicals, including gift books and annuals, had dominated the American publishing industry for decades (qtd. Moore 44). Because of the lack of structure around copyrights, American authors tended to publish short pieces, anonymously, and were not always able to track how far their
work had circulated. In *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting*, Meredith McGill tracks how Hawthorne evolved from an anonymous contributor of short stories to gift books and annuals to being a national figure, a rights-bearing author of novels. Almost simultaneously, Melville, who had previously been known as an author of popular books, became a quasi-anonymous freelancer in the Harper’s and Putnam’s stables.

In 1850, when Harper & Brothers founded a magazine to promote their books, they had an immediate and resounding success, with the circulation of *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* climbing to over 100,000 in 1860 (Moore 47; Post-Lauria 117). This success was due in part to an editorial slant that was determinedly apolitical and middle-brow, geared toward what Sheila Post calls, “family-oriented, entertaining, moralistic” sentimental fiction (Post-Lauria 118). Far less middle-of-the-road was *Putnam’s Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Science, and Art*, founded in 1853 for a liberal middle-class audience interested in rigorous criticism and analysis (Post-Lauria 118). Both magazines won a wide readership (Post 119). As literary critic William Kirkland pointed out about monthlies, “Though but a small part of what is published they constitute much of what is read” (qtd. Post 116).³ Ironically enough, when Melville resigned himself to writing for these magazines,⁴ which required that he adapt himself to their editorial constraints,⁵ his work gained a wider audience than he had ever enjoyed before (Post 119). Though most of Melville’s magazine pieces were anonymous, their authorship was an “open secret,” and he was paid generously, five dollars per page (Winter 17). Melville was also instrumental in the creation of a new literary genre: Perhaps because financial incentives drew ambitious writers like Melville to write magazine fiction, during this
period the tale and the sketch coalesced and evolved into that serious American art form, the short story.6

In the 1840s and ’50s, while British authors were adjusting to the structural demands of serial publication and American authors were just beginning to assert their rights as intellectual property-holders, the subject-matter of Anglo-American fiction was broadening considerably as well. Though the belief that literature could be “improving” to its readers had been around since the eighteenth century, in the mid-nineteenth century writers began to believe that their books could change the world. From temperance narratives to anti-slavery novels, in the 1840s and 50s nearly all British and American novels were “novels of purpose” 7 that proposed to reform major social problems, with industrial fiction as a major subset of these. Inaugurated by such texts as Sarah Savage’s *The Factory Girl* (1814) in America and Harriet Martineau’s *A Manchester Strike* (1832) in Britain,8 and coming into maturity with Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* (1848), the 1840s saw the rise of the industrial novel, a genre which, as Raymond Williams argues, “not only provide[s] some of the most vivid descriptions of life in an unsettled industrial society, but also illustrate[s] certain common assumptions within which the direct response was undertaken” (87).9 In the absence of an American copyright for British writing, British industrial novels appeared in the United States almost immediately after their UK debut, and antebellum America produced reams of industrial fiction as well, not much of which survives (Allen 68n7).10 Perhaps because he was that rare American novelist who worked with his hands before settling into the world of letters,11 perhaps because he knew that British industrial novels were in fashion—Melville was interested in making a living as well as a point, after all—he participated in this literary movement,
often writing about work. While Melville’s early seafaring narratives skew toward the adventure-story end of the spectrum, in Redburn he describes in detail the procedures and tasks that, once mastered, turn a landlubber into a sailor, and in White-Jacket he comes to focus almost entirely on working conditions in the United States Navy. Even Moby-Dick, so rich in theological and psychological themes, gains much of its texture, symbolism, and moral force from the daily work of whaling. Thus, in 1853-4, while Elizabeth Gaskell was writing North and South and Charles Dickens was preparing to encroach upon her territory with Hard Times, Henry David Thoreau was polishing his non-fiction critique of industrialism in Walden, and Herman Melville was writing about work and money—and the occasional painful absence of both. Already perceiving himself as a failure, Melville turned to open criticism of America’s supposedly non-existent class system and to disemboweling that ultimate great white whale, the American dream.

When Melville addresses social evils, his standard for comparison is England, which is natural enough for someone living in a former British colony at a time when the British Empire was at the height of its military and cultural dominance. Melville’s conclusions, however, are less than standard for a patriotic American writer of his generation, as he frequently makes concessions to Britain. While perhaps the most memorable vignette in Redburn is the starving family in Liverpool, less striking but equally important is the treatment immigrants receive when they land in New York. If Redburn’s Liverpool scenes present England as a cautionary example, a dire warning of what America may become if we do not mend our ways, when the novel returns to New
York, Melville indicates that America may already match England for spiritual poverty and sheer heartlessness.

Five years later, the moral balance seems to tip in England’s favor. In what have come to be known as the diptych\textsuperscript{14} stories, paired sketches set in England and America, Melville uses a transatlantic comparison to make the point that there is no worse place to be poor than the United States. As we shall see in the next chapter, Melville goes even further in \textit{Israel Potter}, his serialized novel of the Revolutionary War, in which several of the Founding Fathers are exposed as scoundrels, and an American war hero is utterly forgotten. To what can this change of heart be attributed? Melville’s professional difficulties are only half the story. The other half is his trip to London in 1849-50, which revised some of the impressions he formed on his initial voyage to the United Kingdom. Melville’s first trip to England, which had been the basis for \textit{Redburn}, was his maiden voyage as a sailor, undertaken when he was nineteen years old and penniless. During that visit, as far as we know,\textsuperscript{15} he only saw Liverpool and its environs. His next visit was a different story. In October of 1849, Melville set out on a four-month business-trip to England. A grown man and a published author, Melville enjoyed his second journey to England much more. In his journal from the trip, for every morbid entry in which he sees London as ghastly, a city of the dead,\textsuperscript{16} there are four entries about good times such as sightseeing, book-buying, and attending dinner-parties. With an adult’s perspective and significantly more data, Melville was led to reevaluate \textit{Redburn}’s harsh assessments of Britain, and even more so that novel’s sporadic idealization of America, and we can see the results of this reevaluation in the even-handed satire of the diptych stories and the disappointed Yankee patriotism of \textit{Israel Potter}. By paying careful attention to Melville’s
magazine fiction, this chapter will explore the evolution of his social thought during the 1850s and the ways in which Melville’s critique of American society depended upon a comparison with England.

In 1849, just as *Redburn* was published, Melville returned to England to try to find a British publisher for *White-Jacket,* and in 1853-4, he mined material from this trip for three short stories: “The Two Temples,” “Poor Man’s Pudding and Rich Man’s Crumbs,” and “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids.” Each of these stories is comprised of a pair of sketches, one set in the United States and the other set in England. Since Jay Leyda’s 1949 edition of *The Complete Short Stories of Herman Melville,* critics have referred to these three stories as diptychs, comparing them to the medieval art form that paired painted or carved portraits of saints or scenes from the Life of Christ (Leyda 1949 xx). As discussed previously, Melville was deeply interested in and read broadly about the visual arts. In 1848 he read Charles Eastlake’s *Materials for a History of Oil Painting,* which analyzes the diptych form, and in the journal of his trip to London and Paris in 1849, he notes that he looked at “the Saints of Taddeo Gaddi,” a pair of portraits then on display at the National Gallery, and saw “ivory carving,” most likely diptychs, at the Hotel de Cluny (Delbanco 224, *Journals* 42, 33).

The diptych is a pared-down art-form; medieval diptychs tended to depict individuals or small groups, often portraying people as busts or simply heads, with the intention of “focusing the viewer’s attention” on the figure and “emphasizing more strongly the illusion of its physical presence” (Morgan). Melville, who in *Moby-Dick* showed his ability to keep dozens of characters on the go at once, populates his diptych stories with very few people and a handful of telling details. Even more important to the
diptych than minimalism is the relationship between its two halves, which provide commentary on each other. Thus, while the six individual sketches in Melville’s trio of Anglo-American stories could stand alone, in combination the halves become a far more complex and powerful whole, similar to the effect of *Typee* and *Omoo* when they are read together. A lover of doppelgangers, foils, and not-quite-doubles, Melville takes naturally to the diptych form, creating juxtapositions so pointed they could not all be published in his lifetime.

The precise relation between England and the United States varies from story to story, but in each Melville uses one country to implicate the other in a heartless social and economic system. Because these stories have complicated allegiances, their writer seems nearly unrelated to the author of “Hawthorne and His Mosses,” who saw fit to declare that “England, after all, is, in many things, an alien to us. China has no more bowels of real love for us than she” (“Mosses” 247). As Lawrence Buell points out, “Melville’s renditions of cultural nationalism are typically short-run, qualified, and self-conscious” (229). On the whole, Melville is not jingoistic in spirit. Neither, however, is he a sort of latter-day Washington Irving, nostalgic for the lost mother-country. By the mid-1850s, Melville’s cosmopolitanism has a different flavor. Having built a multi-book career on being a man of the world, in his Anglo-American stories Melville is a man of the people. The diptych stories explore the possibilities of American life—as explicitly opposed to life in London—and most often find them lacking. New York is a tough town in *Redburn* and remains so in “The Two Temples,” but retreating to the New England countryside offers no solace: “Poor Man’s Pudding” and “The Tartarus of Maids” show how difficult the lives of farmers and factory-hands are and how false America’s promise
of unfettered social and geographic mobility. The only elements of the diptychs that move are their well-traveled narrators and the global economy that increasingly intertwines the American and British halves of the stories.

***

No Room at the Inn: “The Two Temples”

It is almost fair and just to aver (although it is profanity) that nine-tenths of all the kindness and forbearance and Christian charity and generosity in the hearts of the American people to-day, got there by being filtered down from their fountain-head, the gospel of Christ, through dramas and tragedies and comedies on the stage, and through the despised novel and the Christmas story, and through the thousand and one lessons, suggestions, and narratives of generous deeds that stir the pulses, and exalt and augment the nobility of the nation day by day from the teeming columns of ten thousand newspapers, and NOT from the drowsy pulpit!

--Mark Twain, 1871

“The Two Temples” begins with “Temple First,” the story of a man who is turned away from a fancy Gothic Revival church – a composite of downtown Manhattan’s Grace Church and Trinity Church\textsuperscript{20} – because his clothes are too shabby. Undaunted, he waits for the beadle to look away and sneaks into the church tower, from which vantage-point he observes the service. He is discovered and jailed for trespassing until at last he is “pardoned for having humbly indulged myself in the luxury of public worship,” as he wryly puts it (TT 158)\textsuperscript{21}. The narrator is sarcastic here, but he is also speaking the truth; he has discovered that church-going in New York is indeed a luxury, a high-end form of entertainment comparable to attending the theater.

Unfortunately for the narrator, this “theater” has a dress-code. He might have gotten a seat, he grumbles “[h]ad my new coat been done last night, as the false tailor promised” (TT 152). This gripe is somewhat ambiguous; it’s not clear to what extent
we’re to believe in the existence of the lying tailor and the better coat that happens to be inaccessible, as by the start of “Temple Second” the narrator’s economic condition is irretrievable. Be that as it may, either the beadle is mistaking the middle-class narrator for a very poor narrator, or else he is correctly identifying the narrator as a pauper. Whichever is the case, the beadle excludes the narrator from worship based on his appearance, a practice Melville portrays as both unchristian and un-American. What saves this sketch from stridence is the fact that it is funny. Long before Charlie Chaplin introduced his Little Tramp to the masses, Melville offers his readers the archetypical New York nebbish with a soul full of grace and a suit full of holes.

Melville had previously experimented with this motif in *Redburn*. During Redburn’s several weeks in Liverpool, he attends Sunday church services regularly. An avowed “admirer of church architecture,” the young sailor finds his greatest pleasure in going to church (279). This pleasure does not seem religious so much as nostalgic and aesthetic—nostalgic in that the homesick youth finds it “sweet to hear the service read, the organ roll, the sermon preached – just as the same things were going on three thousand five hundred miles off, at home,” and aesthetic in that services in England are still different enough to be exotic and to indulge Redburn’s Anglophilia:

> How I loved to sit in the holy hush of those brown old monastic aisles, thinking of Harry the Eighth, and the Reformation! How I loved to go a roving with my eyes, all along the sculptured walls and buttresses; winding in among the intricacies of the pendent ceiling, and wriggling my fancied way like a wood-worm. I could have sat there all the morning long, through noon, unto night (*Redburn* 280).

Delighted as Redburn is with the church, the church is far from delighted with him. To his chagrin, he is seated behind a column, lest his ragged clothing offend the eyes of the faithful:
Nothing daunted... by thinking of my being a stranger in the land; nothing daunted by the architectural superiority and costliness of any Liverpool church; or by the streams of silk dresses and fine broadcloth coats flowing into the aisles; I used humbly to present myself before the sexton, as a candidate for admission. He would stare a little, perhaps (one of them once hesitated), but in the end, what could he do but show me into a pew; not the most commodious of pews, to be sure; nor commandingly located; nor within very plain sight or hearing of the pulpit. No; it was remarkable, that there was always some confounded pillar or obstinate angle of the wall in the way; and I used to think, that the sextons of Liverpool must have held a secret meeting on my account, and resolved to apportion me the most inconvenient pew in the churches under their charge. (Redburn 279).

All the elements Melville will reintroduce in “The Two Temples” are here: First of all, Redburn calls himself “a stranger in the strange land,” and in “Temple Second,” Melville’s New Yorker will find himself alone in London. The phrase “stranger in a strange land” comes from Exodus 2:22, in which Moses explains that he named his son Gershom, which means “stranger there,” because he himself had been “a stranger in a strange land.” Though Moses had been brought up in Pharaoh’s palace and was treated like a prince, as a Hebrew he had never been at home in Egypt. With this brief Biblical quotation, Melville raises the themes of nation, home, and, as was so often discussed in the Bible, our responsibility for the “strangers” in our midst, be they foreigners or ethnic minorities (Deuteronomy 16:11, 26:11).

As important as Redburn’s sense of himself as a foreigner is his creeping sense of a conspiracy against him. Though it is highly unlikely that the sextons of Liverpool convened regularly to ensure that Redburn’s view continue to be obstructed, they may as well have done so, given the regularity of his literal marginalization in church. While Redburn receives even worse treatment when he seeks to read the papers in Liverpool’s Lyceum, whose doorman physically boots him out of the club, the sextons’ rudeness brings greater disillusionment. While it is not a real surprise to Redburn that he can no
longer be counted among gentlemen, and therefore would not necessarily be admitted into an exclusive club, the very tenets of his religion declare his right to a decent seat in church: “It is a most Christian thing, and a matter most sweet to dwell upon and simmer over in solitude, that any poor sinner may go to church wherever he pleases” (Redburn 279). In church, all men are meant to be equal. Eventually, Redburn’s resentful and darkly comic recounting of the sorts of seats sextons used to find for him dissolves into grudging gratitude—though the poor receive a cold welcome to Liverpool’s elegant churches, they are nonetheless permitted to enter: “However, they always gave me a seat of some sort or other…” (Redburn 279).

Five years later, when Melville moves the scenario of a shabbily-clad narrator who wishes to attend Sunday services in a grand church to New York, the experiment yields damning results: While Redburn does get “a seat of some sort or other” in Liverpool, the “Temple First” supplicant is banned outright, and this snobbish abuse of religion occurs on American soil (279). Whereas the young Redburn sees himself as the victim of a conspiracy special to Liverpool, Melville knows that Redburn would have received worse treatment in the supposedly egalitarian United States. As the “Two Temples” narrator ascends the tower staircase, he peers out an exterior window and sees that “[t]he beadle-faced man, with no hat on his head, was just in the act of driving three ragged little boys into the middle of the street,” an echo of his own expulsion and, as one commentator points out, a direct reversal of Jesus’s order that his disciples “suffer the little children to come unto me” (TT 153, Fisher 1970 79). Higher on the staircase, the narrator reflects:

Though an insider in one respect, yet am I but an outsider in another. But for all that, I will not be defrauded of my natural rights. Uncovering my head, and taking
out my book, I stood erect, midway up the tall Jacob’s ladder, as if standing among the congregation; and in spirit, if not in place, participated in those devout exultings (TT 153).

The narrator is inside the church and yet outside the sanctuary. He is in New York, having “tramped… all the way up from the Battery, three long miles,” yet is outside of American society (TT 151) The “natural rights” of which the narrator “will not be defrauded” are his right as a Christian to participate in a church service—any church—as stated in Redburn, but they are also the Rights of Man, and those rights enumerated in the Bill of Rights, and his birthright to the country in which he lives (TT 153).

In this passage, the narrator calls the staircase he’s climbing a “Jacob’s ladder,” which evokes both Jacob’s dream and his deceit (TT 153). In the Book of Genesis, the patriarch Jacob dreams of a ladder on which angels are ascending and descending. During this dream, God renames Jacob Israel and promises him that his descendants will inherit the Land of Canaan. After waking from the dream, Jacob renames the place where he slept Bethel, the House of God. God is not the only one who makes Jacob promises; earlier in Genesis, Jacob entices his elder twin Esau into selling him his birthright for a bowl of lentils. Jacob follows this up by tricking their blind father into giving him a blessing intended for Esau. Thus, when the “Two Temples” narrator says, “I will not be defrauded of my natural rights,” he aligns himself with Esau as well as Jacob (TT 153). For every Jacob sitting comfortably in the House of God, there is a bereft Esau, his twin and his natural equal, who has been left out in the cold.

As ever, Melville is engaging with the idea of America as the Promised Land, and he almost overloads the story with biblical images of disinheriance: The narrator spies “[a] Puseyitish painting of a Madonna and Child… seemed showing to me the sole
tenants of this painted wilderness—the true Hagar and her Ishmael” (TT 156). Ishmael is
the Bible’s other first-born son who famously doesn’t get his inheritance; here, besides
identifying with Ishmael himself, the narrator is implying that Jesus has been banished
from this church that purports to worship him, just as Ishmael was banished from his
homeland in the Book of Genesis.

In the same passage, the narrator muses, “I seemed
gazing from Pisgah into the forests of old Canaan,” referring to the final chapter of
Deuteronomy, in which God has Moses come to the peak of Mount Pisgah to look down
at the Promised Land, soon to be inherited by the stiff-necked people he has thanklessly
guided through the desert for decades (TT 156). On the mountaintop, God breaks the
news that Moses will not enter Canaan, that he will die in the desert (TT 156). Moses’s
disinheritation is even more devastating than Ishmael’s; a “stranger in a strange land” in
his youth, Moses worked to gain admission to the Promised Land, yet his efforts go
unrewarded.

Like Moses on the mountaintop surveying the land, the narrator in the stairwell
has a lofty perspective on the church service below. Perhaps because he can see the big
picture, the narrator notices the artificiality of the proceedings: “I could not rid my soul of
the intrusive thought, that, through some necromancer’s glass, I looked down upon some
sly enchanter’s show” (TT 155). Melville’s word-choice here is revealing. Gazing
through his little window, the narrator can’t shake the feeling that rather than watching a
live church service, he’s gazing through the crystal ball at a séance. But isn’t much of
Christian worship based on the notion that the dead can in some way come back to life?
How negatively are we to read the reference to necromancy? In Melville’s first draft of
this passage, the church service’s performance element and air of mystery are morally
neutral; the narrator merely wonders whether he is seeing “some mysterious enchanter’s show.” In the story’s final version, however, the narrator compares the proceedings to “some sly enchanter’s show” (Hiltner 1990 74). With this revision, Melville removes any ambiguity from his narrator’s condemnation of the spectacle before him.

The church service is essentially a theatrical entertainment, complete with costume changes and a celebrity-lookalike:

[T]he white-robed priest, a noble-looking man, with a form like the incomparable Talma’s, gave out from the reading-desk the hymn before the sermon, and then through a side door vanished from the scene. In good time I saw the same Talma-like and noble-looking man reappear through the same side door, his white apparel wholly changed for black (TT 155).

The Talma to whom the narrator compares the priest is François-Joseph Talma, the internationally famous proto-Romantic French actor of the previous generation (“François-Joseph Talma”).
This allusion, made twice in one paragraph, has a lot of work to do: First of all, Talma’s career spanned the reign of Louis XIV and Napoleon Bonaparte; he struggled to remain apolitical during the Terror. Melville initially wrote this sketch for readers in whose minds the revolutions of 1848 were still fresh, so the allusion to Talma could be a hint that one potential answer to the inequality between the worshipers in the church and the
ragged boys in the street is violent revolution. Second, in using a French, rather than a British or American actor as his touchstone, Melville may also be implying that the services are quasi-Catholic, a significant slur in some circles at the time. When the priest says, “Govern them and lift them up forever,” he is reciting the English translation of the “Te Deum,” which indicates that this Episcopalian service is very high-church indeed (TT 154). Finally, in making the allusion to Talma twice, the narrator underscores the theatrical nature of the church service, calling its sincerity into question.

When the priest delivers his sermon, the narrator again heavily underlines the performance element—and the pandering—of this service: “By the melodious tone and persuasive gesture of the speaker, and the all-approving attention of the throng, I knew the sermon must be eloquent, and well adapted to an opulent auditory” (TT 155). As it turns out, the suavity of the priest and the enthusiasm of the crowd, the overweening attention to form, stand in ironic contrast to the sermon’s content. Though the narrator is locked out of the sanctuary, he can hear parts of the sermon loud and clear: “The text, however,—repeated at the outset, and often after quoted,—I could not but plainly catch:—‘Ye are the salt of the earth’” (TT 155). This line is from the Sermon on the Mount, which begins, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:3-5). What happens when Melville juxtaposes the Christian ideal of the Beatitudes with Christians who believe in the Prosperity Gospel? For one thing, Melville’s meek narrator inherits a prison cell: He is jailed for trespassing and is only released “after paying a round fine, and receiving a stinging reprimand” that emphasizes the extent to which civil authority is in conspiracy with religious authority

The title Melville gave to this pair of sketches, “The Two Temples,” is richly allusive. It would have reminded his 19th-century readers of St. Paul’s distinction between the Jewish temple in Jerusalem and the spiritual temple embodied by believers, thus distinguishing between the performance of religion and its practice (Asals 9). In addition, the title hearkens back to the two temples at which Jews worshipped in Jerusalem. The first of these temples, reputedly built by King Solomon, was demolished by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.E. The Talmud asks, “Why was the first Temple destroyed?” and answers, “Because of three things that were there: idolatry, immorality, bloodshed” (Yoma tractate 9b). With his repeated comparison of the minister with an actor and emphasis on the theatrical aspects of the church service, in “Temple First,” Melville is accusing New York’s elite—and those who admire them—of worshipping false gods.

The destruction of the First Temple was followed by the Babylonian Captivity, in which the conquered Israelites were exiled to Babylon. Just as in *Redburn* Melville repeatedly describes British Harry Bolton as one of the Israelites exiled to the hostile Babylon of New York City, in “Temple Second,” Melville sends his American narrator into exile in “Babylonian London” (TT 159). Having sailed to England as the companion and private physician of a pair of rich American ladies who were embarking on a European tour, the narrator quickly loses his job:

[A]fter two weeks of agonized attendance on the vacillations of the lady, I was very cavalierly dismissed, on the score, that the lady’s maternal relations had
persuaded her to try, through the winter, the salubrious climate of the foggy Isle of Wight, in preference to the fabulous blue atmosphere of the Ionian Isles… (Nota Bene: The lady was in a sad decline.) (TT 159).

Though the narrator graciously tries to excuse his former employer’s conduct with that “Nota Bene,” the fact remains that she dropped him and his services as soon as her plans changed; she has thought only of his instrumental value to herself. The narrator is left in deep financial distress: “Having, ere sailing, been obliged to anticipate nearly a quarter’s pay to foot my outfit bills, I was dismally cut adrift in Fleet Street without a solitary shilling” (TT 159). The expenses the narrator has incurred to prepare himself for the trip and to get to London have clearly not figured into the ladies’ plans.

Unable to face the landlady to whom he owes money, the narrator takes to roaming the streets. Hungry for companionship on a Saturday night, he is lingering in front of a theater when someone hands him a free ticket. Though ambivalent about receiving charity,26 the narrator avails himself of the opportunity. Inside the theater, he climbs numerous flights of stairs, which he compares explicitly to the stairway he climbed in the grand church in New York. Settled up in the cheap seats, the narrator notes the wholesomeness of the crowd, the excellence of William Charles Macready’s portrayal of Cardinal Richelieu, and the sincerity of his own and the crowd’s rapturous response. He goes home and muses upon the hospitality he received that night and contrasts it with his treatment in the New York church. This conclusion would certainly provide ammunition for critics27 who find Melville’s diptych stories to be too on-the-nose, their “setting and incident [ ] chosen in order to illustrated this or that dinner-table point” (Delbanco 225). However, the pat conclusion to the diptych obscures the more complex allusions that precede it.
On the surface, Melville is taking aim at a fairly commonplace satirical target, the hypocrisy of New York’s wealthiest churches, with “Temple First,” then, in “Temple Second,” reinforcing his message with a mirror-image of the original situation. However, “Temple Second” doesn’t merely support the message of “Temple First”; it goes in its own direction, attempting to subvert the old Platonic and Christian ideas that the theater is deceitful and a locus of immoral activities, though Melville himself had previously seemed to endorse these notions with his reference in “Hawthorne and His Mosses” to “the tricky stage” (“Mosses” 245). Judith Hiltner points out that when revising “Temple Second,” Melville removed a line in which his narrator muses, “Whether aught objectionable was behind those screens, or no, I cannot say. I saw nothing wrong” (qtd. Hiltner 1990 75). This redaction eliminated the ambiguity in the passage in which the narrator praises the “decorum of this special theatre” (Hiltner 1990 75).

Melville dedicated “The Two Temples” to Sheridan Knowles, a British actor and playwright who became a Baptist preacher in 1844. In this latter career, Knowles was best known for his attacks on Catholicism and the Oxford Movement. Melville’s implication that Grace Church’s service is too “high” are an echo of Knowles’s ideas. Melville’s alignment with Knowles is limited, however; Beryl Rowland points out how in this piece Melville privileges the work of a writer whom Knowles envied (Bulwer Lytton) and an actor with whom he did not get along (Macready) (Rowland 1974 6). Personalities aside, Melville likely chose Knowles as the dedicatee of this pair of sketches because his career reconciled the supposedly opposed realms of theater and church.
Melville wrote his magazine fiction in the hopes of finding a mass readership that his later novels missed. With “The Two Temples,” we see that Melville’s instincts were good; had the sketch been published in his lifetime, it would have been consistent both stylistically and thematically with the best work found in the magazines of the time. For example, seven years after Melville abandoned this diptych, in the February 1860 issue of *All the Year Round* Charles Dickens published a piece about a cheap theater that is used for pantomimes, melodramas, and other low-brow performances on Saturday night and for an evangelical worship service on Sunday night. Dickens does not insist so vehemently on the theater’s wholesomeness as Melville does; he admits that the working-class audience in the upper galleries is mixed, if disciplined:

> Many of us—on the whole, the majority—were not at all clean, and not at all choice in our lives or conversation. But we had all come together in a place where our convenience was well consulted, and where we were well looked after, to enjoy an evening’s entertainment in common. We were not going to lose any part of what we had paid for, through anybody’s caprice, and as a community we had a character to lose. So we were closely attentive, and kept excellent order, and let the man or boy who did otherwise instantly get out from this place, or we would put him out with the greatest expedition (Dickens 418).

While Melville’s London theater crowd is “not of the first circles, and certainly not of the dress-circle; but most acceptable, right welcome, cheery company, to otherwise unaccompanied me,” Dickens’s crowd is downright dirty, however self-policing (TT162). How can we read the contrast between these two views of a working-class theater audience? Is Dickens blinded by a snobbery only slightly mitigated by the Uncommercial Traveller persona’s use of the first-person plural to describe the crowd and himself? Or is Melville idealizing an essentially seedy scene? Elsewhere, Melville proves himself willing to call a rabble a rabble: In the second sketch in “Poor Man’s Pudding and Rich Man’s Crumbs,” he has no problem using the term “mob” to describe a gathering of poor
people (PM 175). Instead, we must see the audiences in the two theaters as synecdochic stand-ins for the theater itself: With his “cheery” crowd, Melville argues that there is nothing inherently wrong with the theater, that it can be a wholesome form of entertainment. In describing frankly his mixed and not overly tidy audience, Dickens goes further and argues that the theater makes its audience better, that the theater’s rules and the shared pleasures it offers create a sense of community.

Both Dickens and Melville suggest that the theater offers something deeper than community: communion. Twice, Melville casts his theater as a church: The narrator comes across the theater in the first place because he is looking for a church to go to and wishing it were already Sunday morning (TT 159). When he arrives at the theater’s quiet street, he sees it as similar to a “cathedral green” (TT 159). Numerous critics have spotted the red ticket of admission that the narrator receives as an allusion to the host (the wafer that stands in for the body of Christ) and the ale that the narrator drinks with the rest of the balcony-dwellers as wine from the Eucharist, with the ale-seller wishing “immortal life” to “dad” as he doles it out (Dillingham 116, Eigner 254, et al). Similarly, in Dickens’s sketch, the audience goes for refreshments between the plays:

Many of us went the length of drinking beer at the bar of the neighbouring public-house, some of us drank spirits, crowds of us had sandwiches and ginger-beer at the refreshment-bars established for us in the Theatre. The sandwich—as substantial as was consistent with portability, and as cheap as possible—we hailed as one of our greatest institutions… we could never weep so comfortably as when our tears fell on our sandwich; we could never laugh so heartily as when we choked with sandwich; Virtue never looked so beautiful or Vice so deformed as when we paused, sandwich in hand… When the curtain fell for the night, we still fell back upon sandwich, to help us through the rain and mire, and home to bed (Dickens 418).

Dickens is being playful here, but he’s reaching toward profundity: First of all, like Melville, Dickens rejects the notion that temperance and virtue are synonymous and takes
seriously the bonding that members of the audience experience as they dine and drink together. The Uncommercial Traveller voice is almost always in the first-person singular, but when Dickens discusses his experience in the theater and rhapsodizes over the sandwiches, the Uncommercial Traveller speaks in the first-person plural. The narrator has merged with the rest of the audience, forming a concrete and consistent “we”.

Second, Dickens has found a joking way to bring home the point that it is easier to enjoy culture—and to make moral judgments—when your belly is full. This is a point to which Melville returns in his diptych stories: Starvation of the physical body eventually degrades the soul; by implication we should not judge the behavior of people whose most basic needs are not met.

The morning after the dramatic performances, Dickens’s narrator returns to the same theater to observe the religious meeting taking place there. The Sunday service is less fun than the Saturday entertainment, and in being less fun, it misses its purpose. The preacher is, first and foremost, preachy: He focuses on rhetoric, offering his listeners various unrealistic hypothetical scenarios of rebellious and virtuous behavior, alienating his audience and boring them stiff. Worse, the preacher is literally a Bible-banger, appalling the narrator, who expresses concern for “this blessed book—which I must say it did some violence to my own feelings of reverence, to see held out at arms’ length at frequent intervals and soundingly slapped, like a slow lot at a sale” (Dickens 419).

Dickens’s vitriol in this family publication implies that, had “The Two Temples” made it into Putnam’s, Melville may well have found a sympathetic audience for any criticisms of Grace and Trinity churches that he saw fit to level. Then again, Dickens is going after a Dissenting minister who is reaching out to the working classes, a far more vulnerable
target than an Episcopalian priest to the poshest of New York congregations. In addition, Dickens is not accusing the preacher of hypocrisy of any kind; rather, he is critiquing his technique. Showman to showman, Dickens even offers constructive advice on reaching an audience. First, hone your message: The preacher’s deployment of hypothetical workingmen (a sort of proto-Goofus and Gallant approach) is annoying his listeners. Dickens notes that, by contrast, whenever the preacher touches on the themes of the Beatitudes or tells stories from the Life of Christ, the audience perks up considerably: “[T]he array of faces before him was very much more earnest, and very much more expressive of emotion, than at any other time” (Dickens 420). Second, know your audience: Dickens advises leaders of Sunday meetings in theaters “not to disparage the places in which they speak, or the intelligence of their hearers; secondly, not to set themselves in antagonism to the natural inborn desire of the mass of mankind to recreate themselves and to be amused” (Dickens 420). Dickens is staking a claim for fun (whereas Melville, who certainly enjoyed fun, prefers to make his claim for Art). Finally, tell a story: Dickens argues that the New Testament contains “the most beautiful and affecting history conceivable by man,” but that this history is inaccessible to people who struggle to read or are alienated by the verse-form (420). Dickens advises preachers to simply tell the stories of the Bible in simple language that will be readily understood by their audience, and “[y]ou will never preach so well” (420). At once, Dickens presents narrative as a force for redemption, and posits accessibility as a moral virtue.  

If Dickens is criticizing a populist, somewhat low-rent version of Christianity, he’s also offering low culture as a redemptive experience. The theater at which his working-class patrons bond and behave themselves is a “cheap” one where the plays are a
pantomime and a melodrama. By contrast, Melville attacks fancy-pants, High-Church Episcopal services but defends art that is unmistakably “high” in its own right. Though the narrator of “The Two Temples” is seated in the gods, he climbs past many wealthier patrons to get there. The star of the evening is William Charles Macready, the most famous and respected Shakespearean actor in England, and the play in which he is performing is Bulwer Lytton’s *Richelieu*, a sophisticated historical drama. Though Dickens and Melville are making similar comparisons in their sketches, each author can’t help but show his roots—or his business model. Dickens, who had worked in factories and wrote for a mass audience, focuses on populist entertainment and working-class worship. Melville, whose years at sea did not fully erode his patrician background, and whose artistic aspirations were toward proto-Modernist difficulty and complexity, lambastes the kinds of churches he himself might attend and praises art that shares the ambition of his own creations.

In life, Melville was not Macready’s biggest fan. On November 19th, 1849, during his first visit to London, Melville went to the Haymarket Theatre to see Macready play Othello.
The American writer was underwhelmed: “Mcready35 (sic) painted hideously.36 Did’n’t37 like him very much upon the whole – bad voice, it seemed” (Journals 22). Yet in “Temple Second,” Melville praises Macready’s artistry, even, in a subsequent revision, adding a line calling Macready “an amiable gentleman, combining the finest qualities of
social and Christian respectability, with the highest excellence in his particular profession; for which last he had conscientiously done much, in many ways, to refine, elevate, and chasten” (qtd. Hiltner 1990 75). All the Victorian watch-words are in this line: “gentleman” “Christian” “respectability” “conscientiously” “refine” “elevate” “chasten”. Melville doth protest too much. On the surface, he is doing so in the service of his explicit theme: the theater as more wholesome and moral than the church. Yet “The Two Temples” treats other themes, and Melville has more complex reasons for praising Macready. In this sketch, the Shakespearean is not only a stand-in for the spiritual power of art, he is also a one-man political issue.

During Macready’s 1849 tour of the United States, despite receiving critical acclaim, he frequently encountered ferocious heckling and even pungent projectiles from nationalist thugs. The disruptions were so bad on May 7th that Macready decided to cancel the rest of his tour and return to the United Kingdom. To prevent his going, Melville and other New York luminaries signed a petition encouraging Macready to continue his American tour. Melville signed two petitions in his entire life, one to Congress asking for a new copyright law, and the other to Macready, so this must have been an issue dear to his heart (Berthold 454n8). Encouraged by the petition, Macready took the stage at the Astor Place Opera House on May 10th, and his performance was disrupted by a 15,000-strong mob of rock-throwers who surrounded the theater, leaving only when the National Guard arrived and fired into the crowd (Berthold 430).

The hostility toward Macready in America was rooted in a personal and professional feud between Macready and Edwin Forrest, who was the best known Shakespearean actor in America at the time. Whereas Macready was of the same school
as François Joseph Talma, which championed realistic vocals and gestures, Forrest, a big man, worked in a more declamatory, even hammy, mode. Whereas Macready’s American audience was largely high-brow, Forrest found a popular audience and was worshipped by the Young America movement for his support of local dramatists (Berthold 433). To the workingmen attending Forrest’s performances of rebel roles like Spartacus or King Philip in cheap theaters like the Bowery, Forrest was a champion of the common man, and Macready was an aristocratic oppressor, a foreigner.\(^{38}\) Making matters more complicated, Macready’s opponents in New York were not only opposed to fancy foreigners but also convulsed with racism; the Astor Place rioters also disrupted a meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society (Berthold 434). Because of his upper-class pedigree and progressive views, Macready found himself associated with perceived enemies both above and below Forrest’s fans on the American social scale.

When Melville has the narrator of “The Two Temples” attend—and enjoy—a performance by Macready, he is taking a stand in the culture wars. First of all, *Richelieu* is the play in which Macready had been scheduled to perform at the Astor Place Opera House on May 8, 1849\(^{39}\)—a performance he’d been obliged to cancel (Berthold 451). In fiction, Melville has the opportunity to right a wrong: He lets Macready go on, and he shows his readers that they missed out, that the performance would have been something special. Whatever his private thoughts on Macready’s abilities, after years of having his complex, ambitious labors of love like *Moby-Dick* rejected by critics and book-buyers alike, himself reduced to writing for magazines, Melville continues to throw his support behind high culture, a realistic style, and art that aspires to be a lasting achievement. As ever in the diptych stories, Melville is also attempting to renegotiate the relationship
between England and America. While in 1850’s “Hawthorne and His Mosses,” Melville declared that Shakespeare “is sure to be surpassed, and surpassed by an American born now or yet to be born,” here he seems to be hinting that Americans need not denigrate British achievements even as they seek to outdo them (“Mosses” 246).

While Melville is not overtly discussing the prospect of American literary and cultural emergence in “The Two Temples,” one incident does indicate the author’s sense of how Americans can make a good impression on—and reap benefits from—a British audience: Be comfortable with being American and confident in American modes of self-expression. When the narrator of “Temple Second” is seated in the upper reaches of the theater, he mistakes the ale being sold for coffee and thus accidentally endears himself to the ale vendor:

“Thank you,” said I, “I won’t take any coffee, I guess.”
“Coffee? -- I guess? -- Ain’t you a Yankee?”
“Aye, boy; true blue.”
“Well, dad’s gone to Yankee-land, a-seekin’ of his fortin; so take a penny mug of ale, do, Yankee, for poor Dad’s sake” (TT 163).

This exchange returns to the territory of “Hawthorne and His Mosses” and the idea of a non-imitative American culture. It is the narrator’s American expression, “I guess,” and even his instinctive preference for coffee over ale that inspire the young boy to give him a free drink. Thus, American language inspires friendliness and kindness in a way that aping English speech might not have done.

Similarly, the narrator’s speech is not only distinctly American; it is also colloquial and contemporary. As high-flown as Melville’s language often is, as much as he worships Shakespeare, he is also a firm advocate of modernity in literature. In
“Hawthorne and His Mosses,” Melville warns his readers that the American Shakespeare might be hard to recognize:

The great mistake seems to be, that even with those Americans who look forward to the coming of a great literary genius among us, they somehow fancy he will come in the costume of Queen Elizabeth's day... Whereas, great geniuses are parts of the times; they themselves are the times; and possess a correspondent coloring (“Mosses” 246).

Thus, the American equivalent of Shakespeare would likely write in a contemporary vernacular. And he would likely work in a newer literary form, one that was gaining cultural capital yet still frowned upon in some circles as immoral or lowbrow: the novel.

Naturally, Melville’s own efforts and experiences inform what he’s saying, but in “The Two Temples,” Melville is less invested in trumping the literature of Britain than he is in emulating what he sees as positive there. One item found readily in England but not in the United States is public spaces where all social classes are welcome (Kelley 1996 219). Though the ragged protagonist of Redburn is always given the worst seats in Liverpool’s churches, the fact remains that he is given a seat. Similarly, in London, the penniless narrator of “The Two Temples” is permitted to enter a theatrical performance for free, thanks to the generosity of a stranger, and inside he sees every social class represented. While the patrons in the orchestra are physically separated from those in the “gods,” everyone in the room is sharing the same experience. While this “separate but equal” society may seem illusory to the contemporary reader, it still seems healthier than “Temple First”’s New York, where footmen in ersatz livery loiter outside a church that does not admit the poor.

Just as Melville portrays England as, in contrast with America, having public spaces that foster community, he also portrays the British working class as significantly
more educated, or at least culturally sophisticated, than the American working class—this was, after all, the era of Mechanics’ Institutes. The working people seated around the narrator not only enjoy Macready’s nuanced performance, which America’s working-class audience failed to do, but they also welcome the narrator precisely because he is a foreigner. Melville is reminding American readers, in whose memories the Astor Place riots still loomed large, of the need to welcome the strangers in our midst. Though Melville casts London in Bleak House-era Dickensian terms (“The fiendish gas-lights, shooting their Tartarean rays across the muddy, sticky streets, lit up the pitiless and pitiable scene”) the narrator of “The Two Temples” finds he is welcomed and treated generously in the strange city (TT 159).

Why, ultimately, was this sketch rejected by the American magazines to which Melville submitted it? In his rejection letter’s reference to “religious sensibilities,” Briggs seems to think that the shock of this piece lies in Melville’s exposure of the class-consciousness of the supposed Christians in Grace Church and his juxtaposition of clerical and theatrical performances (complete with costume-changes), as when the narrator muses, “In earnestness of response, this second temple stands unmatched. What is it then to act a part?” (TT 164). While this insult to the powerful may well have been enough to give an editor pause, it seems likelier that the publisher of Putnam’s, a magazine working hard to be more Yankee than Anglophile, decided to pass on the piece for nationalist reasons. First of all, as Berthold points out, “[b]y valorizing Macready, “Temple Second” challenged nationalist aesthetics with a vital cosmopolitanism that men like Briggs and Putnam preferred to avoid” (446). Second, and to me more crucial, was
the fact that Melville’s narrator is simply treated better in London than in New York. At the end of his evening in the London theater, the narrator muses on this irony:

I went home to my lonely lodging, and slept not much that night, for thinking of the First Temple and the Second Temple; and how that, a stranger in a strange land, I found sterling charity in the one; and at home, in my own land, was thrust out from the other (164).

This theme of working-class Americans experiencing alienation and even exile while at home, one to which Melville returns most extensively in *Israel Potter*, gives the title of “The Two Temples” particular resonance: According to Jewish tradition, the temples were destroyed because of *sin’at chinam*, the needless hatred between man and his brother, or in-fighting among the Israelites. Melville probably did not know that, but he is making a similar claim about the possible future of the United States. When Melville privileges London over New York in this piece, he is not making a full about-face from his portrayals of horrible poverty in Liverpool. Rather than changing his mind about the condition of the poor in England, Melville is trying to change his readers’ minds about the treatment of the American poor. His Biblical analogy bears much fruit: The Israelites arrived at their Promised Land, established political and religious hegemony, and had it all taken away. After the Babylonian Exile, they got a second chance, came back and rebuilt their temple, and this period ended not only with the destruction of the second Temple, but also, according to Christian belief, in the dissolution of the Covenant between God and Israel. Melville’s warning here is dire: If Americans do not lose their complacency, class oppression will undermine American political power, and religious hypocrisy will destroy their country’s claim to a special relationship with the divine.

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Leftovers Again: “Poor Man’s Pudding and Rich Man’s Crumbs”

It is not gildings, and gold maces, and crown-jewels alone, that make a people servile. There is much bowing and cringing among you your selves, sovereign-kings! Poverty is abased before riches, all Mardi over; any where, it is hard to be a debtor; any where, the wise will lord it over fools; every where, suffering is found.”

--Herman Melville, *Mardi*

In “Poor Man’s Pudding and Rich Man’s Crumbs,” Melville takes up some of the themes of “The Two Temples”—the misery of poverty; the possibility of community; the simple pleasures and deeper significance of food; the vast, self-serving hypocrisy of the comfortable—but does so in a less direct manner better suited to a shockable middle-class magazine readership. After all, the most effective satires do not make fun of social problems so much as they mock the rhetoric used to discuss them. Jonathan Swift’s “A Modest Proposal” was but one of the pompous, condescendingly-phrased proposals for social reform in circulation at the time; the essay’s harsh comedy derives from the contrast between the familiar bureaucratic language and the outrageous measures being suggested. “The Two Temples” is laced with theatrical references but is based primarily on Melville’s private experiences and the public events of his day. By contrast, “Poor Man’s Pudding and Rich Man’s Crumbs” is an overtly literary enterprise that critiques both domestic fiction and the literature of social reform while reframing the societal ills those forms of literature seek to redress.

The first sketch in the diptych, “Poor Man’s Pudding,” opens with the narrator recalling a walk he took forty years earlier with a poet who is significantly named Blandmour. As the two men hike through the snow, Blandmour prates on about how nature provides all that poor people need:
“[T]he blessed almoner Nature, is in all things beneficent; and not only so, but considerate in her charities, as any discreet human philanthropist might be. This snow, now, which seems so unseasonable, is in fact just what a poor husbandman needs. Rightly is this soft March snow, falling just before seed-time, rightly is it called ‘Poor Man’s Manure.’ ... To the poor farmer it is as good as the rich farmer’s farm-yard enrichments. And the poor man has no trouble to spread it, while the rich man has to spread his” (PP 165).47

In this telling, the snow saves poor farmers both money and labor. Hard on the heels of his disquisition about the value of snow as fertilizer, or “Poor Man’s Manure,” Blandmour holds forth on snow’s curative use as “Poor Man’s Eyewater,” and rainwater as “Poor Man’s Egg” in recipes. Finally, the poet waxes lyrical on the virtues of “Poor Man’s Pudding,” a delicious, affordable meal, which he takes as the ultimate proof that “through kind Nature, the poor, out of their very poverty, extract comfort” (PP 167). The notion that nature provides for the poor, and does so with a specificity that hints at some sort of Intelligent Design, is beautiful, and it transforms the chilly New England landscape in which the narrator and the poet are walking. But is it true?

In poetry, what is said is not nearly as important as how it is said. That Blandmour is a poet rather than a writer in any other genre both gives him high-cultural capital (often a class marker in itself) and indicates that he specializes in rhetoric, in ways of talking that can beautify the everyday. Blandmour’s name implies that he’s a master of euphemism, that he can turn harsh reality into blandly pleasant language. Thus, to him poor people are, as one scholar puts it, “happy primitives, who lead contentedly the simple pastoral life” (Fogle 41). In this sketch, Melville gives an airing to Blandmour’s assertions that New England’s rural poor are essentially well provided for, but he also subjects them to reality testing. When the narrator pays a visit to the Coulters,48 a poor couple who live nearby, he observes that their house is unbearably cold and damp; they
don’t have adequate firewood; and the mid-day meal must be eaten in a rush because the Squire for whom Coulter chops wood expects him back promptly. Mrs. Coulter reveals that both children she has borne thus far have died, which does not offer much hope for the child she is expecting. And when the narrator finally tastes the much-praised “Poor Man’s Pudding,” he finds it inedible, composed as it is of rice “of that damaged sort sold cheap” and last year’s salt-pork, which the Squire sells to the Coulters despite its being rancid (PP 171).

Such visits by middle-class characters to their working-class neighbors are a staple of British and American literature of the mid-nineteenth-century, a period in which poverty spread and labor disputes rose to fever pitch. To name two fictional examples, the plot of Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South* moves forward every time middle-class Margaret Hale visits her laborer neighbors the Higginse (who in turn visit the dirt-poor Bouchers), and Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* famously begins with a visit to the poor Hummels that establishes the virtues of the March family. 19th-century realist fiction contains numerous instances of well-to-do women bringing hampers and unsolicited advice to their less well-off neighbors because these visits occurred often in real life. However, the portrayal of the poor visits varies widely, depending on the author’s ideological stripe. Paul Lewis taxonomizes the various positions in the service of which literary poor visits are deployed thus:

from celebrations of middle-class benevolence to practical suggestions for individual, institutional, political, and social reform; from Christian and transcendental repudiations of material wealth to materialist and socialist attacks on the cruelties of a competitive market system and skeptical and irreligious critiques of pious optimism (246-7).
When Melville’s narrator visits the Coulters at home, he realizes that they are far worse off than Blandmour had described them as being, that they need much more help than Mother Nature alone will provide. To a 21st-century reader, Blandmour seems a straw man. In the era of school lunch programs and nationwide debates over government-sponsored health care, who would have the gall to claim that nature alone can provide for the health of the poor? To make Blandmour’s attitudes more conventional, Melville sets his sketch some forty years in the past, to a period that his contemporaries saw as marking “a point of departure, heralding a new age of hunger,” as Beryl Rowland describes it, during which a new Corn Law spread misery throughout Britain’s working classes and had a major impact on the American poor as well (Rowland 1972 72). However, “Poor Man’s Pudding” is not a mere period piece: Writing in the wake of the Irish famine of 1847 and in a period in which America’s newfound prosperity was patently failing to trickle down to its working classes, Melville found Blandmourian attitudes in the science and literature of his own era. In “Poor Man’s Pudding,” he exposes American poverty and the ideological and psychological mechanisms that seek to conceal it.

The most direct object of parody in “Poor Man’s Pudding” is Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s 1836 novel The Poor Rich Man and the Rich Poor Man. Sedgwick was one of the popular writers characterized by Nathaniel Hawthorne in an 1855 letter to his publisher as a “damned mob of scribbling women.” In fact, she was the most successful woman writer in 19th-century America until Harriet Beecher Stowe published Uncle Tom’s Cabin. Like Melville, Sedgwick had lofty connections: Her father eventually became the Speaker of the House of Representatives. Unlike Melville, she never married,
and though her work was largely forgotten after her death, during her lifetime her books
were commercial hits. Whereas Melville had a mother and three sisters to support as well
as his wife and children, Sedgwick was bolstered by four well-to-do brothers and her own
“considerable inheritances” (Balaam 65). As a New England writer who shared a
publisher—Harper & Brothers—with Sedgwick, Melville would have been aware of her
for some time, but he is likely to have taken a particular interest in her work while he was
working on Pierre, or The Ambiguities in 1851. Pierre, in which Melville attempted to
achieve commercial success through writing a work of domestic fiction, was his most
abject professional failure. The reviews were terrible, sales were worse, and Melville
never wrote a full-length novel again. It would be simplistic to argue that Melville
brutalizes Sedgwick’s novel as a sort of misplaced revenge for what domestic fiction did
to him. However, Melville’s treatment of The Poor Rich Man, etc. feels almost personal:
Along with his rational refutation of the logic of Sedgwick’s arguments, in “Poor Man’s
Pudding,” Melville offers seemingly intentional misreadings and distortions of
Sedgwick’s work, albeit, in the Bloomian scheme of literary influence, ones that are
creative.

When Melville swipes at Washington Irving in “Hawthorne and His Mosses,” he
is taking aim at a major international celebrity and a hugely wealthy man. Catherine
Maria Sedgwick seems like a small fry by contrast, no matter how consistently well her
handful of novels sold. Why attack her? One possibility: While Harper & Brothers had
made Sedgwick rich, when Melville wrote “Poor Man’s Pudding and Rich Man’s
Crumbs,” Harper’s was tarrying too long in giving him a response to his proposed
“Tortoise-Hunters” novel, a fragment of which later became The Encantadas. Melville
increasingly saw the Harpers delay publication of his work, sometimes failing to come to a decision at all, so much so that he came to submit more often to Putnam’s than to Harper’s (Sealts 494). In one sense, Melville’s parody of Sedgwick’s work is a small, impotent attempt at revenge against his publishers who were withholding opportunity—he mocks the kind of novels they do publish when rejecting his best efforts. This could explain the ferocity of Melville’s misreading of Sedgwick—he may have envied her success and not been in the mood to see the value of the kind of novel that was published without question and received with great warmth.

There is also the matter of Sedgwick’s themes. After the failure of Mardi and Pierre and the ho-hum response to his masterpiece Moby-Dick, Melville was uniquely positioned not to appreciate the thought that, as one of Sedgwick’s characters asserts, “The world is full of … small provisions for our happiness if we had but the eyes to see them and hearts to feel them” (48). Melville, whose family was growing steadily and whose consistent hard work often went unrewarded, was not likely to appreciate nature’s bounty or approve of “a Rich Man speak[ing] prosperously… of a Poor Man” (PP 173). Antagonistic to elisions and euphemisms, Melville’s parody gives short shrift to Sedgwick’s reformist impulses, paradoxically at the same time that it adopts them. In lampooning Sedgwick, Melville takes on not just her oeuvre, but a broad swath of the mainstream literature of his day. Artistically, Sedgwick can be seen as a forerunner to Nathaniel Hawthorne, as she pioneered realistic depictions of life in New England, including a historical novel set in Puritan times. Yet while Hawthorne’s deeply ingrained conservatism led him to dismiss attempts at social or spiritual reform as bunk, Sedgwick abandoned her childhood Calvinism to embrace Unitarianism, and her books are full of
the latest scientific and social theories. Based on his travesty of Sedgwick’s novel, Melville seems to have found this aspect of her writing ridiculous if not downright offensive, yet seemingly unironic portions of “Poor Man’s Pudding and Rich Man’s Crumbs” echo Sedgwick’s concern with nutrition and hygiene.

*The Poor Rich Man and the Rich Poor Man* tells the story of a virtuous but poor New England family who move to New York and overcome various forms of adversity—negligent parenting, chronic illness—through hard work, Christian faith, and scrupulous hygiene. The various villains of the piece—small-time, all; this is not a world that permits entrée to vast evil—get their comeuppance soon enough, while the May-Akin clan is fruitful and multiplies. Our working-class heroes never become affluent, but the novel’s narrator repeatedly urges the reader not to perceive this as a failure or an injustice, quoting Proverbs 13:7: “There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing—there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches” (Sedgwick 74). If the Akins have to sew ribbons onto their old coats to make them seem new again, well “[t]here is a lively pleasure in this *making do* that the rich know not of” (Sedgwick 30). When the narrator runs out of bromides, a kindly physician appears to dispense some more, lecturing the principal characters on the fine points of hygiene and domestic economy, and suggesting that they are uniquely circumstanced for happiness: “‘Your housework is a source of contentment… a rich lady of my acquaintance says she envies her servants, who have *kitchen-work* to go to in all their troubles’” (Sedgwick 48). Despite all this sentiment, even sanctimony, the novel is a smooth, engaging read. And the physician is not only an authority-figure to Sedgwick’s characters; the author herself concludes her novel with a six-page afterword crediting the medical advice in the book to Scottish physiologist
Andrew Combe (1797-1847), and giving extracts from his 1834 work, *Principles of Physiology, Applied to the Preservation of Health and Education*, on the importance of airing beds, changing sheets, wearing flannel, and washing the whole body (not just the hands and face). As entertaining as *The Poor Rich Man*, etc. is at its best, the book is intended to educate its readers of all classes on principles of hygiene and self-care.

Unable to maintain a middle-class lifestyle for his own household without significant help from family, Melville has no patience for this sort of well-intentioned practical advice: “Of all the preposterous assumptions of humanity over humanity, nothing exceeds most of the criticisms made on the habits of the poor by the well-housed, well-warmed, and well-fed” (PP 173). Thus his Coulters are as virtuous and sweet as Sedgwick’s Akins, yet they are not rewarded in this life: They work hard all day but can’t get ahead; their house is unhealthily wet, moldy, and drafty; their two children have died, and not much can be expected for the baby Mrs. Coulter is carrying at the moment.

Whereas Sedgwick’s hero, Harry Akin, makes his job work for him (since he has a heart condition, he drives a cart and sets his own hours), Coulter must bolt down his rancid lunch because his boss, Squire Teamster, “sits in his sitting-room window, looking far out across the fields. His timepiece is true” (PP 170). While the Akin clan is forever expanding to include new children and new friends, the Coulters are largely alone with their grief, isolated socio-economically as well as geographically. In closing “Picture First: Poor Man’s Pudding,” Melville makes sure to get a dig in at the hygiene experts of his day. When the narrator of “Poor Man’s Pudding” leaves the Coulters’ cottage, he becomes aware of how stuffy the house had been:
The house air I had quitted was laden down with that peculiar deleterious quality, the height of which—insufferable to some visitants—will be found in a poor-house ward.

This ill-ventilation in winter of the rooms of the poor—a thing, too, so stubbornly persisted in—is usually charged upon them as their disgraceful neglect of the most simple means to health. But the instinct of the poor is wiser than we think. The air which ventilates, likewise cools. And to any shiverer, ill-ventilated warmth is better than well-ventilated cold (PP 173).

Melville is aware of poverty as a paradox: Open the window to let out stale air, and your home will be cold, leaving you vulnerable to the very diseases you sought to prevent.

Don’t eat salt-pork, and want of protein will make you weak and unable to do your work.

Eat the salt-pork you can afford, and you are eating your landlord’s rotten leftovers, complete with “yellowish crust” (PP 170). Accept charity, and you shame yourself. Don’t accept charity, and you starve. Thus Melville destroys the comfortable slogans that deny American poverty, just as he exposes Blandmour’s—and Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s—euphemisms.

As in “The Two Temples,” charity is a vexed issue in this diptych, so much so that the word “charity” appears in it over twenty times (Fisher 1972 32). In Sedgwick’s The Poor Rich Man and the Rich Poor Man, Susan May contemplates what her hapless father and disabled sister would do if she were not providing for them: “[T]hey would have to look to the town for support. Is not that awful to think of?” (68). The ethic of the novel is self-reliance. When Susan teaches a young girl needlework, she tells her: “Better, my child, to trust to diligent, skilful hands, than to widows’ societies, and assistance societies, and so on; leave those for such as can get nothing better, while we use the means of independence that Providence has given us” (Sedgwick 84). When Melville takes aim at Sedgwick’s novel, this polite contempt for the recipients of charity is one of his major targets, despite the fact that in Redburn his protagonist had expressed similar
sentiments, “You can’t beg your way, Wellingborough; that would never do; for you are your father’s son, Wellingborough; and you must not disgrace your family in a foreign land; you must not turn pauper” (289). Five years on from Redburn, Melville has no time for this line of reasoning. Though it is important always to distinguish between the author and his characters, we can hear the struggling writer’s indignation when his narrator declares:

The native American poor never lose their delicacy or pride; hence, though unreduced to the physical degradation of the European pauper, they yet suffer more in mind than the poor of any other people in the world. Those peculiar social sensibilities nourished by our own peculiar political principles, while they enhance the true dignity of a prosperous American, do but minister to the added wretchedness of the unfortunate, first, by prohibiting their acceptance of what little random relief charity may offer; and, second, by furnishing them with the keenest appreciation of the smarting distinction between their ideal of universal equality and their grindstone experience of the practical misery and infamy of poverty—a misery and infamy which is, ever has been, and ever will be, precisely the same in India, England, and America (PP 172).

This passage takes several surprising turns. Melville begins with what at first seem like straightforwardly nationalist assumptions: The poor of America have a “delicacy” that presumably keeps them clean and tidy under difficult circumstances, whereas European paupers reach a state of “physical degradation” that likely includes dirt and disorder, possibly even drunkenness. Furthermore, America holds egalitarian ideals unknown in Europe, and these political ideas filter down into social life. So far, so good. But Melville locates several ironies here, the first being that the American values of egalitarianism and social mobility paradoxically make life harder for the poor. With the myth of the level playing field comes the stigma upon those who fail to thrive in the supposedly opportunity-rich environment. Paul Boyer notes, “It was a matter of firm conviction among the middle class in this period that in the overwhelming majority of cases, poverty
was caused by defects of character” (90). In *The Poor Rich Man and the Rich Poor Man*, Sedgwick has one of her characters preach a sort of prosperity gospel, saying, “‘In this country nobody sinks into deep poverty… except by some vice, directly or indirectly. There are, perhaps, a few exceptions’” (178). Even Sedgwick’s most generous-hearted characters can scarcely imagine poor people who are not somehow at fault for their own suffering. Thus, when Martha Coulter periodically succumbs to despair, she blames herself for not holding up better:

> [S]trive how I may to cheer me with thinking of little William and Martha in heaven…—still, still does dark grief leak in, just like the rain through our roof. I am left so lonesome now; day after day, all the day long, dear William is gone; and all the damp day long grief drizzles and drizzles down on my soul. But I pray to God to forgive me for this (PP 172).

A devotee of Philip Doddridge, who advised his readers to think of their afflictions as “blessings” and God’s “chastisements of love,” if Martha blames herself for not being cheerful in the face of devastating bereavement and near starvation, one can only imagine that she blames herself and her husband for failing to prosper (qtd. Dillingham 127)\(^5\).

Melville’s observation on the punishing effects of egalitarian rhetoric and values on the poor takes on a new dimension with the phrase “Those peculiar social sensibilities nourished by our own peculiar political principles.” The repetition of “peculiar” echoes the “peculiar institution,” the euphemism for slavery in Melville’s time. (In this context, *peculiar* does not mean strange so much as specific, local, distinct.) While Melville is explicitly saying that America’s political ideals, though positive, can unintentionally undermine the country’s citizens, he is implicitly pointing to the political pragmatism that has already compromised America’s ideals; he is reminding his readers of the native-born Americans who are not counted as citizens.
Lest Melville be perceived as taking a dig only at his American readers who preach liberty and equality while permitting slavery to persist, he broadens his scope, listing “India, England, and America” as three locations where “the misery and infamy” of poverty are “precisely the same”. It is clear why Melville mentions England; after all, the second half of this diptych story is set in London, and the transatlantic comparison has long provided Melville with a springboard from which to jump to his most daring conclusions. In *Redburn*, for example, Melville employs his naive protagonist to muse, in his contemplation of the poverty in Liverpool, that indigent white people are largely a foreign phenomenon. Remarking that “a considerable portion of the destitute” in the “‘free states’ of America” are black, Redburn excludes them from his head-count as he strikes a cocky Yankee pose: “For *there*, such a being as a native beggar is almost unknown; and to be a born American citizen seems a guarantee against pauperism; and this, perhaps springs from the virtue of a vote” (*Redburn* 277). On the surface, patriotic young Redburn is criticizing Britain, whose Reform Bills expand the franchise only a little at a time, whereas citizens of the United States enjoy universal (read: white, male) suffrage. But the assertion that the right to vote can fend off poverty also contains veiled implications that the Northern states have not lived up to their responsibilities toward all their residents and that in the interest of eliminating embarrassing instances of American poverty, it might not be a terrible idea to give African-Americans the right to vote (*Redburn* 277). This is daring stuff for a writer aiming at mass-market success, so England serves as a foil in Melville’s rhetorical framework. But why is India on the list? First, because it lets Melville draw a subtle parallel between the East India Company’s colonial endeavors and America’s institution of slavery: In the period leading
up to both the Indian Rebellion of 1857 and the American Civil War, Melville may have felt more comfortable being explicit about Britain’s national misdeeds than America’s. Second, Melville likely introduces India as an emblem of social division. In the nineteenth century India was famous for its ossified and seemingly insurmountable caste system. In mentioning India here, Melville tacitly reminds his readers that in England and America we have Untouchables too. Finally, Melville mentions India because his concerns go beyond the local or even the transatlantic; far from being a regionalist like Hawthorne, Melville is a global writer, and he sees poverty as a universal problem.60

In the diptych’s second sketch, titled, “Picture Second: Rich Man’s Crumbs,” Melville’s narrator goes to London, where he continues to visit the poor, this time making the rounds of “the noble charities of London,” culminating in the Guildhall charity (PP 174). When Melville himself visited London in 1849, a friendly firefighter took him to the Guildhall. It was the day after the Lord Mayor’s feast, and beggars were waiting “to receive the broken meats & pies from yesterday’s grand banquet” (Journals 15). This charity event was known as the English Feast of Lazarus, after the beggar in Luke 16 who asks for the crumbs that fall from a rich man’s table (Duban 275). At the time, the scene struck Melville as “comical,” and he noted in his journal that “[a] good thing might be made of this” (Journals 15). However, by the time Melville got round to writing the story, in his post-Moby Dick disappointment, the scenario had taken on a bitter significance, and what little comedy remains in the sketch is exceedingly dark. Whereas in his 1849 journal Melville laughs at the fact that he “could tell who had cut into this duck, or that goose. Some of the legs were gone – some of the wings, &c.,” in the 1853
story the narrator is overwhelmed with disgust—with both the food and the people eating it (Journals 15).

In “Poor Man’s Pudding,” poverty and pride collude in slowly killing the Coulter family; in “Rich Man’s Crumbs” Melville describes poverty without pride and charity without caritas. Melville does indeed make “a good thing” of the Guildhall charity, but he transforms his amused journal entry into a furious short story, which he sets just after the Napoleonic wars. With a fire-officer for his Virgil, the narrator takes a tour of Cheapside. When the fireman asks whether he recalls “the event of yesterday,” the narrator assumes that he is referring to a fire that left many poor people homeless, but in fact the firefighter is referring to the Guildhall Banquet, held the evening before (PP 174). This is our first hint that the narrator and his guide’s values are not entirely aligned. They enter the Guildhall, where the narrator watches the desperately poor come to blows over the mangled dinners of politicians and aristocrats. The English fire-officer has so completely internalized his country’s class system that he sees nothing wrong with the event and praises it profusely: “‘What a generous, noble, magnanimous charity this is!’” he declares. “‘Unheard of in any country but England, which feeds her very beggars with golden-hued jellies’” (PP 177). The narrator is unmoved: “‘But not three times a day, my friend. And do you really think that jellies are the best sort of relief you can furnish to beggars? Would not plain beef and bread, with something to do, and be paid for, be better?’” (PP 177). This is a fundamental difference in perspective. Whereas the fire-officer sees the “golden-hued jellies,” literally the food of kings, as ambrosial, Melville’s literal-minded narrator does not see that food touched by celebrities is imbued with any aura of greatness. He sees food as food, nutritious or not, and knows that man doth not
live by metaphor alone—bread would be a start, and a job would be even better. At this moment, Melville is as prescriptive as Sedgwick, who, in *The Poor Rich Man and the Rich Poor Man*, has a physician lecture a severely disabled woman on the evils of cake, pie, and preserves (45-6). Later in the novel, a rich man’s child vomits custard and pie and later takes ill and dies, implicitly of a surfeit of sweets (Sedgwick 141, 171).

If Sedgwick objects to rich food, Melville objects to the food of the rich. Eating someone else’s leftovers, he implies, is undemocratic. While the contrast of the ragged beggars and their rich surroundings and luxurious—yet half-destroyed—meal is particularly creepy, even if the food were of a more nutritious sort, and even if it were not rich people’s leftovers but a fresh-cooked meal, Melville would likely object to this form of charity. In 1855’s elegaic “Jimmy Rose,” he describes the fate of a courtly and generous gentleman who falls upon hard times:

> Often, about the tea-hour, he would drop in upon some old acquaintance, clad in his neat, forlorn frock coat, with worn velvet sewed upon the edges of the cuffs, and a similar device upon the hems of his pantaloons, to hide that dire look of having been grated off by rats… Not much merit redounded to his entertainers because they did not thrust the starving gentleman forth when he came for his poor alms of tea and toast. Some merit had been theirs had they clubbed together and provided him, at small cost enough, with a sufficient income to make him, in point of necessaries, independent of the daily dole of charity; charity not sent to him, either, but charity for which he had to trudge round to their doors (JR 323).

Charity that degrades its recipient is not charity. The beggars eating broken pies and amputee fowls in the Guildhall are in no way elevated by the experience. Always interested in the limits of civilization—in “Picture Second: Rich Man’s Crumbs,” Melville portrays the paupers receiving the left-over food as savages, even animals, a “squalid mass,” “yelping crowd,” and “meager, murderous pack” (PP 175). Returning to the scenes of *Typee* and *Omoo*, Melville explores the implications of communion gone
wrong: “It was just the same as if I were pressed by a mob of cannibals on some pagan beach. The beings round me roared with famine. For in this mighty London misery but maddens. In the country it softens” (PP 175). Whereas in “Temple Second,” the theater-going crowd shares ale and sandwiches and a Communion-like experience of community, in “Rich Man’s Crumbs,” as they seek to take the leavings of the elite into themselves, the crowd take on traits not of communicants but of cannibals. Even without the precedent of “Temple Second,” we know that Melville is not attacking London in particular so much as the cruelties of urban life in general. In approaching the back entrance of the Guildhall, the narrator describes the area as “grimy as a backyard in the Five Points,” thus establishing a parallel between London and New York and precluding a moral advantage to one place or the other (PP 174). Rather, Melville explicitly contrasts the city versus the country: If hunger “maddens” in London but “in the country it softens,” we are left with the dilemma of whether softened hunger—and anger—are good for the hungry in particular and for democracy in general. Ultimately, the Coulters’ example shows the reader that there is no refuge to be found in the pastoral, a lesson to be reinforced in the “Tartarus of Maids” sketch. And the unsoftened, entirely mad hunger of the London beggars? Melville does not blame the beggars so much as the organizers of the charity: “That one half-hour’s peep at the mere remnants of the glories of the Banquets of Kings, the unsatisfying mouthfuls of disemboweled pasties, plundered pheasants, and half-sacked jellies, served to remind them of the intrinsic contempt of the alms” (PP 178). Is it good for hungry people to get a literal taste of luxury they will not experience again? Can glimpsing the opulence in which others live make London’s poor anything but implacably, violently envious?
Melville is critical of charity given in the form of food, and, on a Sedgwickian, literal level, of the unhealthy meal on offer, and he also objects to the Guildhall charity on a more abstract level, as an outgrowth of an unjust and outmoded feudal system. Mistaken for one of the charity’s rightful recipients, Melville’s narrator is told, “Here, take this pasty, and be thankful that you taste of the same dish with Her Grace the Duchess of Devonshire. Graceless ragamuffin, do you hear?” (PP 177). This doubling of “grace” has its implications—if in “The Two Temples” one needed a good suit to be permitted to enter a house of God, here there is no grace to be had without a noble title.

Unlike many Americans of his day and ours, Melville had only the smallest of soft spots for the English aristocracy; he devotes an entire chapter of *Moby-Dick* to an episode in which the Duke of Wellington seized a whale from the sailors who had worked hard and risked great danger to hunt it. Wellington seized the whale in reliance on a medieval law giving the monarch the first right to any whale or sturgeon, as Melville notes with a smile, “the King receiving the highly dense and elastic head peculiar to that fish, which, symbolically regarded, may possibly be humorously grounded upon some presumed congeniality” (*Moby-Dick* 438-9). When not mocking aristocrats themselves, Melville goes after those who worship them. Also in *Moby-Dick*, when Ishmael sees his roommate Queequeg bowing in worship of a small idol, he asserts:

> I cherish the greatest respect towards everybody’s religious obligations, never mind how comical, and could not find it in my heart to undervalue even a congregation of ants worshipping a toad-stool; or those other creatures in certain parts of our earth, who with a degree of footmanism quite unprecedented in other planets, bow down before the torso of a deceased landed proprietor merely on account of the inordinate possessions yet owned and rented in his name (*Moby-Dick* 90).
Continuing this theme, in “Picture Second: Rich Man’s Crumbs,” Melville plays out a worst-case scenario for modern-day feudalism. When the narrator first encounters the recipients of the charity, he sees them as “a mass of lean, famished, ferocious creatures, struggling and fighting for some mysterious precedency, and all holding soiled blue tickets in their hands” (174). Reduced to animalistic “creatures,” the poor struggle for “precedency,” a dark mockery of upper-class concerns over who should go down to dinner first, or be seated below or above the salt.64 The race for “precedency” is the class struggle, or rat-race, that Melville always found “mysterious” in life, his best efforts unrewarded. And in Britain, with its visible aristocracy, the contest for status must have seemed particularly rigged. Perhaps because of Anglo-American unease with the Continental revolutions of 1848, Melville can’t show all his cards at once here. When the hungry people he terms a “pestiferous mob” first enter the Guildhall, the narrator plays into his readers’ fear of revolutionary violence, saying, “I thought of the anarchic sack of Versailles” (PP 175). Yet once in the Guildhall, the narrator becomes critical of aristocracy. When the fire officer spies a ragged boy eating a pheasant whose “two breasts were gouged ruthlessly out,” he enthuses that “’his Royal Highness the Prince Regent might have eaten of that identical pheasant,’” only to have Melville’s narrator to rejoinder, “’I don’t doubt it… he is said to be uncommonly fond of the breast’” (PP 176). This swipe at George IV’s legendary libido and dissolute lifestyle is surely there to remind readers of the dangers of having a hereditary aristocracy: bad government, abuses of power, profligate spending, a clueless “let them eat cake” attitude toward the poor. Naturally, these abuses are not limited to official aristocracy; back in New England the Coulters live on and work Squire Teamster’s land as his unofficial serfs, and some
scholars have noted an implication of *droit de seigneur*, or at least the Southern plantation, in the “Sunday ride” the Squire’s man occasionally gives Martha Coulter in his carriage (Rowland 1972 77, Lee 163, PP 171). If the “anarchic sack of Versailles” is, in this piece, an unequivocally bad thing, what of the governments and political systems that lead to such revolutions? Melville’s crack at the Prince Regent serves as a reminder that the rich and famous people whose leavings are being consumed are not necessarily good people; the beggars have not exactly been given access to the relics of saints.

Disgust has a way of spreading; in “Rich Man’s Crumbs,” the charity banquet is unquestionably unappealing, with its glorious banners but dirty floor “foul as a hovel’s—as a kennel’s” (the Guildhall itself an idol with feet of clay), the ragged, shoving, gobbling paupers and mangled food (PP 175). But the image Melville conjures of greedy George IV ripping the breast-meat off a pheasant implies that the banquet held the night before, which has left the floor “strewed with the smaller and more wasteful fragments of the feast,” may have been no less off-putting (175). Try as Britain’s upper classes may to distance themselves from the poor, Melville locates uncomfortable parallels in the two groups’ behavior.

Unappealing as the imagery of “Rich Man’s Crumbs” is, in pairing these two sketches Melville may be arguing that miserly charity is better than none. After all, Martha Coulter cooks the meal she won’t refer to as “poor man’s pudding”—“We do not call it so, sir” she rebukes the narrator—out of spoiled pork sold to her husband by the squire who serves as employer and landlord in one (PP 169). While the poor in England must beg for table-scraps, the American poor are made to pay for them—but only once they’ve gone bad. This is self-reliance gone horribly wrong, and Melville closes the
diptych with a “plague on both their houses” sentiment: “Heaven save me equally from the ‘Poor Man’s Pudding’ and the ‘Rich Man’s Crumbs’” (PP 178). If the paternalism of England fails to serve that country’s poor, the rhetoric of Yankee independence, however kindly intended, serves to keep the poor in their place. There is no clear winner in the contest between England and America; the issue is one of perspective.

As a case study in perspectival differences, it is instructive to read “Rich Man’s Crumbs” alongside Nathaniel Hawthorne’s sketch of similar scenes in *Our Old Home*. Whereas Melville paints the 1814 Lord Mayor’s banquet as grotesque and animalistic, his erstwhile friend Nathaniel Hawthorne draws entirely opposite conclusions from similar scenes. In “Civic Banquets,” one of the *Atlantic Monthly* pieces that later came to comprise *Our Old Home*, Nathaniel Hawthorne describes

> those public, or partially public banquets, the custom of which so thoroughly prevails among the English people, that nothing is ever decided upon, in matters of peace and war, until they have chewed upon it in the shape of roast-beef, and talked it fully over in their cups (366).

Pointing to the fact that medieval British towns often contain an old banquet hall, Hawthorne sees the custom of public dinners as deep-rooted in British life and as, by his own era, having achieved its apotheosis. On the absence of a banqueting culture in America, Hawthorne laments: “It is the consummate flower of civilization and refinement; and our inability to produce it, or to appreciate its admirable beauty if a happy inspiration should bring it into bloom, marks fatally the limit of culture which we have attained” (v.1 364-5). Facetiously as this may have been intended, Hawthorne’s notebooks indicate that he mostly enjoyed the public dinners at which he was an honored guest, and he was taken with several of the banquet halls he encountered, including London’s Guildhall, which he visited twice.66 In his journal entry from July 13, 1856,
Hawthorne notes, “There is an annual banquet in the Guildhall, given by the Lord Mayor and the sheriffs, and I believe it is the very acme of civic feasting” (v.2 325). Years later, when repackaging his journal entries as sketches, Hawthorne all but apologizes to the reader for describing a Lord Mayor’s dinner at the Mansion House in London rather than one held at the Guildhall: “I should have preferred the annual feast at Guildhall, but never had the good fortune to witness it” (v.1 386-7). So impressed with the Guildhall was he that, having visited the place on July 13, 1856, Hawthorne came back two weeks later to show his son Julian the carved statues of Gog and Magog, the wooden statues of London’s mythical guardians (not to be confused with the Biblical figures).
When Melville’s narrator in “Rich Man’s Crumbs” points out that the pasties and pies have been hollowed out by the previous night’s diners, the fire office asserts, “‘A noble charity, upon the whole, for all that. See, even Gog and Magog yonder, at the other end of the hall, fairly laugh out their delight at the scene’” (PP 176). The narrator is unconvinced: “‘But don’t you think, though,’” hinted I, “‘that the sculptor, whoever he was, carved the laugh too much into a grin—a sort of sardonical grin?’” (PP 177).

Hawthorne’s notes and sketch show us how mainstream a target Melville is attacking—if upper-class New Yorkers might have been offended by Melville’s attack on Grace and Trinity churches in “The Two Temples,” the great and the good in London were not likely to appreciate aspersions cast on the elegant hospitality of the Guildhall. Whereas to Hawthorne Gog and Magog are something cute to show the kids, to Melville they are ghouls mocking the proceedings—both banquet and charity—at the Guildhall.

Hawthorne and Melville’s perspectives on England naturally differed, what with Melville visiting first as an impoverished young sailor and later as a struggling freelance writer, and Hawthorne arriving in state as a successful man of letters who had also been honored with a civil commission by no less a person than the President of the United States. Hawthorne was not blind, however; his notebooks are full of the squalor of 1850s Liverpool, and in Our Old Home, the blandly pleasant “Civic Banquets” sketch appears immediately after “Outside Glimpses of English Poverty.” This latter sketch is in the warts-and-all travel-literature genre in which Dickens visits America’s insane asylums and prisons and Melville describes the Guildhall charity; “Outside Glimpses” describes English slums, complete with gin-shops, pawnbrokers, unwed mothers, barefoot children, beggars, and filth everywhere, and climaxes with a visit to an almshouse. At the
almshouse, Hawthorne encounters a diseased, half-blind child, “a wretched, pale, half-torpid little thing… with a humor in its eyes and face, which the governor said was the scurvy,” who latches onto him (Hawthorne 352). The child follows Hawthorne around “rubbing against his legs… pulling at his coat-tails, and, at last, exerting all the speed that its poor limbs were capable of, got directly before him and held forth its arms, mutely insisting on being taken up” (Hawthorne 352). Hawthorne had the lifelong problem of being liked by other people—often immediately, and intensely—more than he liked them back, and this moment is the most extreme documented instance of that issue. Standoffish even among his friends, Hawthorne wrestles with himself and ultimately forces himself to cuddle the child, “no easy thing for him to do,” as he admits (352).

Hawthorne closes “Outside Glimpses of English poverty” with two weddings held in Manchester Cathedral. The first, held during the Easter holidays to avoid a fee, is a mass-wedding of poor laborers, and Hawthorne dwells on the shabbiness of the various bridegrooms’ garments and their limited prospect for marital happiness. The latter is the wedding of two aristocrats, and while the wedding is everything an aesthete like Hawthorne could have wished, he cannot help but wonder:

Is, or is not, the system wrong that gives one married pair so immense a superfluity of luxurious home, and shuts out a million others from any home whatever? One day or another, safe as they deem themselves, and safe as the hereditary temper of the people really tends to make them, the gentlemen of England will be compelled to face this question (362).

Hawthorne would not have smiled to note that he shares this sentiment with none other than Catharine Maria Sedgwick, one of his resented “scribbling women.” In The Poor Rich Man and the Rich Poor Man, she argues: “[T]he prosperity of one is the prosperity of all. The fountains are with the rich, but they are no better than a stagnant pool till they
flow in streams to the labouring people” (178). This early example of trickle-down economics is the Christian analogue to Hawthorne’s revolutionary sentiment: If the flow of wealth has been dammed up to prevent any improvement in the lot of the poor, the rich will receive their punishment in the next world, per Sedgwick, or in this one, as Hawthorne hints.

If “Civic Banquets” seems all too approving, it may be because Hawthorne wishes to end his collection on a gracious note toward his former hosts—and current readers. Or it may be because such gatherings are a relief in the midst of the suffering Hawthorne sees all around him, a pallid, bourgeois, but comforting compromise between the frankly disgusting gap between the rich and poor that Hawthorne sees every day. As critic Arnold Goldman puts it, “Down-to-earth as are the proceedings at English civic banquets, after the resolution and struggles of the previous chapter this one seems like an image of communion” (167). In juxtaposing “Outside Glimpses of English Poverty” and “Civic Banquets,” Hawthorne closes his volume with a sort of diptych of his own, providing a holistic, if ironic, view of England.

While this essay has thus far emphasized how Melville and Hawthorne’s divergent career trajectories may have made Melville a far more savage critic of England—at least in public—it is worth noting that he had his share of nice meals in London too. As we shall see, for all that the Guildhall “Charity” appalls Melville, he is not averse to making conciliatory gestures toward “Our Old Home.”

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_Hard Labor: “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids”_

And did the Countenance Divine
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here
Among these dark Satanic mills?

--William Blake, “Jerusalem” (1804)

If “Rich Man’s Crumbs” is a scathing portrait of England’s state dinners and public
charities, “The Paradise of Bachelors” offers a nuanced take on what was then a
recognizably English custom of giving private dinner-parties. At the tail-end of his trip to
London in 1849, when Melville had sold the UK rights to *White-Jacket* and was
contemplating his return home, he was invited to a series of dinners, beginning with one
hosted by Robert Francis Cooke (immortalized in “The Paradise of Bachelors” as “R. F. C.”)
In his journal, Melville looks back on the dinner with satisfaction: “Last night dined
in Elm Court, Temple, and had a glorious time till noon of night. A set of fine fellows
indeed. It recalled Lamb’s “Old Benchers”… Up in the 5th story we dined. The Paradise
of Batchelors” [sic] (*Journals* 44). In the sketch titled “The Paradise of Bachelors,”
written several years after the event, Melville transforms this “glorious time”\(^71\) into
something more ambiguous. The sketch is set in the Temple, the area of London founded
by the Knights Templar and now the legal center of the city.\(^72\) When Melville’s narrator
attends a dinner party hosted by one of the many bachelors living in the Temple, he
catches a glimpse of another life—that of the professionally successful, romantically
unattached gentleman. By and large, he likes what he sees, describing the Temple as a
refuge from the stresses of daily existence:

Sick with the din and soiled with the mud of Fleet Street—where the Benedick
tradesmen are hurrying by, with ledger-lines ruled along their brows, thinking
upon rise of bread and fall of babies—you adroitly turn a mystic corner—not a
street—glide down a dim, monastic way, flanked by dark, sedate, and solemn
piles, and still wending on, give the whole care-worn world the slip, and,
disentangled, stand beneath the quiet cloisters of the Paradise of Bachelors (*PB*\(^73\)
202).\(^74\)
The “Benedick tradesmen” are married men with faces marred by worry about how to support their growing families, and the Temple is a shelter from their cares, a “monastic” retreat from the responsibilities engendered by, well, engendering. Bachelorhood has its privileges in Melville; in *Moby-Dick*, the Pequod encounters a ship called the Bachelor, and the contrast between the two ships’ captains and crews is striking. For one thing, the Pequod is embarked on its fool’s errand and hemorrhaging resources, while “the Bachelor had met with the most surprising success; all the more wonderful, for that while cruising in the same seas numerous other vessels had gone entire months without securing a single fish” (*Moby-Dick* 536). The Bachelor glides effortlessly through seas that are fruitless and hazardous to others, just as the Temple bachelors live in ease while tradesmen hurry and worry. Sure enough, the dinner-party, thrown in one barrister’s attic apartment, is all-male. Melville’s narrator muses at length on the history of the Knights Templar, who built nearby Temple Church and settled the surrounding area, and tries to see a connection between those Templars and the Temple’s current denizens. The link, he finds, is in bachelorhood, and in a perhaps overzealous commitment to pleasure:

> We know indeed—sad history recounts it—that a moral blight tainted at last this sacred Brotherhood. Though no sworded foe might outskill them in the fence, yet the worm of luxury crawled beneath their guard, gnawing the core of knightly troth, nibbling the monastic vow, till at last the monk’s austerity relaxed to wassailing, and the sworn knights-bachelors grew to be but hypocrites and rakes (PB 203).

Melville uses “luxury” here in both its older sense of lechery, as the Templars were accused of sexual license, and its later sense of inessential expense. It is money that brought the medieval Templars down, and money pervades Melville’s portrayal of modern-day residents of the Temple. It’s hard to know what, as a skeptical but committed Protestant, Melville truly thought of the Knights Templar; the passage above may
indicate that he absorbed some of the prejudices of his era. The narrator of “Paradise” muses that “Brian de Bois-Guilbert was a Templar, I believe,” referring to the attempted rapist in Sir Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe* who has his victim accused of witchcraft when she resists him (PB 203). In the 19th century, just as French historians were reviving the question of the Templars’ heresy,\(^7\) in the English-speaking world Scott’s portrayal cemented the popular notion of the Templars as having been undone by uncontrolled sexuality, or “contending passions” (Scott 412). Melville is more explicitly anti-Templar in *Israel Potter*, written at around the same time as the diptych stories; when Israel is locked in a coffin-like chamber formerly used by the Templars to punish rebellious members of their order, he reflects that “the domestic discipline of this order was rigid and merciless in the extreme” (Browne 44, IP 71).

When the Order of the Templars was disbanded in the early 14th century, its members were accused of various forms of blasphemy and institutionalized homosexuality and were often condemned to death. Contemporary historians tend to discount any admissions of guilt in those proceedings, as confessions were obtained under the Inquisition’s torture,\(^7\) but in Melville’s time the notion that the Knights Templar incorporated homosexual sex into their rituals was widely accepted (Rowland 1969 393-4). Outlandish accusations aside, at the very least the Templars succumbed to what is now known in military and business circles as “mission-creep”: Over its two centuries of activity, the order abandoned its original identity of warrior-monks charged with protecting pilgrims to the holy sites in Jerusalem and became a league of professional fundraisers. These fundraisers evolved into a prototype for international bankers, safeguarding the valuables of nobles on crusade and issuing letters of credit—a
business that eventually alienated cash-strapped monarchs and made the order a tempting target for dissolution and liquidation. When Melville jokes that today’s Templars are a far cry from their monastic predecessors, he is playing on the evolution that the Order of the Knights Templar itself underwent: “[Q]uite unprepared were we to learn that Knights-Templars … were so entirely secularized as to be reduced from carving out immortal fame in glorious battling for the Holy Land, to the carving of roast-mutton at a dinner-board” (PB 203). Melville proceeds to suck some mild comedic juice out of the notion of an armed knight turned modern-day bourgeois lawyer: “[T]he knight-combatant of the Saracen, breasting spear-points at Acre, now fights law-points in Westminster Hall. The helmet is a wig” (PB 204). Commentators often see this vein of humor as Melville’s condemnation of the lawyers as diminished creatures in comparison to the medieval knights, but in fact Melville makes a similar analogy regarding his beloved baby son Malcolm. In his journal entry from December 18, 1849, Melville notes:

> I stopped at a silversmith’s (corner of Craven St & Strand) & bought a solid spoon for the boy Malcolm—a fork, I mean. When he arrives to years of mastication I shall invest him with this fork—as of yore they did a young knight, with his good sword (Journals 43).

Thus, even before attending the series of dinners that inspired “The Paradise of Bachelors,” Melville made a jokey connection between heroic fighting and heroic eating. Food comes up frequently in life-loving Melville’s writing, rarely in a condemnatory context, whereas to the more fastidious Nathaniel Hawthorne, who was in England at the same time as Melville, a hearty English dinner is an expression of self-indulgence and gluttony in the national character. In “Civic Banquets,” Hawthorne suggests waggishly that even having died and gone to heaven, the typical Englishman would yearn for a full dinner:
The idea of dinner has so embedded itself among his highest and deepest characteristics, so illuminated itself with intellect and softened itself with the kindest emotions of his heart, so linked itself with Church and state, and grown so majestic with long hereditary customs and ceremonies, that, by taking it utterly away, Death, instead of putting the final touch to his perfection, would leave him infinitely less complete than we have already known him. He could not be roundly happy. Paradise, among all its enjoyments, would lack one daily felicity which his sombre little island possessed (Hawthorne 1891 363).

If Hawthorne’s satire is relatively gentle here, Melville’s is even more so: Lest his generous hosts be offended at the implication that the present-day lawyers at the Inns of Court are petty, food-obsessed creatures, Melville takes pains to offer a disclaimer that the Knights Templar were “but gruff and grouty at the best,” likely uncomfortable in their armor, with “proud, ambitious, monkish souls clamped shut,” whereas the modern-day Templar is the “best of comrades, most affable of hosts.” As a type, the sketch insists: “His wit and wine are both of sparkling brands” (PB 204). Sure enough, the dinner described in “Paradise” is unfailingly pleasant and intellectually stimulating, “a Grand Parliament of the best Bachelors in universal London” (PB 206).

Taken on its own, “The Paradise of Bachelors” is, as one critic put it, “a genial, rather Irvingesque account ... well calculated to attract the genteel American reader by its pleasant portrait of an older, more picturesque society” (Fogle 45-6). In the description of the party, we see Melville in full mid-century magazine mode, painting a picture of cozy, if mildly unconventional, domesticity. The rooms where the dinner is held are at the top of the building, “well up toward heaven,” not unlike the cheap theater seats in “The Two Temples,” and they are charmingly low-ceilinged, with “wonderfully unpretending” furniture, which the sketch explicitly holds up to its American readers as a model for imitation: “It is a thing which every sensible American should learn from every sensible Englishman, that glare and glitter, gim-cracks and gewgaws, are not indispensable to
domestic solacement” (PB 206). Gone are the tacky horrors of Redburn’s Aladdin’s Palace; this is a London of taste and culture. The nine diners settle into this intimate, homey setting and are immediately plied with multiple courses of food—jocularly compared to a military onslaught—alternated with vast amounts of drink. The conversation is even more lavish than the refreshment and amounts to a catalogue of the rarefied gossip and specialized knowledge available to a wealthy Englishman. One guest speaks of “how mellowly he lived when a student at Oxford; with various spicy anecdotes of most frank-hearted noble lords, his liberal companions.” Another describes Flemish architecture in what sounds like alarming detail. Yet another guest “was a great frequenter of the British Museum, and knew all about the scores of wonderful antiquities, of Oriental manuscripts, and costly books without a duplicate” (208). And so on and so forth. This shameless display of cultural capital is a far cry from Redburn’s Liverpool, which has destroyed all its landmarks.

Many critics have read the bachelors’ conversation as desiccated, its tendency toward antiquarian interests a mark of the “sterility” of the Bachelors’ lives. But we must remember both the historical context of 1850s Britain and the context of Melville’s own life. The 19th century was the heyday of archaeology, and imperial Britain was at the center of the field. It is no coincidence that the bachelor with an interest in philology spends his days at the British Museum, which took much of its current form in the 1850s. The overall nature of the dinner conversation points to British dominance in several realms of scholarship, and indeed to the long history, global scope, and deeply felt ownership of high culture enjoyed at the time by Britain but not by an America that had been independent for only some 80 years. As for Melville, his journal provides evidence
that he enjoyed every minute of the dinner party that was the sketch’s inspiration, and we know from the breadth of his reading that he would have been far from unsympathetic with the group’s scholarly or antiquarian leanings. Readers on record as finding the Bachelors’ pursuits to be dry are scholars—these are professional readers, active in academic institutions in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, during periods when scholars might feel that the action is elsewhere. Melville, by contrast, did not have the opportunity to go to university; by late adolescence he was working to contribute to his family’s support. An autodidact, he was enthusiastic about all branches of knowledge and would have enjoyed immensely the mostly elevated level of the discourse.

Readers who believe the Bachelors’ discourse to be dry may also be ignoring the conventions of the mid-19th century British dinner-party, at least as described in American travelogues, which paint a picture of hearty meals where the diners’ wit and erudition provide the entertainment. Ralph Waldo Emerson, for one, visited Britain several times and captured his experiences in 1856’s *English Traits*, where he portrays English dinner conversation as an art form, albeit of an artificial, less than spontaneous variety:

The dress-dinner generates a talent of table-talk which reaches great perfection: the stories are so good, that one is sure they must have been often told before, to have got such happy turns. Hither come all manner of clever projects, bits of popular science, of practical invention, of miscellaneous humor; political, literary, and personal news; railroads, horses, diamonds, agriculture, horticulture, pisciculture, and wine. English stories, bon-mots, and the recorded table-talk of their wits, are as good as the best of the French. In America we are apt scholars, but have not yet attained the same perfection: for the range of nations from which London draws, and the steep contrasts of condition, create the picturesque in society, as broken country makes picturesque landscape, whilst our prevailing equality makes a prairie tameness: and secondly, because the usage of a dress-dinner every day at dark has a tendency to hive and produce to advantage everything good. Much attrition has worn every sentence into a bullet (387).
Emerson sounds genuinely torn here between admiration for the undeniable sophistication of the English people with whom he has dined and his suspicion, however defensive, that such culture cannot be come by honestly. With the premise that “prevailing equality makes a prairie tameness,” Emerson implies that a lavish dinner is the direct result of inequality, and cultured conversation is predicated on social injustice—the dinner and the conversation may be pleasurable, but they leave an aftertaste, one that strikes Emerson as distinctly foreign, even feudal. In fact, he opens his disquisition on English dinners with the assertion that “In an aristocratical country like England, not the Trial by Jury, but the dinner, is the capital institution” (386). If Trial by Jury is the ultimate expression of political equality, then according to Emerson dinner, and the highly educated people with whom he had it, are the products of a profoundly unequal society.

Of course, we must remember Emerson’s larger project in *English Traits*: An American writer working in the 1850s who chooses to chronicle the national characteristics of the English is by necessity writing a phantom book on American Traits as well. As admiring as Emerson’s portrait of England is, he inevitably finds evidence for the superiority of the American political and social system, and he has a vested interest in avoiding counter-evidence. Thus, Emerson adopts a faux-naïf pose, positioning Americans as “apt scholars” learning from England but having failed to attained its “perfection” in dinners and associated imperfections in other areas. In describing English dinners, Emerson does not seek to imagine an American milieu other than his own, assuming instead that “steep contrasts of condition” are absent from the United States. This elision is reminiscent of Hawthorne’s complaint in the preface to *The Marble Faun*
that American authors are at a disadvantage when writing a romance, hampered by the liberty and justice enjoyed in their country:

No author, without a trial, can conceive of the difficulty of writing a Romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a common-place prosperity, in broad and simple daylight, as is happily the case with my dear native land (854).

Both Emerson’s and Hawthorne’s writing evince a state of denial of the painful gap between rich and poor in the United States, to say nothing of that “picturesque and gloomy wrong,” slavery. Melville’s diptych sketches, by contrast, are entirely about the prosperity gap and the waters rising to engulf America’s moral high ground. When Emerson describes English dinner-parties, he quotes “the Venetian traveler of 1500”84 on the paradoxically heartless hospitality of the English:

‘And they think … no greater honor can be conferred or received than to invite others to eat with them, or to be invited themselves, and they would sooner give five or six ducats to provide an entertainment for a person, than a groat to assist him in any distress’ (386).

In *The Devil’s Dictionary*, Ambrose Bierce defines hospitality as “the virtue which induces us to feed and lodge certain persons who are not in need of food and lodging” (qtd. Bracken 10). Bierce’s irony speaks to a truth here: Both born of generosity, hospitality and charity are related but nearly opposite impulses. In the same way that a 19th-century American’s assertions about England necessarily imply counter-assertions about the United States, a disquisition on hospitality raises the issue of charity. The medieval Venetian characterizes the English as being strong on hospitality and weak on charity, and Emerson quotes him in part to imply that while uncouth Americans may not be able to throw elegant dinners, they are surely inclined to help their needy fellows, that Americans have ethics whereas the English have only etiquette. By contrast, in “Jimmy
Rose,” “Bartleby the Scrivener,” and elsewhere, Melville reveals that Americans are as able as capable as their British counterparts of ignoring their charitable impulses. That London can be a cold place is not in dispute between the two American writers, however. In fact, Melville situates the Paradise of Bachelors for his readers as being in “the stony heart of stunning London,” with an implication that London’s ancient stone buildings are but a reflection of the city’s hard-heartedness (PB 202).

This hard-heartedness expresses itself in diverse ways. The common interpretation of “The Paradise of Bachelors” is that Melville is criticizing the bachelors precisely for their being bachelors, and thus free of the burdens of family. He does mention their unmarried—and presumably celibate—state repeatedly, at one point referring to the denizens of the Temple throughout history as “Brethren of the Order of Celibacy” (PB 205). Celibacy requires the withholding of oneself and withdrawing from at least one aspect of society. In this sketch, being open to having sex means accepting the likelihood of dependants—and curtailed freedom. In the introduction to his edition of Melville’s short fiction, Jay Leyda characterizes this diptych as being about the contrast between “lighthearted irresponsibility in ‘The Paradise of Bachelors’ and burdensome responsibility in ‘The Tartarus of Maids’” (Leyda xxi). The genial dinner companions are certainly light-hearted, but to the contemporary reader, it is difficult to see lawyers, journalists, and scholars as irresponsible—these men appear to be doing their share of the world’s work. Yet Melville’s narrator suggests that unmarried men are by definition free of most of the cares of adult life:

[Y]ou could plainly see that these easy-hearted men had no wives or children to give an anxious thought. Almost all of them were travelers, too; for bachelors alone can travel freely, and without any twinges of their consciences touching desertion of the fireside.
The thing called pain, the bugbear styled trouble—those two legends seemed preposterous to their bachelor imaginations (PB 209).

The notion of pain and trouble as the stuff of legend registers to many readers as downright unfeeling. In *Moby-Dick*, when Ahab meets the captain of the Bachelor, they have a revealing exchange:

‘Come aboard, come aboard!’ cried the gay Bachelor's commander, lifting a glass and a bottle in the air.
‘Hast seen the White Whale?’ gritted Ahab in reply.
‘No; only heard of him; but don't believe in him at all,’ said the other good-humoredly. ‘Come aboard!’
‘Thou are too damned jolly. Sail on. Hast lost any men?’
‘Not enough to speak of - two islanders, that’s all; - but come aboard, old hearty, come along. I’ll soon take that black from your brow. Come along, will ye (merry’s the play); a full ship and homeward-bound’ (537-8).

The happy, charismatic captain does not see the deaths of two “islanders” as something “to speak of”; the Bachelor philosophy requires the denial of others’ suffering. Stephen Spender characterizes “The Paradise of Bachelors” as portraying “a nineteenth-century England, rich, sterile, complacent, hospitable—genially, genteelly heartless: stuffed with rich foods and surrounded with thick walls and heavy furnishings which shut out all human miseries and stifle the need for Christian charity” (61). Any number of critics chime in to note the bachelors’ selfishness and coldness, their shirking of their own responsibilities and denial of others’ reality. But if the sketch contains a hint of condemnation, is there not also a twinge of envy in the narrator’s tone? Melville was forever caught between work and family, between artistic ambition and financial necessity, and never more so than when abroad. In his journal of his 1849 trip to London, Melville records a “very painful” dilemma (*Journals* 41). He desperately misses his wife and baby, and knows that his wife wants him home. But he has also been invited by the Duke of Rutland to visit him at Belvoir Castle some three weeks hence:
It is now 3. P.M. I have had a fire made & am smoking a cigar. Would that One I
know were here. Would that the Little One too were here.—I am in a very painful
state of uncertainty. I am all eagerness to get home—I ought to be home—my
absence occasions uneasiness in a quarter where I must beseech heaven to grant
repose. Yet here I have before me an open prospect to get some curious ideas of a
style of life, which in all probability I shall never have again. I should much like
to know what the highest English aristocracy really & practically is. And the
Duke of Rutland’s cordial invitation to visit him at his Castle furnishes me with
just the thing I want. If I do not go, I am confident that hereafter I shall upbraid
myself for neglecting such an opportunity of procuring “material.” And Allan &
others will account me a ninny.—I would not debate the matter a moment, were it
not that at least three whole weeks must elapse ere I start for Belvoir Castle—
three weeks! If I could but get over them! And if the two images would only down
for that space of time.—I must light a second cigar & revolve it over again.
½ past 6. P.M. My mind is made; rather, is irrevocably resolved upon my first
determination. A visit into Leicester would be very agreeable—at least very
valuable, in one respect, to me—but the Three Weeks are intolerable. Tomorrow I
shall go down to London Dock & book myself a state-room on board the good
ship Independence (Journals 41-42).

This passage is hard to read, so stark are the choices and painful the sacrifice, as
evidenced by Melville’s needing some three hours to think over how to proceed. The
family man who wants to go home, or at least knows how anxious his wife is for his
return, must war with the professional writer in search of material, and particularly with
the man of letters who believes that the creation of great American literature requires
continued engagement with the British cultural heritage. If Melville’s yearning to visit
Belvoir Castle and experience elite British culture seems incompatible with his
essentially democratic leanings, we must remember that the Anglophile, bourgeois home
portrayed in Redburn is a close facsimile of the home in which Melville grew up. There
is no doubt that Melville’s brother Allan would think him “a ninny” for not grasping the
opportunity. We should also note that Melville’s literary career had long been
inextricable from his experiences of travel, and that in late 1849 he was running out of
voyages to mine. Paradoxically, in considering his need for literary fodder, Melville is
being the responsible family man—he is thinking not only of furthering his own career but also of supporting his wife and child. Ultimately, they are his first priority, and after several days of being wined and dined, Melville is delighted to hear from his wife: “Last night—just on the eve of my going to the Temple—a letter was left for me—from home!—All well and Barney more bouncing than ever, thank heaven” (*Journals* 45).

On top of the oft-discussed issue of whether the sketch’s bachelors do right in deciding not to marry, Melville embeds a number of bomblets in his cheerful travelogue. To begin with, the bachelors are not alone; their dinner is served by “a surprising old field-marshals (I can not school myself to call him by the inglorious name of waiter), with snowy hair and napkin, and a head like Socrates” (*PB* 207). While the snowy napkin points to the waiter’s professionalism, his snowy hair raises an uncomfortable issue: The elderly waiter is walking up five flights of stairs to bring each course of food.

Furthermore, while the “field-marshals” appellation and initial comparison to Socrates87 could be respectful, the fact that the narrator continues to refer to the waiter as “Socrates” thereafter in the sketch is disturbingly reminiscent of the Southern slaveowners’ ironic joke of naming slaves for Roman emperors and figures from classical literature. As one critic puts it, Socrates’s “real name, like the class structure underlying Paradise, is forever repressed” (Wiegman 739). The waiter’s demeanor raises questions as well; the narrator notes of the older man that “[a]midst all the hilarity of the feast, intent on important business, he disdained to smile. Venerable man!” (*PB* 207). While a superficial reading might conclude that the serious-faced waiter is unhappy or disapproves of the proceedings, he is actually doing his job to the highest standard. An experienced waiter in Victorian England would know better than to seem to be listening to the dinner
conversation going on around him. The narrator’s observation reveals his American assumptions about appropriate behavior for servants. In 1832’s *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, Frances Trollope complains that good help is hard to find in Ohio:

The greatest difficulty in organizing a family establishment in Ohio, is getting servants, or, as it is there called, ‘getting help’, for it is more than petty treason to the Republic, to call a free citizen a *servant*. The whole class of young women, whose bread depends upon their labour, are taught to believe that the most abject poverty is preferable to domestic service (59).

Perhaps because of this cultural disconnect, when Trollope finally finds servants, they do not stay in her employ for long:

One of these was a pretty girl, whose natural disposition must have been gentle and kind; but her good feelings were soured, and her gentleness turned to morbid sensitiveness, by having heard a thousand and a thousand times that she was as good as any other lady, that all men were equal, and women too, and that it was a sin and a shame for a free-born American to be treated like a servant.

When she found she was to dine in the kitchen, she turned up her pretty lip, and said, ‘I guess that’s ’cause you don’t think I’m good enough to eat with you. You’ll find that won’t do here.’ … I did everything [sic] in my power to conciliate and make her happy, but I am sure she hated me (60).

Whether the reader’s sympathies should be with Trollope or her servant is debatable; what seems indisputable is that in 19th-century America the rhetoric of political equality colored the master-servant relationship, creating no end of cross-cultural misunderstanding for recent transplants from England. Trollope is shocked that her servants expect to eat at the table with her family; the servant is shocked that she is expected to eat in the kitchen. That “You’ll find that won’t do here” speaks volumes:

Local custom is not on Trollope’s side. By contrast, in unabashedly hierarchical England a servant’s holding himself aloof from the proceedings at his employer’s dinner-table is a mark of training and discipline. That Melville’s narrator finds the waiter’s impassivity at all remarkable simply reveals his own provinciality, which is reinforced by his offering
the possibility that the servant lends his dignity to the event, that Socrates is in the position of arbiter of taste and respectability: “I am quite sure, from the scrupulous gravity and austerity of his air, that had Socrates, the field-marshal, perceived aught of indecorum in the company he served, he would have forthwith departed without giving warning” (PB 208). It is a literary cliché that the upper classes rely on their servants to enforce their status and the etiquette that maintains it. However, the narrator’s assumption that a servant who feels his dignity has been offended will leave without notice is based on American biases—an experienced, well-trained English servant would show no such insubordination or reverse-snobbery. What the narrator gets right here is that the silent Socrates has no voice in a story about highly articulate people.

The Inns of Court are haunted by other silent figures as well. The narrator mentions that Samuel Johnson resided in the Temple, as did “that undoubted bachelor and rare good soul, Charles Lamb” (PB 205). One of the dinner-guests hails from Gray’s Inn, where “Lord Verulam” (Francis Bacon) once lived (PB 206). This literary name-dropping serves multiple purposes. First, Melville is trying to appeal to his genteel American readers, pointing to the cultural richness of the place being described. Second, he is pointing to touchstones in a tradition that he is attempting to write his own way into. Finally, he is continuing his exploration of the complexities of work, family, and money. Fans of literary gossip will know that Johnson, Lamb, and Bacon represent various models for a career in writing—and for family life. Like Melville, Samuel Johnson was born into prosperity, but his father fell into debt. Also like Melville, due to financial difficulties Johnson was not able to complete his education and initially tried his hand at teaching. Johnson labored as a Grub Street jobber for some two decades before his
Dictionary of the English Language earned him recognition and financial security. In his early 20s he married a much-older widow and spent her entire fortune on starting a school that quickly failed. Throughout his work on the Dictionary, Johnson felt guilty that he and his wife were living in poverty and in frantic disorder, and when she died he was despondent. The narrator of “The Paradise of Bachelors” characterizes Johnson as “that nominal Benedick and widower but virtual bachelor,” because of the several years that Johnson and his wife lived apart, but the fact remains that Johnson worked under financial worries and family pressures, just as Melville did (PB 205). Francis Bacon’s career was similarly mixed, and his marriage much worse: Bacon started strong, serving as a Member of Parliament, Attorney General, and eventually Lord Chancellor. However, he lost the latter post amid accusations of bribery, a mere year after his career’s high point, the publication of the Novum Organum. Bacon was rumored to have been compromised by his wife, who came from a wealthy home and expected to be maintained in the lifestyle to which she was accustomed. Financial worries aside, Bacon’s marriage was beset by fundamental incompatibility: His wife had a longtime lover, and debate continues to rage among biographers as to whether Bacon himself was homosexual.89

Then we have Charles Lamb, dubbed “that rare good soul” in “Paradise” (205). Lamb was that rare working-class writer who succeeded in the world of English letters. In love, however, he was thwarted by his struggles with mental illness and the obligation to take care of his sister, whose emotional problems were more severe than his own. Each of these writers faced hurdles familiar to Melville: All three had problems with money and with family life. Johnson’s years of journalistic hackwork no doubt earned sympathy from Melville, who was trying to cater to magazine readers. Bacon’s rumored
homosexuality may have struck a chord as well. And Charles Lamb’s biography would certainly have resonated with Melville: Lamb’s unceasing devotion to his sister Mary, at the expense of getting married himself, may have reminded Melville of how his own family readjusted itself around his father’s breakdown and death. And Lamb’s own emotional problems would not have been foreign to Melville, who suffered several breakdowns over the course of his life. Not one of these writers achieved his highest artistic and professional ambitions, in part because personal life got in the way.

While each of the literary figures Melville cites can be seen to stand for a particular career trajectory, Charles Lamb’s role is most critical. Lamb is on Melville’s mind at the moment of inspiration; in his journal he notes explicitly that the dinner in Elm Court “recalled Lamb’s ‘Old Benchers’” (Journals 44). “The Old Benchers of the Inner Temple” is Lamb’s essay about his childhood in the Temple, where his father was the longtime assistant to a barrister. “The Old Benchers” is largely a nostalgic account, but it contains some stings, including the following portrayal of Samuel Salt, Lamb’s father’s employer:

S. had the reputation of being a very clever man, and of excellent discernment in the chamber practice of the law. I suspect his knowledge did not amount to much. When a case of difficult disposition of money, testamentary or otherwise, came before him, he ordinarily handed it over with a few instructions to his man Lovel, who was a quick little fellow, and would despatch it out of hand by the light of natural understanding, of which he had an uncommon share. It was incredible what repute for talents S. enjoyed by the mere trick of gravity. He was a shy man; a child might pose him in a minute -- indolent and procrastinating to the last degree. Yet men would give him credit for vast application in spite of himself. He was not to be trusted with himself with impunity. He never dressed for a dinner party but he forgot his sword -- they wore swords then -- or some other necessary part of his equipage. Lovel had his eye upon him on all these occasions, and ordinarily gave him his cue (124-5).
Lovel is, of course, a portrait of Lamb’s own father, who covered for his wayward employer but was never promoted to a position higher than clerk. When Melville has his narrator look to the waiter for social cues, he is echoing one of Lamb’s themes, namely that those below-stairs were often more competent than their supposed betters. Socrates the waiter could be seen as a tribute to Charles Lamb’s father, and a warning to readers not to underestimate their social inferiors. Your waiter may have the mind of a Socrates, just as your slave could have the force of a Caesar. The only mildly successful author in your midst who scratches out sketches for five dollars per page could be a genius whose output will be studied centuries hence. And a barely civilized young country may one day no longer need to pay homage to the former colonial center.

Similarly, Charles Lamb himself takes on multiple significances in the context of this sketch: He could be seen as a bachelor who missed out on life, or, conversely, as a family man whose responsibilities held him back, a literary genius who was not sufficiently appreciated in his time, or a working stiff who had to write in his free time while holding down an office job for 25 years. As we shall see even more explicitly in “The Tartarus of Maids,” in this diptych Melville explores, among so many other themes, the production of his diptychs. Geographically, the Temple is just off Fleet Street, in Melville’s time and until very recently the center of British journalism. But in metaphorical terms the Temple is miles away. When Melville refers to the Temple as a refuge from “the din and… the mud of Fleet Street,” he is portraying the Temple and its highbrow dinner parties as a retreat from the world of journalism and from the kind of writing he is now forced to do to support his family. In this sketch, the Temple is the life
of the mind, a place you need connections to rent a room in, a place Melville can only visit. Contemplating his time at the Temple, the narrator rhapsodizes:

Dear, delightful spot! Ah! When I bethink me of the sweet hours there passed, enjoying such genial hospitalities beneath those time-honored roofs, my heart only finds due utterance through poetry; and, with a sigh, I softly sing: “Carry me back to old Virginny!” (PB 205).

Critics have gone to great pains to trace the “poetry” cited here; it is a minstrel song, “De Floating Scow of Old Virginia,” which was performed by the Christy Minstrels in the late 1840s. This would initially seem like a surprising reference for Melville. In the 1840s, blackface minstrelsy was the most popular form of music in America (Saxton 3). But Melville was not always interested in what was popular; when he signed the petition for Charles Macready to perform in the Astor Place Opera House, he essentially sided with Macready and high culture against the Bowery B’hoys and popular culture (Berthold 436). Yet here Melville makes one of his typical proto-Post-Modernist moves, bringing a pop-culture reference into his story to sit alongside a catalogue of high-culture signifiers.

As we can see from the Extracts that open Moby-Dick, Melville brings an eclectic sensibility to assembling the raw materials of his fiction. But the song does additional work as well, reinforcing Melville’s commentary on—and complaint about—working life. The song’s first stanza goes as follows:

The floating scow of old Virginny
I work’d in from day to day,
A fishing ’mongst de oyster beds,
To me it was but play.
But now I’m growing very old.
I cannot work any more.
So carry me back to Old Virginny,
To Old Virginny’s shore.
We must remember the persona of the minstrel: This is a white man with a darkened face singing in the character of a former slave. When the singer rhapsodizes about work that “was but play,” he is claiming that slavery was easier than freedom. However, Melville’s reference here puts a new twist on that notion of work that feels like “play”—this is precisely the life that the scholar-lawyer-gentleman bachelors enjoy. They all work hard, are productive members of society in one way or another, yet devote their time essentially to amusing themselves. The narrator is understandably jealous of this lifestyle, just as Melville would have liked to be independently wealthy, free to participate in high culture and churn out ambitious novels regardless of their reception. The yearning here is for work that is enjoyable, freedom from the worries of caring for oneself and one’s family, and the pain and pleasure of serving that impossible master: High Art.

“De Old Scow” follows another minstrel-song convention, that of nostalgia for the old home. Blackface minstrels routinely sang (in the persona of former slaves) about wanting to return to the plantation and serve their beloved Master (Saxton 18). This yearning for a return to slavery was blurred into a more generalized sadness and longing for a more innocent time and place. As America industrialized and rural Northeasterners moved West or to urban centers, “the South became symbolically their old home: the place where simplicity, happiness, all the things we have left behind, exist outside of time” (Saxton 14). Given the transatlantic context of “The Paradise of Bachelors,” when Melville invokes the longstanding nostalgia for the South in American popular music, he also hints at a more literary, high-culture nostalgia toward a different Old Home: England. Could Melville be saying that Americans were better off under British rule, like well-cared for slaves on a prelapsarian plantation? “The Paradise of Bachelors,” even
more than “Temple Second,” is a love-song to the British motherland. It might seem odd to express this affection for Britain through as American a form as the minstrel song, but by the time this sketch was written minstrelsy was nearly as popular in Britain as it was in the United States, in part from a new-found British “curiosity about life in the New World, and included in this was a desire to learn more about ‘Negro’ character and culture” (Pickering 191). Perhaps in quoting a piece of American culture that had become well-known on both sides of the Atlantic, Melville was imagining a new position for his own writing, at the center of an emerging cosmopolitan Anglophone culture, one in which British readers are as interested in American scenes and themes as Americans were in their British counterparts.

It is also likely that Melville is not only citing the themes and audiences of minstrelsy but is also employing some of its strategies, particularly those of play and indirection. Pickering argues that “the minstrel clown allowed a taste of the repressed, providing a means for what was repressed to be staged” (196). Similarly, Saxton claims of blackface minstrelsy that “the genre provided a kind of underground theater where the blackface ‘convention’ rendered permissible topics which would have been taboo on the legitimate stage or in the press” (4). These forbidden topics included homosexuality, class hostility, and political commentary. Numerous readers of “The Paradise of Bachelors” have detected hints that the bachelors are homosexual; perhaps the nod to minstrel performances serves as a quiet confirmation to keyed-in readers. Hints at the excesses of the medieval Templars and coy suggestions of parallels to the modern-day denizens of the Temple may be this kind of clue as well. Given the galvanizing, if macabre, second
half to this diptych, one may also read the inclusion of a minstrel ditty in the sketch as a gesture toward excluded populations, from African-Americans to women.

Like “The Paradise of Bachelors,” “The Tartarus of Maids” has its origin in an experience from Melville’s life: In 1851, Melville traveled to David Carson’s Defiance Mill in Dalton, Massachusetts, to purchase a bulk order of paper (Sealts 710). If, upon reading the diptych’s first half, Robert Francis Cooke may have reconsidered the wisdom of inviting Melville to dinner, one can only imagine the mill proprietor’s reaction if he recognized his own factory in “Tartarus.” In this sketch, the narrator is a New England “seedsman” who travels to a paper factory to purchase envelopes for his seeds. It is clear from the start that something is amiss. The winter landscape is deeply sinister, so much so that the approach to the mill is explicitly described as “Dantean” (PB 211). The factory is near the bottom of a hollow called the Devil’s Dungeon, through which runs Blood River. Whereas the factory Melville visited in life is near Mount Greylock, in the sketch the nearest mountain is “Woedolor Mountain,” no doubt a sadder, grimmer geological extrusion (PB 210). Melville takes great pains to establish an unconvincing parallel between the approach to the factory and the transition from Fleet Street to the Temple in London. After pointing out that each spot adjoins a busy road but is itself secluded, and comparing a factory tower to the Temple Church, the narrator notes of the paper-mill, “This is the very counterpart of the Paradise of Bachelors, but snowed upon, and frost-painted to a sepulcher” (PB 214). The allusion is to Matthew 23:27: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whitened sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead [men's] bones, and of all
uncleanness.” In other words, appearances are not to be trusted: This space looks reminiscent of the homey apartment complexes of the Temple, but it is a grave.

From this ominous beginning, Melville builds a Poe-vian atmosphere of creeping discomfort, and a landscape that seems to have colored—or rather, discolored—its human inhabitants. On first entering the courtyard, the narrator addresses a young woman who is hurrying past, but she doesn’t answer. A second silent woman lets him inside the factory. Something is wrong with these women. When the narrator walks around the factory, what he finds there gives him pause: “At rows of blank-looking counters sat rows of blank-looking girls, with blank, white folders in their blank hands, all blankly folding blank paper” (PB 215). The affectless operatives echo the snow-white landscape, reinforcing the sense of dread that it evokes. There is an inside joke here—what could be more terrifying to a writer than vast quantities of blank paper? But even beyond writerly anxiety around the blank page, in Melville, famously, the color of horror is not black or red but white. In *Moby-Dick*’s chapter titled “The Whiteness of the Whale,” Melville reverses the traditional symbolism of black and white, arguing that whiteness is frightening in itself:

> [Y]et for all these accumulated associations, with whatever is sweet, and honorable, and sublime, there yet lurks an elusive something in the innermost idea of this hue, which strikes more of panic to the soul than that redness which affrights in blood.

> This elusive quality it is, which causes the thought of whiteness, when divorced from more kindly associations, and coupled with any object terrible in itself, to heighten that terror to the furthest bounds (205).

Melville goes on to conclude that whiteness is alarming because it looks like the absence of color but is in fact the aggregate of all the colors in the spectrum (212). Thus,
whiteness reminds us of the gap between our perceptions and reality and can make us wonder where else our senses—and our common sense—are leading us astray.

“The Tartarus of Maids” is a white place populated by pale people. In this sketch, Melville departs from the only slightly idealized realism of “The Paradise of Bachelors,” making a foray into the horror genre. While exploring the factory, the narrator notices two young women at a machine. One feeds blank paper in; the other takes ruled paper out. Then he sees them change places:

I looked upon the first girl’s brow, and saw it was young and fair; I looked upon the second girl’s brow, and saw it was ruled and wrinkled. Then, as I still looked, the two -- for some small variety to the monotony -- changed places; and where had stood the young, fair brow, now stood the ruled and wrinkled one (215).

At this moment, the narrator sees that the young woman will grow old, presumably before her time, as she works endlessly at this machine, and he sees the machine ruling the women in both senses of the word, lining their foreheads and dictating their lives. Not only do the machines set the rhythm of the work, they act upon—literally inscribe the bodies of—the women working at them. Fictions of the time often depict damage done to factory girls by their work. In this case, however, Melville is not only talking about the harm that industrialization does to laborers, but also more broadly about what all kinds of work do to people. The factory-girl’s brow becoming lined is an image we have seen before; during the opening of “The Paradise of Bachelors,” the narrator notes the “Benedick tradesmen are hurrying by, with ledger-lines ruled along their brows” (PB 202). Having to worry about money, having to worry about work, physically alters—and mars—workers of all stripes.

Melville is in line with his peers in being melodramatically anti-industrialization. 19th-century portrayals of factories veer toward extreme utopian or
dystopian perspectives, depending on the author’s sense of the extent to which American life is changing, or has been disrupted by the rise of manufacturing. On the utopian end of the spectrum, in the chapter of *American Notes* describing his visit to Lowell, Massachusetts, Charles Dickens celebrates the condition of the operatives working in the town’s many factories: “They were healthy in appearance, many of them remarkably so, and had the manners and deportment of young women: not of degraded brutes of burden” (*AN* 76-77). Furthermore, the factories themselves are places where one would want to work:

> The rooms in which they worked, were as well ordered as themselves. In the windows of some, there were green plants, which were trained to shade the glass; in all, there was as much fresh air, cleanliness, and comfort, as the nature of the occupation would possibly admit of (77).

Those green plants are essential, mediating a compromise between the agrarian ideal and the industrial reality. The young women of the mills—many of them transplants from rural regions—may work at machines, but they are not alienated from nature; they have sun and greenery in their workspace. Dickens also emphasizes the degree of culture achieved by the factory workers who subscribe to circulating libraries and contribute to the *Lowell Offering* literary magazine. When *American Notes* was published, Dickens’ American critics accused him of being selective in his memory as well as politically motivated in his criticisms of American manners and institutions, but in this instance Dickens presents American factories as a model for British imitation:

> In this brief account of Lowell, and inadequate expression of the gratification it yielded me, and cannot fail to afford to any foreigner to whom the condition of such people at home is a subject of interest and anxious speculation, I have carefully abstained from drawing a comparison between these factories and those of our own land. …

> The contrast would be a strong one, for it would be between the Good and Evil, the living light and deepest shadow (80).
Claiming not to be drawing a comparison between British and American factories—while paradoxically still doing so—Dickens notes that such a comparison would be unfair because

Many of the circumstances whose strong influence has been at work for years in [British] manufacturing towns have not arisen [in Lowell]; and there is no manufacturing population in Lowell, so to speak: for these girls (often the daughters of small farmers) come from other States, remain a few years in the mills, and then go home for good (80).

The implication is that because Lowell is still a new community, founded some twenty years before Dickens’ visit, and also because being a factory operative is considered a temporary position for unmarried women rather than a long-term career, there is no permanent urban underclass in the town. There may be something of a writer’s fantasy at work here. Peter Keating argues that because “the industrial labourer was the product of a new kind of environment,” the factory had no literary precedent, and thus 19th-century novelists had trouble portraying factories and factory workers (9). If there is no established way to portray factory life—the work and the problems of the workers—it is easier to claim that there are no problems in this new way of life, that the work itself is “but play,” as in the minstrel song quoted in “Paradise.”

Another possibility is that, rather than attempting to deny the suffering of factory hands worldwide, Dickens exaggerates the rosiness of the American factory system to highlight abuses at home. Having famously toiled in a factory as a child, Dickens was concerned about the condition of industrial workers in Britain, and he may be inflating the virtue of American factories to give a reformist slap to his own country. After all, there is no idealization in Dickens’ portrayal of an English industrial town in Hard Times, published some twelve years after American Notes:
It was a town of red brick, or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it; but as matters stood, it was a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage. It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got uncoiled. It had a black canal in it, and a river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye, and vast piles of building full of windows where there was a rattling and a trembling all day long, and where the piston of the steam-engine worked monotonously up and down, like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness (20-21).

In contrast to the light, air, and flora of the Lowell factory, this is a vision of Hell in line with William Blake’s “dark Satanic mills.” Dickens takes pains to show the supposed marks of civilization as being in fact emblematic of savagery. The town’s buildings, stained by air pollution, look like “the painted face of a savage.” The steam-engine, the height of modern technology, looks like nothing so much as a deranged elephant. If the reader imagines England’s industrial cities as signs of progress, Dickens argues that they demonstrate a regression to an uncivilized state. This is the same paradox that led Upton Sinclair to title his 1906 exposé of the meatpacking industry *The Jungle*.

Melville makes a similar point in the “Try-Works” chapter of *Moby-Dick*. Describing the ship-board rendering of the blubber of a slain whale, Melville comments on the fact that the whale’s own fat is used to fuel the rendering process:

Like a plethoric burning martyr, or a self-consuming misanthrope, once ignited the whale supplies his own fuel and burns by his own body. Would that he consumed his own smoke! for his smoke is horrible to inhale, and inhale it you must, and not only that, but you must live in it for the time. It has an unspeakable, wild, Hindoo odor about it, such as may lurk in the vicinity of funereal pyres. It smells like the left wing of the day of judgment; it is an argument for the pit (462).

Melville personifies whales at various times throughout *Moby-Dick*, and for various purposes, but here he is more specific, comparing the burning whale carcass to Sati (or suttee), the practice of Hindu widows self-immolating on their husbands’ funeral pyres.
This practice was already illegal in Melville’s time but resonated strongly in the Victorian imagination. The juxtaposition of the fuel that fires the most modern of technologies with a primitive, irrational religious practice emphasizes that our civilization and its relation to the natural environment may not be as advanced as we would like to think. If the burning whale smells no different from a burning human being, then the whaling industry, meant to provide fuel for the machinery that will advance humanity, is portrayed as murderous, the dead whale a stand-in for the industry’s human sacrifices. This image that Ishmael conjures of a woman being burned alive is a precursor to the factory operatives in “Tartarus,” who are instead buried alive in the sepulchral factory.109

The factory in “Tartarus” is the converse but not the opposite of the infernal try-works in Moby-Dick; in Dante’s Inferno, the ninth circle of Hell is an icy lake into which traitors are frozen, so here the icy New England landscape stands in for a hell-scape.

Working conditions in the factory are extremely hazardous. Looking at the women sharpening the blades of the machine that tears up rags for papermaking, Melville’s narrator muses: “Their own executioners; themselves whetting the very swords that slay them” (PB 219). To make the paper, the women must tear up rags, and as they do so, they inhale their fibers: “The air swam with the fine, poisonous particles, which from all sides darted, subtilely, as motes in sunbeams, into the lungs” (PB 217). This is an image common to Parliamentary investigations and industrial fiction. In Elizabeth Gaskell’s North and South, a dying factory worker describes the industrial waste that has accumulated in her lungs thus:

‘Fluff,’ repeated Bessy. ‘Little bits, as fly off fro’ the cotton, when they’re carding it, and fill the air till it looks all fine white dust. They say it winds round the lungs, and tightens them up. Anyhow, there’s many a one as works in a carding-
room, that falls into a waste, coughing and spitting blood, because they’re just poisoned by the fluff” (102).110

Between Dickens’ praise of Lowell and Melville’s portrayal of the factory as an unredeemable Hell is the pragmatic, middle-of-the-road approach of Elizabeth Gaskell’s industrial fiction. Typically, Gaskell presents a problem and immediately thereafter offers a solution, complete with costs and functional specifications. Prompted by Margaret Hale, Bessy continues:

‘Some folks have a great wheel at one end o’ their carding-rooms to make a draught, and carry off th’ dust; but that wheel costs a deal o’ money—five or six hundred pound, maybe, and brings in no profit; so it’s but a few of th’ masters as will put ’em up’ (102).

Melville, on the other hand, is not in the solution-providing line. We see this in all his short stories that include visits to the poor. Having seen, heard, and tasted the worst of the Coulters’ life in “Poor Man’s Pudding,” Melville’s narrator exits the scene, reflecting that he “could stay no longer to hear of sorrows for which the sincerest sympathies could give no adequate relief.” He leaves “no pay for hospitalities gratuitous and honorable as those of a prince,” for “such offerings would have been more than declined; charity resented” (PP 172). Unable to comfort Martha Coulter and fearing that any material help would offend her pride, the narrator removes himself from her presence, a far cry from the Sedgwick characters who stay and prate on with practical advice. Melville’s innovation in the literature of “poor visits” is that his stories, like his characters, offer neither charity nor advice. Instead, his narrator models silent observation. While some critics111 read this tendency as a moral failure among Melville’s characters, from the seedsman who doesn’t lift a finger to help the factory operatives to Bartleby’s timid boss, it is possible that
Melville is criticizing the intrusiveness of social reformers—and the uncompromising tone of much reform literature.

One of the tropes of reform fiction that this sketch explores is the notion that the atmosphere in factories is inappropriately sexual. Patricia Johnson points out that in Victorian novels there “is often a blurring of the lines between prostitutes and working-class women involved in non-domestic kinds of labor” (5). She attributes this to the fact that Parliamentary bluebooks on the state of various industries consistently portrayed working-class women as highly sexualized, often prematurely so (24-27). Across the Atlantic, in the early days of America’s industrialization, numerous non-fiction accounts of factory girls who were seduced and in some cases murdered were published (Allen 70n24).112 Scholars such as Tom Allen and Laura Hapke see factory girls in novels as “the ‘successors’ of the imperiled heroines of sensation novels” (Allen 56). Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna’s The Wrongs of Women (1842), for instance, includes “The Forsaken Home,” a novella about sexual harassment at a factory. In “The Tartarus of Maids,” Melville takes the cliché of the factory as an uncomfortably sexual place to new heights, and in a new direction, when he describes the process of paper being made from pulp. Many readers have noted that in this sketch the production of paper seems much like human reproduction. The pulp that goes into the machine is “white, wet, woolly-looking stuff, not unlike the albuminous part of an egg, soft-boiled,” and it is poured from two separate vats into “one common channel,” through which it flows into an enormous machine (PB 218). The machine is in “a room, stifling with a strange, blood-like, abdominal heat” (PB 218). From pulp to paper, the production process takes “nine minutes,” an echo of the nine months of human gestation (PB 219). When the paper
finally comes out of the machine, the narrator hears “a scissory sound… as of some cord
being snapped” (PB 220). Critics are split as to whether Melville’s 19th-century readers
would have caught all the bodily references in this sketch, but the comparison between
industrial production and human reproduction seems fairly explicit. The purpose of the
comparison, however, is less obvious. Melville may be playing on the idea of the factory
as an inappropriately sexualized place, showing the absurdity of the argument by taking it
literally—what if factory work actually involved mixing “albuminous” fluids in an
“abdominal” space? After caricaturing the reformist argument, Melville refutes it
entirely, demonstrating that the operatives are the opposite of sexualized. No matter how
explicitly, literally, cartoonishly sexual the factory itself is, the women who work there
are frigid.

In a different register entirely, Melville is also meditating on that other mass-
product of the young republic, American citizens, and wondering what kind of citizen
these blank-faced maidens could one day mother. Watching the blank sheets of paper
being produced, the narrator muses: “I could not but bethink me of that celebrated
comparison of John Locke, who, in demonstration of his theory that man had no innate
ideas, compared the human mind at birth to a sheet of blank paper” (PB 221). Noting that
the paper “born” of the great machine is the cheap sort known as foolscap, the narrator
fingers the “moist, warm sheets, which continually were being delivered into the
woman’s waiting hands” and asks his guide: “Don’t you turn out anything but foolscap
at this machine?” The response is telling: “Oh, sometimes, but not often, we turn out
finer work—cream-laid and royal sheets, we call them. But foolscap being in chief
demand, we turn out foolscap most” (PB 220). A young democracy will produce some
“royal sheets,” natural aristocrats, but like every other society, it primarily needs worker bees, and childrearing and education are largely geared in that direction. As Fisher argues, “The excessive amount of fools-cap, in contrast to the more aristocratic ‘cream-laid and royal sheets,’ conveys Melville’s pessimistic view of that divine, democratic average that so inspired Whitman at the same moment in our history” (1971 93). In an 1851 letter to Hawthorne, Melville admitted that he had taken “a dislike to all mankind -- in the mass” (Letters 127). Yet America is meant to be dedicated to the democratic self-expression of the mass. Thompson avers that “the mill represents America itself, indiscriminately taking in all of the new material which comes its way, pressing it into molds of uncompromising conformity, and turning it out in standard editions in which little allowance is made for errata” (41). Can we hope for Americans to be more than fools’ cap? Melville might—one could also read the young country as the tabula rasa, in Melville’s words “something destined to be scribbled on, but what sort of characters no soul might tell” (PB 221). It is a 19th-century cliche to see the Old World as saturated and the New World as empty, but in the mid-1850s, and perhaps even today, the country was still in the process of developing its own culture. We could see the blank paper being produced in the new America as indicative, as Fisher puts it, of “cultural and intellectual barrenness,” or we could see the blank pages as an opportunity for a young writer who wants to participate in the creation of a national literature (Fisher 1971 95).

As to the nature of that national literature, in his incorporation into this sketch of imagery from Dante, from the human body, and from the ultra-modern workplace, Melville may again be advocating art that has the same quality of overstuffed hybridity as the monument to Admiral Nelson in Liverpool and Moby-Dick. Why wouldn’t American
literature contain the very latest ideas from every realm of knowledge? Melville came to take an intellectual interest in the work of his various physician friends, especially Dr. Augustus Kinley Gardner, who had literary interests but had also gone to Paris to study “obstetrics and lunacy,” and published on gestation and parturition (Young 220). We know from Moby-Dick’s “Extracts” how broad Melville’s reading was; this sketch gave him an opportunity to meditate on newfound scientific knowledge.

In addition to his commitment to inclusive, intellectually catholic art that could encompass scientific thought, Melville had personal reasons to be thinking about reproduction while writing this sketch. Several commentators note that Elizabeth Melville was pregnant during its composition, and that, given the state of his literary reputation and the family finances, Melville may have greeted that news with ambivalence. Young, for one, sees “Tartarus” as “a revelation of the depth and passion of the author’s frustration that anything more—pregnancy, children, family—should interfere with his doomed, Dantean determination to get by his pen recognition he had already earned” (224). Seen in one light, the paper factory, with its “dark colossal water-wheel, grim with its one immutable purpose,” stands in for the inexorable mechanics of generation (PB 216). This interpretation is based on the view that reproduction is trouble and that this sketch is opposed to it. After all, in “The Paradise of Bachelors” the “Benedick tradesmen” are consumed with worry over “the rise of bread and the fall of babies” (PB 202). However, we also know that Melville was devoted to his family.

Given the love Melville felt for his own family, he may be making a different argument altogether in this sketch. As tempting as it is to see the river of blood and the “abdominal” room as indicative of male horror of the female body and its sexual
functions, the threat in this story may not be femaleness so much as the denial—or refusal—of femaleness, and with it the refusal of personhood. The paper-making machine’s gestational production process could be seen as having taken the place of real reproduction in the lives of the young women who work at it. Read in this light, “Tartarus” is a play on the archetypical horror-story theme of artificial intelligence, of “going back to the source of life only to discover that ‘life’ is obsolete, that the ‘artificial’ and ‘mechanical’ has triumphed completely over the ‘natural and ‘organic’” (Fisher 1971 87). The machine has a life of its own, while the factory operatives are effectively being murdered by being kept out of the reproductive cycle. In both conventional factory fiction and in reality, most young women working in factories eventually left to marry. Melville is positing what it would be like if they never left, never married, were stuck forever. At the time that Melville wrote this story, his unmarried sisters Helen and Augusta were living with him and his family. He saw at first hand how hard Helen tried to find a husband. Despite her best efforts, she was thirty-six before she married in 1854 (Robertson-Lorant 19). Pious and shy, Augusta was engaged once but never married. Thus, while Herman Melville was writing *Moby-Dick*, he was living *Pride and Prejudice*, surrounded by sisters who were intelligent and kind but not particularly sought after due to defects of person or personality. In a family where money was tight, this was a grave, grinding worry, one that bleeds into “The Tartarus of Maids.” In the sketch, the women are destroyed by remaining “girls,” and their arrested development has national implications. Allen observes that since nothing changes in Tartarus, the sense of displacement that other factory fictions resolve through the marriage plot becomes a permanent condition… Hence, while [conventional heroines of industrial fiction] illustrate strategies for recuperating traditional versions of the self and rehabilitating them for a modern
environment, Melville’s heroines make estrangement itself a distinguishing mark of identity (65).

Seen in this light, the factory operatives’ remaining unmarried is not just a personal but a national tragedy; it means that industrialization has permanently altered the American self and made the workplace rather than the family the basic unit of social organization.

The maids are not the only ones in this story whose unmarried state is problematic. While “The Paradise of Bachelors” seems to celebrate the independent lifestyle of the educated and wealthy bachelors, in “The Tartarus of Maids” bachelorhood is overtly demonic. After the London dinner-party, the narrator notes, “you could plainly see that these easy-hearted men had no wives or children to give an anxious thought,” and this seems to be a compliment (209). In the New England factory, on the other hand, the “dark-complexioned” factory-owner is nick-named “Old Bach,” short for “Old Bachelor” but reminiscent of “Old Scratch,” a nick-name for the devil (216). “Better to marry than to burn,” warned St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians. While Paul of Tarsus was worried that the unmarried would fall into sexual temptation, Melville is more concerned with the temptations of selfishness and exploitation. Old Bach has managed to remain aloof from women, and this aloofness in his private life has translated to indifference to the suffering of his employees. Asked why the women in the factory are referred to as “girls,” the factory owner responds that the appellation is due to none of the women being married. He does not hire “‘married women; they are apt to be off-and-on too much. We want none but steady workers: twelve hours to the day, day after day, through the three hundred and sixty-five days, excepting Sundays, Thanksgiving and Fast-days” (PB 222). This is the contemporary American workplace in embryo—human beings are resources, and no employer wants workers who balance family life with the workplace. Hiring only
unmarried women, Old Bach creates an economic incentive for his “girls” to remain single and possibly traps them in that state. And his plan works: The factory-owner’s ironically named assistant, Cupid, who seems on track to grow into an old bachelor himself, explains that the old woman tending to the paper as it falls out of the large machine is a former nurse, “‘[b]ut the business is poor in these parts, and she’s left it’” (PB 220). Industrial production has replaced reproduction.

What is wrong, one might ask today, with women choosing paid employment over the unpaid drudgery of housework? The issue may be that factory labor has replaced reproductive labor in these women’s lives without adequate compensation: “[T]he factory does not create women’s enslavement—it merely converts them from biological to economic slaves” (Petrulionis 9). As difficult as parenthood can be, it has its rewards as well, whereas it seems unlikely that the blank-faced, zombie-like girls enjoy even a moment of their work in the mill. It is also possible that Melville is making a sweeping and subversive point, namely that the factory operatives can’t win: Both mass-production and reproduction are enterprises that oppress women. During the period in which the sketch was written, American women could not own property; their wages belonged to their husbands or the males in their families. It was also known during Melville’s time that many if not most of the women working in factories did so to fund the education and career ambitions of some male. In her memoir of the early days of Lowell’s textile mills, Harriet Robinson recalls that

The most prevailing incentive to labor was to secure the means of education for some male member of the family. To make a gentleman of a brother or a son, to give him a college education, was the dominant thought in the minds of a great many of these provident millgirls. I have known more than one to give every cent of her wages, month after month, to her brother, that he might get the education necessary to enter some profession. I have known a mother to work years in this
way for her boy. I have known women to educate by their earnings young men who were not sons or relatives (77, italics Robinson’s).

This theme of women working to support the careers of the men in their lives became a trope of factory fiction in the 1830s and 40s. In a typical narrative gesture, in Ariel Cummings’s *The Factory Girl* much emphasis is placed on the fact that the happy ending is due to the factory girl’s work in the factory – her brother gets to be a minister (Allen 54). In “The Tartarus of Maids,” Melville may be questioning the fairness of such a bargain, in which a young woman does difficult manual work for extraordinarily long hours so that the men in her life can transcend their social class. There may even have been an element of self-castigation in this inquiry: To forward his own literary career, Melville put his sisters and his wife to work in making fair copies of the manuscripts he meant to send out to publishers (Robertson-Lorant 27). This sketch hints that he may have been aware of the strenuousness of his demands.

The primary relation between the narrator and the women in the factory is one of empathy; he identifies so closely with the operatives that he begins to take on their coloring. The women in the factory are deathly pale; both they and the paper they produce are white. The river flowing out of the mill, on the other hand, is blood-red. The narrator begins to put two and two together, wondering “that red waters should turn out pale chee--paper, I mean” (217). He nearly slips and says “cheeks,” as he realizes that like the Phlegethon, the river below the factory is flowing red with the life-blood of the women in the factory. Part-way through his tour, the narrator removes his scarf, only to reveal that he too is growing white-faced: “Two white spots like the whites of your eyes,” exclaims the factory-owner, “man, your cheeks are frozen” (216). Whereas the narrator of “Poor Man’s Pudding” merely feels bad when faced with the Coulters’
predicament, the narrator of Tartarus is, as one critic puts it, affected “physically and viscerally as his body mimics the appearance of the maids” (Weyler 463). Not only does the narrator immediately lose his color, but as soon as he walks into the rag room, he begins coughing. At the sketch’s end, he has not recovered. “‘Your cheeks look whitish yet,’” says the factory-owner (222). This image may have its origin in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s story “Rappaccini’s daughter,” in which a young woman who has been brought up among poisonous plants becomes herself so poisonous that she leaves a white hand-print on a man she touches, indicating that any contact with her is poisonous. In a similar vein, Melville’s narrator’s frostbite and pallor indicate both his deep identification with the women and the factory’s contagious nature. Anton Chekhov refines this theme in his 1898 story known in English as “A Doctor’s Visit” or “A Case History.” In Chekhov’s tale, a young heiress has an undefined malady that keeps her from sleeping at night and is slowly killing her. The doctor eventually realizes that the heiress’s illness stems from the factory that she owns and her immense and unearned power over other people. The only cure would be to give up the factory and move far away.

“The Tartarus of Maids”’s criticisms of the single life imply in retrospect that there is something heartless in the independence and irresponsibility of the Temple barristers. Whereas the women in the factory remain single in order to sacrifice for their families and loved ones, the bachelors remain single precisely because they refuse to sacrifice for others. W.H. Thompson connects these heartless bachelors to the apathy with which the citizens of Liverpool greet the starving mother and children in Redburn (36). We could also link them to Harry Bolton’s uncertain reception in New York. Ultimately, in this sketch the decision not to form a family is a refusal of membership in
the human family. Fellowship and community are central concerns for Melville, and we see his concern with them again in his vivid description of the paper-making process. The “white, wet, woolly-looking” paper pulp with which the women work is reminiscent of that other Melvillian industrial goop, the spermaceti in *Moby-Dick*. In the “A Squeeze of the Hand” chapter, Melville describes the process of squeezing the lumps out of the spermaceti as follows:

Squeeze! squeeze! squeeze! all the morning long; I squeezed that sperm till I myself almost melted into it; I squeezed that sperm till a strange sort of insanity came over me; and I found myself unwittingly squeezing my co-laborers’ hands in it, mistaking their hands for the gentle globules. Such an abounding, affectionate, friendly, loving feeling did this avocation beget; that that at last I was continually squeezing their hands, and looking up into their eyes sentimentally; as much as to say,—Oh! my dear fellow beings, why should we longer cherish any social acerbities, or know the slightest ill-humor or envy! Come; let us squeeze hands all round; nay, let us all squeeze ourselves into each other; let us squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness (456).

This is work that truly is “but play,” an instance of rapprochement, even communion.

Conflating spermaceti with sperm, Melville creates the image of a circle of men holding hands in a vat of semen. The industrial work here is portrayed as sexual—though by definition non-reproductive—and engendering of comradeship and even closer bonding. By comparison, though the factory girls in “Tartarus” work with their own share of quasi-reproductive fluid, their interaction is solitary and entirely sterile. They don’t speak or touch. While the men of the Pequod create an ideal community by working together, with their hands, the women seem to suffer alone even as they work side by side, separated by machinery.

The narrator of “Tartarus” is particularly troubled by the workers’ relationships with their machines. Whereas *Israel Potter* returns to the Biblical form of slave-labor --
brick-making -- and attributes it to England, “The Tartarus of Maids” points out that a new kind of slavery has developed, that of the laborer to the machine, and locates it in the United States: “Machinery -- the vaunted slave of humanity -- here stood menially served by human beings, who served mutely and cringingly as the slave serves the Sultan” (215). In *Martin Chuzzlewit*, Charles Dickens describes American attitudes toward the steam-engine as follows:

> And now the engine yells, as it were lashed and tortured like a living labourer, and writhed in agony. A poor fancy; for steel and iron are of infinitely greater account, in this commonwealth, than flesh and blood ... It shall cost a man more dollars in the way of penalty and fine, and satisfaction of the outraged law, to deface in wantonness that senseless mass of metal, than to take the lives of twenty human creatures! Thus the stars wink upon the bloody stripes; and Liberty pulls down her cap upon her eyes, and owns Oppression in its vilest aspect, for her sister (327-8).

Dickens’ charge that America values its machines over its people contains the ghostly echo of those defenders of slavery who claimed that slaves, who had a monetary value to their masters, were treated better than free American laborers. That criticism has broad implications: Today we complain that corporations view their employees as resources rather than people. Dickens and Melville both show us that this dehumanizing attitude has deep roots in the origins of American industry—and in the country’s slaveholding heritage. As one critic puts it, in “Tartarus” “the workers must live for nothing but the machines they tend... Hell is a system of perverted values, in which the machines have taken on the vital functions, and the human beings have become their slaves” (Fogle 49-50). Melville is of one mind with Thoreau, who, at roughly the same time as “Tartarus” was written, declared:

> We do not ride on the railroad; it rides upon us. Did you ever think what those sleepers are that underlie the railroad? Each one is a man, an Irishman, or a Yankee man. The rails are laid on them, and they are covered with sand, and the
cars run smoothly over them. They are sound sleepers, I assure you. And every few years a new lot is laid down and run over; so that if some have the pleasure of riding on a rail, others have the misfortune to be ridden upon (76).

Thoreau joins Melville in using the most gruesome imagery possible to emphasize that industrial technology is not only putting paid to an antiquated way of life; it is killing people, from the manual laborers whose health and safety go unregarded to the consumers who “have the pleasure of riding on a rail” directly to their spiritual death.

With the juxtaposition of “The Paradise of Bachelors” and “The Tartarus of Maids,” Melville is portraying a zero-sum game in which, if one party wins economically, another loses, or, in Thoreau’s words, “The luxury of one class is counterbalanced by the indigence of another. On the one side is the palace, on the other are the almshouse and ‘silent poor’ (28). And, as we see in Chekhov’s story, the supposed winners are compromised by the losers’ defeat. The paper factory’s influence extends much further than the Devil’s Dungeon region of New England. The paper it produces will be used for any number of purposes: “sermons, lawyer’s briefs, physicians’ prescriptions, love-letters, marriage certificates, bills of divorce, registers of births, death-warrants, and so on” (PB 220). As he lists all these functions for the paper, Melville demonstrates that all of American society depends on the labor of the paper factory, and in fact that paper is connected to every aspect and stage of love-relationships and family life. In fact, the social critique of “The Tartarus of Maids” extends beyond the United States. When the narrator is in the room where rags are torn up, he realizes that “that among these heaps of rags there may be some old shirts, gathered from the dormitories of the Paradise of Bachelors” (217). The happy bachelors of London’s Temple Bar are thus implicated in this scene. Not only do they supply some of the rags for the paper, as
lawyers they probably use reams of it; thus the almost parodically cozy party and
effortless-seeming high culture of the first sketch depend upon the misery of the women
in the American factory.

This seems an echo of a similar gesture in *Moby-Dick*, in which Ishmael suggests
that whale-oil is used to anoint monarchs’ heads during coronations: “Think of that, ye
loyal Britons! we whalemen supply your kings and queens with coronation stuff!” (123).
Given how much of this short chapter is spent comparing a new king to a salad that must
be salted and oiled, it is no great surprise that Melville’s UK publisher, Richard Bentley,
chose to excise the chapter in its entirety. But while Bentley was a sharp-eyed censor of
irreverence of all kinds, he may not have even noticed the darker irony here, that
grand, supposedly holy affairs such as coronations, and the authority that they confer,
depend on more than one dirty, brutal industry, and on the suffering of workers across the
globe.

The moment of glimpsing such instances of interdependency across national and
class boundaries is what Bruce Robbins calls “the sweatshop sublime.” In his *PMLA*
essay of that title, Robbins analyzes the moment of epiphany in *Middlemarch* when
Dorothea Brooke discovers the interconnectedness of everyone around her, regardless of
social class, and the relative pettiness of her romantic travails, and he makes an analogy
to the moment in David Lodge’s *Nice Work* in which a literary critic looks out an airplane
window and thinks of housewives boiling water in electric kettles and of the people in
factories on the other side of the planet who put that kettle—and the parts that went into
it—together. Robbins describes both the moment of enlightenment and the confusion as
to what to do with that newfound knowledge thus:
In thought, at least, you are launched on a one-click leap from the tender, drowsy privacy of early morning at home—the shirt not yet on your back, the first cup of tea just finished—to the outer reaches of a world economic system of notoriously inconceivable magnitude and interdependence, a system that brings goods from the ends of the earth … to satisfy your slightest desire. Yet at the same time this insight is also strangely powerless. Your sudden, heady access to the global scale is not access to a commensurate power of action on the global scale. You have a cup of tea or coffee. You get dressed. Just as suddenly, just as shockingly, you are returned to yourself in all your everyday smallness (85).

That deflating smallness and impotence is at the core of Robbins’s argument, his essay itself devolving into a meditation on the conflicting notions of interdependence and privacy and the role of the public intellectual. In Melville’s diptych, however, there is more to be done with the newfound realization of global interdependence. As Melville’s narrator rockets out of the Devil’s Dungeon, he exclaims, “Oh! Paradise of Bachelors! and oh! Tartarus of Maids!” (PB 222). To many readers, this seems a passive sigh in the vein of “Ah Bartleby! Ah, humanity!” (BS 74). But whereas the narrator of “Bartleby” makes his cry when Bartleby is dead and can no longer be helped, and at a population as vast and unreachable as all of humanity, the narrator of this sketch is shouting from the heavens a truth that needs spreading, that the Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids are intimately connected. As Dillingham points out, “the white world of the blank maidens is not a different realm from that of the merry bachelors; it is the same world seen from another angle” (185-6). When Hawthorne describes, in “Outside Glimpses of English Poverty,” the sick, deformed child asking to be picked up and the American visitor’s assent, he is signaling that the New World cannot ignore the suffering in the Old, and vice versa. Arnold Goldman puts it thus: “[T]he American can not hold himself aloof and independent from the Old World’s wrong, he is a part of the same mortal humanity,
and he must embrace it. He must abandon his innocence and eat of the tree of knowledge” (166)\textsuperscript{126}

When, at the end of “The Paradise of Bachelors,” some of the Temple’s denizens retreat “to their neighboring chambers to turn over the *Decameron* ere retiring for the night,” the allusion is significant: In the *Decameron*, ten people flee the plague by hiding away on elegant estates, where they eat well and entertain each other with stories (PB 210)\textsuperscript{127}. With the reference to Bocaccio being a source for the sketch, Melville reminds his readers that no matter how pleasant the conversation and delicious the wine, the “paradise” he has conjured for us is artificial, that death and anxiety surround it on all sides. Many readers experience the transition from “Paradise” to “Tartarus” as jarring, but we are given ample notice in the former sketch of what is to come. Between Socrates’s significant silence and the hint that the Bachelors sequester themselves from harsh reality, Melville gives his readers ample notice that we must become aware of points of view and realms of experience besides our own, of the people behind the scenes who make our lives possible, whether they are slaves picking the cotton for your shirt or a wise employee like Charles Lamb’s father, who keeps you from making a fool of yourself. The infernal paper-mill’s ties to England demonstrate that the extremely pleasant meal of the first sketch has dark connotations, that we enjoy meals at the expense of the hungry. As for the factory’s location, Melville is hinting that in creating a New England, we are repeating the mistakes of the Old Country; we are creating a Hell in the Promised Land. The American who aspires to the cultural eminence and comfort of the bachelors of “Paradise” must realize that his lifestyle will rest on the shoulders of someone trapped in “Tartarus.” What should we do with this knowledge? Melville is not
calling for direct action on behalf of factory workers\textsuperscript{128} so much as making his readers aware of otherwise invisible relationships. As Amanda Claybaugh reminds us, “what must be reformed” in reformist fiction “is not so much the slave or factory system but rather the individuals who profit from those systems, however remotely” (24). In “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids,” Melville repeats the moral challenge of \textit{Redburn} and of “Bartleby”: How much do you owe to other people? Should we worry about who made the shirts on our backs, the paper on which we write? Should we think about our furniture, as young Redburn does, in terms of “where the wood grew, whether the workmen who made them still survived” (46). Today we wrestle with whether to purchase consumer products that we know were produced by ill-fed children in another part of the world. In Melville’s time, consumers had to decide whether to purchase goods whose manufacture was rooted in literal slavery or the milder but still real abuses of wage-slavery.

“Paradise/Tartarus” is not only an exhortation, however, but also a lamentation. During his years at sea, Melville did backbreaking manual labor, but the hardest work of his life was his writing—first the breakneck production of \textit{Redburn} and \textit{White-Jacket}, the unloved “two jobs” he wrote for the money, then the grinding, doomed attempt at popular success with \textit{Pierre}, and finally the descent into hack-work for the magazines. Much of that piecework for the periodicals turned out to be inspired—some, like “Bartleby,” now classic—but in his time Melville could see primarily that he worked long, hard, and alone, without managing to salvage his prestige as an artist or to achieve anything like financial stability. When he writes about alienated labor, Melville must also be writing about himself. In the two halves of this diptych, Melville shows two classes of people:
those who kill themselves working for paper, and those who make paper work for them.
For the factory operatives, substitute Melville and his many counterparts on Grub Street.
For the erudite lawyers in the Temple, substitute successful writers such as Nathaniel Hawthorne and Washington Irving.

If, in “Tartarus,” Melville sets a parallel between industrial and literary production,\textsuperscript{129} he is not the first to make this connection: A ballad from the 1830s or 40s called “Factory Song” describes a typical day in a Lowell cotton factory, including what the various workers and machines do. The poem’s final stanzas make the connection between industrial production and literary production:

Six thousand yards from day to day,
If I am rightly told,
Is carded well, and spun and wove,
And carried to be sold.

When you my friends these lines behold,
Think not I’ve done my best;
But know that all I’ve left behind,
I’m leaving for the rest.

I hope all those who have the skills,
To view the least mistake;
Will start anew, the work review,
And much improvement make.

In that final stanza, the ballad-writer proposes a collaborative model of literary engagement modeled on the best practices of industrial production. The difference between the friendly “squeeze of the hand” in \textit{Moby-Dick} and the loneliness of “Tartarus” is this kind of communication. Newbury suggests that in “The Paradise of Bachelors,” “Melville obliquely and fondly remembers not just his visit to London but his own, less isolated literary past” (Newbury 60). “The Paradise of Bachelors,” then, is the
literary life as Melville would have liked to—and briefly did—live it; “The Tartarus of Maids” is closer to his experience as a writer for magazines.

Melville may not have enjoyed this latter stage of his literary career, but it was a profoundly productive period in his writing life. Though he wrote his magazine fiction primarily out of financial need rather than artistic ambition, Melville often transcended the parameters within which he had to work. In particular, when he invokes a transatlantic comparison or counterpart, his fiction becomes more complex and his ideas more original. “Temple First,” about the hypocrisy among New York’s elite churchgoers, is making a point that is entirely conventional among leftist social critics of the time, such as Margaret Fuller and Walt Whitman. Similarly, “Temple Second” taken alone would seem like a fairly rote echo of Sheridan Knowles and others in rebutting charges that the theater is sinful. When these two sketches are taken together, however, the reader necessarily notices that this is not a comparison of a church and a theater in the same city. Rather, the move to “Babylonian London” raises issues of exile and identity. Thus, Melville is not criticizing American religion so much as the religion of America, and he is exploring the broader issue of the place of art in the world. Similarly, the debunking of nationalist rhetoric in “Poor Man’s Pudding and Rich Man’s Crumbs” gains strength from the fact that Melville is simultaneously taking aim at two contending nationalisms. Ultimately, the power of “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids” comes from its representation of the global marketplace at work, from both the consumers’ and the producers’ points of view. Taken alone, with the exception of “Tartarus,” which is sui generis, each of the diptych halves is fairly typical of what is going on in middlebrow American magazines of the mid-19th century. Melville’s originality lies in putting the two
halves together. The bipartite form is a favorite of Melville’s, from the before-and-after of Typee and Omoo through, as Jonathan Crimmins points out, the bifurcation of Pierre, or the Ambiguities.¹³¹ There is one more diptych hidden in Melville’s oeuvre, one that spans nearly his entire writing life: Taken together, White-Jacket and Billy Budd present a portrait of the American and British navies, one that reveals how American institutions inherited the virtues and many of the vices of the mother country. That moment of splitting off from England, and what may have been lost in the transition, is the subject of Israel Potter, to which we shall turn in the next chapter.

4 As one critic puts it: “Depressed by Pierre’s rejection and burdened by financial troubles, he agreed to write for the middle-class Putnam’s Monthly” (Marler 166).
5 To see how Melville revised Israel Potter from the sentimental, conservative biography he pitched to Harper’s to the sarcastic debunking of the Revolutionary mythos that was eventually published in Putnam’s, see Sheila Post-Lauria, “Magazine Practices and Melville’s Israel Potter.”
6 For an account of this generic evolution and Melville’s place in it, see Robert F. Marler’s “From Tale to Short Story: The Emergence of a New Genre in the 1850’s.” It is noteworthy that while tales and short stories were an established American genre, open to all comers, at this point in Britain only brand-name writers like Dickens or Elizabeth Gaskell could risk publishing short fiction.
7 This formulation dates back to the eighteenth century, but I owe its current usage to Amanda Claybaugh’s The Novel of Purpose: Literature and Social Reform in the Anglo-American World. Claybaugh’s major insight is that many novels of the mid-nineteenth century adopted themes of social reform for reasons that were “strategic rather than committed,” as she puts it, and that they did so for a variety of aesthetic and professional reasons (Claybaugh 34). Though Melville does not receive extensive coverage in Claybaugh’s book, his magazine fiction certainly fits this profile.
8 Other early examples include Frances Trollope’s The Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong, The Factory Boy (1840), Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna’s Helen Fleetwood (1841), and Elizabeth Stone’s William Langshawe, The Cotton Lord (1842).
9 Williams’s examples of the genre are Elizabeth Gaskell’s Mary Barton (1848) and North and South (1855), Charles Dickens’s Hard Times (1854), Benjamin Disraeli’s Sybil, or The Two Nations (1845), Charles Kingsley’s Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet (1850), and George Eliot’s late entry Felix Holt (1866). These are the most popular and most artistically successful of the genre, but they have many precursors and imitators.
10 For a bibliography of 19th-century American literature set in textile mills, see Judith A. Ranta’s Women and Children of the Mills.
11 And not by choice, as in the case of Thoreau.
12 Of course, the floggings Melville describes in White-Jacket were no longer nearly so common when he wrote the book. For an interesting discussion of why writers so often attacked abuses that no longer exist (as Mark Twain did with his critique of slavery in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn), see Claybaugh’s The Novel of Purpose p.33.
The British part of *Redburn* is set in a realist Liverpool and a fantasy London; the British halves of the diptych stories are set in London. Israel Potter wends his lonely way through England. In *Moby-Dick*, Melville repeatedly uses “England” and “English” in contexts in which “Britain” and “British” would make more sense. He never visited Scotland or Wales; his Britain was England. Thus, I will use the terms interchangeably.

The term was first used by Jay Leyda in his introduction to the 1949 edition of *The Complete Short Stories of Herman Melville* (xx).

The letters from that voyage have been lost (Delbanco 32).

“While on one of the Bridges, the thought struck me again that a fine thing might be written about a Blue Monday in November London – a city of Dis (Dante’s) clouds and smoke – the damned &c – coal barges – coaly waters, cast iron Duke &c its marks are left upon you, &c &c &c” –Herman Melville in his journal, Friday, November 9th, 1849. (*Journals* 14).

Robertson-Lorant says that Melville had trouble finding an American publisher for a book so critical of the U.S. Navy (12). Of course, another reason for publishing first in the U.K. was that American copyrights were not honored abroad, and vice versa.

In “Seeds of Discontent: The Expanding Satiric Range of Melville’s Transatlantic Diptychs,” Aaron Winter maps the relationship between the two halves of each diptych, from the simple “ironic contrast” of “The Two Temples” to the “reiterative doubling” of “Poor Man’s Pudding and Rich Man’s Crumbs” through the “dialectical interconnection” of “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids” (18-19).

Or, put slightly differently, Melville was “one who approached human destiny as planetary and framed his questions accordingly” (Lyons 53).

In “Grace Church and Melville’s Story of ‘The Two Temples,’” Beryl Rowland catalogues the details adapted from each of these edifices and notes that in using a composite, Melville was able “to assail simultaneously the ostentation and the superficial Christianity of the two newest and most fashionable churches in New York” (346).


Perhaps because of his experiences as an indigent young sailor, Melville was always aware that clothes make the man. In London in 1849, Melville bought a new jacket “so as to look decent—for I find my green coat plays the devil with my respectability here” (Journals 39-40). The “Two Temples” narrator’s struggle to be decently attired is an echo of Redburn’s being mocked for wearing his old hunting jacket to sea and White-Jacket’s losing his name, being entirely known on shipboard for his ridiculous clothing.

Jonathan A. Cook also identifies an allusion here to Robert Burns’s poem “A Man’s a Man for a’ That” (Cook 2006 10).

Jonathan A. Cook notes that this is “an ironic reversal of St. Paul’s well-known argument that Hagar and her child were types of the superseded Old Testament law (Gal. 4:19-31). Here, Melville’s sympathies are clearly with the dispossessed mother and child.

As Paul says in one of his epistles, “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the spirit of god dwelleth in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16)

In “Poor Man’s Pudding and Rich Man’s Crumbs,” we see the full stigma associated with receiving charity in 1850s America.

In a typical critical deprecation, Paul Giles calls the diptych stories “five-finger excercises for Melville’s major theme of the analogical interaction between British and American cultures” (Giles 239).

In “Satiric Precedent for Melville’s ‘Two Temples’” (1979), James Duban catalogues Walt Whitman’s *Daily Eagle* editorials and a handful of pieces in *Yankee Doodle* that were critical of Grace Church and its congregation. In “Christian Typology and Social Critique in Melville’s ‘The Two Temples’”, Jonathan Cook adds Margaret Fuller to the list of sources for the sketch (Cook 2006 8).

Though Knowles’s work is not well-known today, he was nominated for the Poet Laureateship eventually secured by Sir Alfred Lord Tennyson (Rowland 1974 5).

Jonathan A. Cook argues that Melville may have hoped the dedication to a man of the cloth would soften the piece’s satire on religion (31). However, Knowles was a Baptist preacher and thus already aligned in opposition to the High-Church Episcopalians Melville is criticizing.

Later republished as “Two Views of a Cheap Theatre” in *The Uncommercial Traveller and Reprinted Pieces, Etc.* (London: Oxford UP, 1968). This text was first brought to my attention by Martin Meisel, but Edwin Eigner compared Dickens’s and Melville’s takes on this theme in his 1985 essay “The Two Temples
of Melville and Dickens”. For a fascinating account of Dickens’ possible appropriation in *Bleak House* of *Redburn*’s scene of death by spontaneous combustion and Melville’s angry response in “Bartleby the Scrivener,” see Chapter 2 of Robert Weisbuch’s *Atlantic Double-Cross*.

This section’s epigraph comes from an 1871 newspaper article in which Mark Twain echoes his predecessor’s privileging of supposedly secular forms over explicitly religious instruction:

> It is almost fair and just to aver (although it is profanity) that nine-tenths of all the kindness and forbearance and Christian charity and generosity in the hearts of the American people to-day, got there by being filtered down from their fountain-head, the gospel of Christ, through dramas and tragedies and comedies on the stage, and through the despised novel and the Christmas story, and through the thousand and one lessons, suggestions, and narratives of generous deeds that stir the pulses, and exalt and augment the nobility of the nation day by day from the teeming columns of ten thousand newspapers, and NOT from the drowsy pulpit! (Twain).

32 Edwin Eigner points out that Dickens has made this move before, as with Sleary’s circus in *Hard Times* (254).

33 And six months after the Astor Place riots.

34 Sic.

35 Macready performed Othello in blackface. While this was common practice at the time, it is possible that something about seeing the upper-class Englishman in blackface disconcerted Melville, just as American audiences in 1964-5 responded quite differently than their British counterparts to Laurence Olivier’s blackface Othello.

36 Sic.

37 In his comprehensive and excellent “Class Acts: The Astor Place Riots and ‘The Two Temples,’” Dennis Berthold notes that Edwin Forrest was somewhat too fabulously wealthy to be a true champion of the working man, and that William Charles Macready was a passionate republican who gave lectures at workingmen’s institutes and “admired American public education” (433, 455n18).

38 In fact, Forrest performed the same role elsewhere in New York on that same night (Berthold 451).

39 This mistake is Melville’s own: In his journal entry for November 7, 1849, Melville describes a visit to the “Royal Lyceum (sic) Theater, Strand”: “Went into the Gallery (one shilling) Quite decent people there – fellow going round with a coffee pot & mugs – crying “Porter, gents, porter!” (Melville Journals 14).

40 During the 19th century this expression was a cliché Americanism. In 1878, Henry James punctuates Daisy Miller’s speech with “I guesses” to emphasize her casual, colloquial American style, which is meant to win over readers just as Melville’s narrator endears himself to the ale vendor.

41 It would by definition be a “he” in Melville’s mind. James D. Wallace points out that when naming the eight leading American writers in a draft of “Hawthorne and His Mosses”, Melville listed only men: “Hawthorne, Emerson, Whittier, Irving, Bryant, Dana, Cooper, and Nathaniel P. Willis. The range of talent from Hawthorne and Emerson through Willis seems great enough to include a Catharine Sedgwick or Lydia Maria Child, Lydia Sigourney or Frances Osgood, but Melville had no interest in women writers” (Wallace 203).

42 Though Samuel Smiles observed that by 1849, when Melville first visited London, at least half of the men attending lectures at the various Mechanics’ Institutes were low-level clerks (white-collar workers) as opposed to true mechanics, the fact remains that a significant number of factory-workers received some form of education and enrichment at the Institutes (Gregg 259).

43 Edwin Eigner correctly refers to the riots as “one of the most infamously inhospitable acts of nineteenth-century America” (253).

44 For a thorough account of Melville’s employment and subversion of the devices of reform literature in *Moby-Dick* and elsewhere, see David Reynolds’s *Beneath the American Renaissance*, ch. 5.


46 The Coulters also have a symbolic name: A coulter is a type of plowshare, indicating that Melville is associating the Coulters entirely with their work. Mr. Coulter was born to plow, yet he works another man’s land.

47 Post-Lauria summarizes portrayals of inter-class interaction in *Harper’s* stories thus: “Aloof, spectator narrators representing the privileged middle class… isolate themselves from the events they related and use their status to observe less fortunate characters from above on the ladder of success.” Post-Lauria argues
that such fictions flattered middle-class readers’ aspirations to elite status and allowed them to celebrate their success via a comparison with those less fortunate (118).

50 On the non-fiction front, Paul Lewis notes that the Baker Farm chapter of Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* falls into the poor visit category, as Thoreau advises the immigrant family on how they could save money on food and rent if they only lived like him. Lewis charitably attributes Thoreau’s preachiness here to “the potency of poor visit conventions” that force Thoreau “first to take note of the filthiness and dampness of the cabin and then to attempt, as Sedgwick had in the 1830s, to inform his hosts of the importance of living simply” (265).

51 Rowland also notes that it was in 1814 that Thomas Malthus published *Observations on the effects of the Corn Laws, and of a rise or fall in the price of Corn on the agriculture and general wealth of the country*, which British lawmakers used to support their arguments for the 1815 Corn Law. British and American thinkers were still heavily influenced by Malthus’s *Principles of Population*, particularly by the notion that both private charity and government subsidy artificially prop up populations that would—and by implication should—be reduced naturally by starvation, when Melville was writing his sketches in the 1850s (Rowland 1972 73).

52 In *The Feminization of American Culture*, Ann Douglas characterizes Sedgwick’s book as “a cheery little story of the upper and lower classes entitled *The Poor Rich Man and the Rich Poor Man*. Its moral was that wealth has nothing to do with happiness and genuine success.” Douglas reads Melville as having been “[i]ncensed at such sentimental evasion” (Douglas 300).


54 In fact, Charlene Avallone traces the influence of Sedgwick’s *The Linwoods* and her sketch “The Country Cousin” as influences on *Pierre*. “The Country Cousin” even includes heroines named “Lucy and Isabel in the romance roles of light and dark ladies” (Avallone 53). Similarly, Peter Balaam offers a convincing account of “The Piazza” as a reworking of a moment in Sedgwick’s *A New England Tale*. Less definitive, though possible, is his claim that Sedgwick is the Dives of “The Piazza,” to Melville’s Lazarus. *Israäl Potter* and *The Confidence Man* are novellas; the rest of Melville’s output consists of poems and short stories, many of the latter extremely accomplished.

55 In *Atlantic Double-Cross*, Weisbuch insists upon this Bloomian distinction: “But the question that matters in any looming of an anxiety of influence, as Harold Bloom repeatedly argues, is not whether the present writer has read his predecessor fairly and well but whether his misreading is creative” (51).

56 In this way, she might be seen as a proto-George Eliot.

57 In “Transantlantic Counterparts,” James Duban speculates that Melville may have seen the *Illustrated London News* of December 22, 1849, which contained pictures of starving Irish people, as well as an illustrated account of a particularly grand Masonic banquet held in Simla, India. Whether or not Melville saw that paper, he chooses to discuss the widening gap between the rich and the poor as more than a merely local or even transatlantic issue; his scope is global, and he includes the developing world in his commentary.


59 In “Melville’s global perspective, see Paul Lyons’s “Global Melville” in *A Companion to Herman Melville* (Ed. Wyn Kelley), pp.52-68.

60 In “Melville’s Waterloo in ‘Rich Man’s Crumbs,’” Beryl Rowland points out that while Melville’s narrator situates the Guildhall charity in the summer of 1814, with the “Battle of Waterloo having closed the long drama of Napoleon’s wars,” in fact Waterloo was fought in 1815, and the real-life banquet Melville is describing was held on June 18, 1814 to celebrate the Treaty of Paris (Rowland 1970 218). There is no record of any charity event having been held after the Treaty of Paris banquet, whereas the Lord Mayor’s usual charity was held on November 10, 1814 (Rowland, 1970 219). Rowland locates various other historical inaccuracies in “Rich Man’s Crumbs,” but in “Melville’s ‘Mistakes’” Maurice Lee explains these away as purposeful recontextualizations intended to raise the specter of Napoleon and the fear of French—and English, and in fact American—political instability in general in his readers’ minds. Regrettably, in this pre-Roald Dahl period the episode is not played for laughs.

61 We know that Melville wanted to visit the Duke of Rutland at Belvoir Castle, and also that his father sought unsuccessfully to confirm a connection to the aristocratic Scottish Melville line. See Rogin’s *Subversive Genealogy* for an account of Melville’s father’s attempts to trace the family’s possibly aristocratic lineage.
Maurice Lee reads this scene in reverse, seeing the blue ticket as a symbol of universal suffrage and the chaos of the event as a possible result of the expanded franchise (159).

By contrast, Sedgwick’s physician refuses payment for his services, a kind gesture slightly undermined by his referring to his patients as “the poor” and explaining that he is not charging Charlotte because he values “the lesson of meek and cheerful submission” she has given him (51).

On July 13, 1856, and again with his son Julian, whom he wanted to show the statues of Gog and Magog, on July 30.

The statues Melville refers to (and which Hawthorne showed to his son Julian) were carved in 1708 by Captain Richard Saunders. These were destroyed during the Blitz and were replaced with reproductions in 1953 (“Gog and Magog”).

In her catalogue of anachronisms in “Melville’s Waterloo in ‘Rich Man’s Crumbs,’” Beryl Rowland includes the fact that in 1814, Gog and Magog were in the center of the hall and were only moved to the end of the hall a year after the banquet Melville is describing took place (Rowland 1970 220-21).

This is a 1953 reproduction of one of Captain Richard Saunders’ statues, which were carved in 1708 and destroyed during the Blitz.

Hawthorne refers to himself in the third person throughout this story, but we know from his notebooks and from the context that the child approached none other than the sketch’s author.

During the two nights after this initial dinner in the Inns of Court, Melville attended additional pleasurable all-male dinners, which likely inspired his portrayal of the varied and elevated conversation at the dinner in “The Paradise of Bachelors. Of the December 21 dinner, Melville notes “An exceedingly agreeable company.” He describes his companions of the next night as follows:

Sunday Dec 23rd '49 Last night dined at the Erectheum Club—a part of eight—Charles Knight the author of London Illustrated &c & the Publisher of the Penny Cyclopaedia & concerned in most of the great popular publications of the day;—Ford the Spanish Traveller & Editor of the Guide Book—Leslie the painter—Cunningham the London Antiquarian & author of the London Guide published by Murray;—& Mr Murray the Albemarle Street man—together with Cooke & a youth whose name I forget.—We had a glorious time & parted at about midnight (Journals 46).

The Temple contains two of the four Inns of Court (professional organizations for barristers in England), as well as being near the Royal Courts of Justice. The Inns of Court are comprised of vast law libraries and warren-like complexes of offices and dormitory-like accommodations for law students and unmarried lawyers.


Bickley points out that this description of the passage from Fleet Street to the Temple echoes a similar account in Washington Irving’s “London Antiques”: “The flesh was weary, the spirit faint, and I was getting out of humor with the bustling busy throng through which I had to struggle, when in a fit of desperation I tore my way through the crowd, plunged into a by-lane, and after passing through several obscure nooks and angles, emerged into a quaint and quiet court... I was, in fact, in the chapel of the Knights Templars, strangely situated in the very center of sordid traffic; and I do not know a more impressive lesson for the man of the word than thus suddenly to turn aside from the highway of busy money-seeking life and sit down among these shadowy sepulchers” (Bickley 88, Irving 238-9).

As in Hamlet’s fear that Denmark’s bed of state had become a “couch for luxury and damned incest” (William Shakespeare, Hamlet I:v).

See Rowland’s “Melville’s Bachelors and Maids: Interpretation Through Symbol and Metaphor.” for more on 19th-century views of the Templars.

See Malcolm Barber’s The Trial of the Templars (Cambridge UP, 1993) for more on the accusations and methods of interrogation involved.

Bickley attributes this line of humor with Washington Irving’s sketch “An Old Soldier,” which describes an old general who has never “run any great risk of dying, excepting from an apoplexy, or indigestion” (qtd. 88-89).

In 1844’s Martin Chuzzlewit, Charles Dickens describes rooms in the Temple in similarly cozy terms:

There are snug chambers in those Inns where the bachelors live, and, for the desolate fellows they pretend to be, it is quite surprising how well they get on. John was very pathetic on the subject of his dreary life, and the deplorable make-shifts and apologetic contrivances it involved; but he really seemed to make himself pretty comfortable. His rooms were the perfection of neatness and
convenience at any rate; and if he were anything but comfortable, the fault was certainly not theirs (Dickens MC 648).

80 For example: “The sterility of the lives led by the modern Templars is reflected by their interests as evinced in the stories and anecdotes with which they regale one another…All are concerned with esoteric minutiae, with the erudition and lore of the ivory tower, with picking the dry scholarly bones of the past. Of life as it is lived by the majority of their contemporaries they manifest no interest” (Thompson 37-38).

81 For more, see Seals, Melville’s Reading.

82 Only, of course, in a society in which a Jury of one’s peers could include nearly anyone.

83 For more on English Traits as a post-colonial text, see Marek Paryz’s “Beyond the traveler’s testimony: Emerson’s English Traits and the construction of postcolonial counter-discourse.”

84 Emerson is quoting A Relation, or Rather a True Account, of the Island of England, with Sundry Particulars of the Customs of These People, and of the Royal Revenues Under King Henry the Seventh. About the Year 1500, trans. from the Italian by Charlotte Augusta Sneyd, Camden Society, no. 37 (London, 1847), pp.21-2.

85 Newbury, for one, sees the bachelors’ various interests and activities to be “self-indulgent and elitist” (60). Browne argues that the story’s tone “is so obviously forced and exaggerated in its heartiness that the reader knows he cannot take Melville’s approval at apparent face value. This is a story of the shirkers of the responsibilities of life, Melville’s ‘bachelors,’ who fail to commit themselves to life and thus actually do evil” (Browne 43). On a similar note, Fogle confirms that the bachelors have fun at their dinner, but he senses an uncomfortable undercurrent: “Here Melville undoubtedly speaks sincerely, and his sketch is a graceful acknowledgement to his actual host, Robert Francis Cook. His good humor is unmistakable. Yet the very exaggeration of his praises implies a criticism” (Fogle 47).

86 The medieval castle on the estate of the Dukes of Rutland was damaged during the English revolution and later destroyed by a fire, so a new castle was built in a Gothic Revival style in the early 1800s. Redburn is devastated not see such a place during his visit to Liverpool: “In the land of Thomas-a-Becket and stout John of Gaunt, not to catch the least glimpse of priory or castle?” (227). Ironically, the missed opportunity Melville so regrets would have been to visit an ersatz version of antiquity only.

87 This might also be a gentle allusion to one of literature’s famous drinking parties, Plato’s Symposium.

88 In another illustration of the snobbery of American servants, in “Temple First” Melville describes footmen loitering outside the church: “See the gold hat-bands, too, and other gorgeous trimmings, on those glossy groups of low-voiced gossipers near by. If I were in England now, I should think those chaps a company of royal dukes, right honorable barons, etc. As it is, though, I guess they are only lackeys” (HM TT 152).

89 In his sketches for Brief Lives, John Aubrey’s entry on Francis Bacon contains an appellation in Greek which is translated in some editions as “homosexual” and others as “pederast”: For instance, Richard Barber’s 1982 edition of Aubrey reads: “He was a homosexual. His Ganymedes and favourites took bribes; but his lordship always gave judgement according to justice and honesty. His decrees in Chancery stand firm, i.e. there are fewer of his decrees reversed than of any other chancellor” (Aubrey, ed. Barber 28). Oliver Lawson Dick’s 1999 edition reads: “He was a Pederast. His Ganimeds and Favourites tooke Bribes” (Aubrey, ed. Dick 11).


91 In fact, Melville incorporates elements of minstrelsy in Moby-Dick as well. Eric Lott points out: “Melville has Pip close the ‘Dobloon’ chapter with a snippet of ‘Old King Crow’ (1843), one of the most popular minstrel songs in the 1840s, and fleece comes forth with a sermon straight out of the minstrel show” (163).

92 In “‘Old Virginny’ in Melville’s ‘The Paradise of Bachelors’”, Caroline Moseley quotes the song’s full lyrics as follows:
The floating scow of old Virginny
I work’d in from day to day,
A fishing 'mongst de oyster beds,
To me it was but play.
But now I’m growing very old.
I cannot work any more.
So carry me back to Old Virginny,
To Old Virginny’s shore.

Chorus:
Den carry me back to Old Virginny,
To Old Virginny’s shore,
Oh, carry me back to Old Virginny,
To Old Virginny’s shore.

If I was only young again,
I’d lead a different life;
I’d save my money, and buy a farm
And take Dinah for my wife.
But now old age, he holds me tight,
My limbs, dey are growing sore:
So take me back to Old Virginny,
To Old Virginny’s shore.

And when I’m dead and gone
Place this old banjo by my side;
Let the possum and coon to my funeral go,
For dey was always my pride.
And den in soft repose I’ll sleep,
And dream for ebermore
Dat you’ve carried me back to Old Virginny
To Old Virginny’s shore.


95 Saxton characterizes the “political stance” of minstrelsy as “a defense of slavery… Slaves loved the master. They dreaded freedom because, presumably, they were incapable of self-possession. When forced to leave the plantation they longed only to return” (Saxton 18).

96 This sentiment endures in American popular music through the present day. See, for instance, John Denver’s 1971 “Take Me Home, Country Roads” and Lynyrd Skynyrd’s “Sweet Home Alabama” (released in 1974, remade by Kid Rock in 2008 as “All Summer Long).

97 Blackface minstrelsy endured longer in British popular culture than it did in the United States: The Black and White Minstrel Show variety program ran on British television from 1958 through 1978.

98 Sealts notes that while the Defiance Mill is the only one Melville is known to have visited, “that the trip is ‘some sixty miles’ with an overnight stop suggests another setting more distant from Arrowhead than Dalton” (Sealts 710-11). It is possible that, like the church in “Temple First”, the mill in “The Tartarus of Maids” is a composite.

99 Young observes that “A partial precedent for Melville’s Blood River lies in the fiery-red waters of the river Phlegethon in Hades,” and that in turn “Phlegethon came to Dante via Virgil from myths of an infernal river of fire, which Dante turned to boiling blood, the blood of sinners who had shed it on earth” (Young 216-7).

100 Because the maids do not speak, PhilipYoung connects them to “Dante’s ‘shades,’ which is to say spirits of the dead inhabiting hell. Sentenced to more than maidenhood, they are female counterparts to the sad, silent, lackluster/ and ultimately dead bowlers Rip Van Winkle saw in the Catskills” (218-9).

101 The irony here is also about the nature of work: Most factories use raw materials to produce a finished product; this one takes in finished products such as shirts and uses them to create the raw material that will be used for white-collar work. This is the same gesture we see today in the BBC and NBC situation comedies The Office, set in the offices of companies that manufacture paper.
Reviewing portrayals of factory girls in Gaskell’s *North and South*, Dickens’s *Hard Times*, and Eliot’s *Felix Holt*, Johnson notes that “the dead or dying factory girl appears right at the juncture of crucial political negotiations” (35).

As is argued by some critics, among them Fisher, who claims that Melville’s “main aim was to express imaginatively the emotional impact of what he felt to be a general crisis for humanity: the widespread existence of a mechanistic, life-deadening, freedom-denying set of values emphasized in America by increasing industrialization” (Fisher 1971 83).

Here I must do justice to critics such as Young who argue that just as 19th-century readers recognized the few local details in “Tartarus” and were misled to believe that they were reading a travel sketch, 20th century critics “continue to think that the tale is essentially a Melvillean denunciation of the industrial revolution… Such critics respond to a story Melville did not write” (213). While Young is correct that that this sketch is not a simple protest against industrialization, we cannot argue that the factory in this sketch is purely symbolic. Melville’s enduring interest in work—whether on a warship or a whaleship or on a New England farm—indicates that his examination of American society in this sketch works on several levels.

One scholar describes American industrial fictions of the time thus: The popular narratives exhibit a range of responses to industrialization, from sanguine attempts to contain this new form of productive power by illustrating its compatibility with an (ostensibly traditional) pastoral way of life to more ambivalent efforts to suggest how modernization has changed America and separated the present and future from the past (Allen 47).

Incidentally, the fact that factory girls were frequent subscribers to literary magazines of the time raises the question of whether they were the intended audience for this sketch.

Sigmund Freud’s 1925 essay “Negation” points out that when you say you are not going to do something, you still raise the specter of doing it, and that specter will linger in your reader or auditor’s mind (96).

Incidentally, despite the tempting overlaps in theme and imagery between Blake’s poem and Melville’s sketch, it is not likely that Melville knew the Blake poem at the time that he wrote “Tartarus.” “Jerusalem” is well known today because of the music composed for it by Sir Hubert Parry in 1916; in the 1850s, however, “few in England, and fewer in America, were acquainted with Blake as a poet in 1851” (Birss 311). Melville did come to read Blake later on; however. He either bought or borrowed Alexander Gilchrist’s 1863 *Life of William Blake, ‘Pictor Ignotus’. With Selections from His Poems and Other Writings* on June 4, 1870 (Sealts 61).

The factory as Hell became a cliché of fictional critiques of industrialism in American literature. For instance, in Rebecca Harding Davis’s “Life in the Iron Mills,” published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1861, an American factory is portrayed explicitly as Hell: “The mills for rolling iron are simply immense tent-like roofs, covering acres of ground, open on every side. Beneath these roofs Deborah looked in on a city of fires, that burned hot and fiercely in the night. Fire in every horrible form: pits of flame waving in the wind; liquid metal-flames writhing in tortuous streams through the sand; wide caldrons filled with boiling fire, over which bent ghastly wretches stirring the strange brewing; and through all, crowds of half-clad men, looking like revengeful ghosts in the red light, hurried, throwing masses of glittering fire. It was like a street in Hell. Even Deborah muttered, as she crept through, ‘looks like t’ Devil’s place!’ It did,—in more ways than one” (Davis 20).

It is not likely that Gaskell is a source for Melville’s sketch. Though the serial of *North and South* appeared from September 1854 to January 1855, and “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids” was published in April 1855, Melville had actually received payment for the sketch in May of 1854, nearly a year prior to publication (Sealts 709). The echo between Melville and Gaskell here indicates nothing more than the extent to which such unhealthy conditions in factories were, so to speak, in the air.

Hiltner, for one, sees Melville’s narrators as seeing that they “must remove themselves from the objects of their sympathy because of the guilt inspired by a disturbing recognition of their own complicity with the forces that have victimized the sufferer” (Hiltner 1989 59).

Johnson observes that when Parliamentary reports exposed sexual harassment in Britain’s factories, “The official response to reports that girls were sexually harassed, or even raped, in factories was not to pass legislation to make factories safe to work in but, instead, to claim that factory work ‘corrupted’ women” (49).
209

113 Beryl Rowland points out that the mill as a metaphor for human reproduction goes as far as Job, Isaiah, and the Talmud (Rowland 1969 391). Jay Leyda sees “a level... of game” in this sketch’s imagery and suggests that “Melville gives one the impression of seeing how close he can dance to the edge of nineteenth century sanctities without being caught... the perceptive reader must have blamed his own imagination for what he found in Tartarus” (xxix). Marvin Fisher argues that “the approach to the mill (which the narrator discovers in a frigid hollow) is described in terms so frankly physiological and so nearly scatological that their appearance in a mid-19th century issue of the highly respectable *Harper’s Magazine* documents not only Melville’s audacity but also the unsuspecting innocence and complacency of editor and audience” (Fisher 1971 83). Fisher sees “Tartarus” as “an excellent example of Melville’s method of artistic concealment, his technique of expressing controversial, at times scandalous, and usually unpopular views symbolically, but then embedding his symbols so deeply in situation, description or oblique allusion that few of his contemporaries could fully grasp the multi-leveled meaning” (1971 80).

114 This is certainly an approach George Eliot adopted when she came to write *Middlemarch*.

115 When the Melvilles moved back to New York in 1863, Gardner became their family doctor. It was left to him to declare Malcolm dead when he shot himself. It was also Gardner who advised Elizabeth Melville’s family that she should leave Herman because of his mental illness. Gardner was also a crusader against abortion, which was legal and common at the time, as well as masturbation and birth control (Young 221-2). Young points out that “[i]f the unstoppable of the miraculous machine in the papermill was ‘specially terrible’ to Melville’s narrator, Melville’s once-upon-a-time friend Gardner was of the enemy” (221).

116 Among them Jay Leyda (in *The Melville Log*, pp.403-4) and William B. Dillingham, who notes that Elizabeth was pregnant with the Melvilles’ “fourth child in six years” (201).

117 The machine in “Tartarus” is either literally machinery (industrialism) or else figuratively the machinery of our bodies, sex, reproduction. Dillingham says that these two themes are “merely manifestations of a broader theme, namely, the pitiful plight of ordinary man, who tries to escape a self-perpetuating, unfathomable nature but who is caught up in its grinding, steady, relentless process” (Dillingham 202). This is what Philip Larkin refers to in “The Life with a Hole in It” as “[t]he unbeatable slow machine/ That brings what you’ll get” (202).

118 Robertson-Lorant notes: “Although a childhood illness left her with a limp that cramped her dancing style, Helen attended teas and dancing parties in hopes of meeting an eligible Boston bachelor” (19).

119 I Corinthians 7:9.

120 Melville insisted that his wife and sisters copy the manuscripts without adding punctuation, so that he could make all punctuation decisions at the last moment. This must necessarily have made the work harder and removed elements of mindfulness or satisfaction from the labor, making it “at best a tedious and irritating task” (Robertson-Lorant 27).

121 This self-awareness was shortlived; Robertson-Lorant describes how years later Melville would buy his daughters “esoteric books that he needed for his research, and he woke them up at night and made them proofread *Clarel* (1876), his 18,000-line poem about the Holy Land” (31).

122 Another critic notes that “The narrator becomes the only person—and, perhaps most significantly, the only man—who can absorb the Maids’ silence and give voice to their exploited position” (Serlin 83).

123 Spermaceti is the waxy substance in whale’s skulls that is used to manufacture cosmetics and other products. While spermaceti is not whale sperm, it was long thought to be so, and Melville refers to the two interchangeably.

124 Present-day readers of “Tartarus” may wonder how that reference to slavery resonated in Melville’s own time. It is possible that it would not have had much impact: On industrial fictions, one scholar argues that “by the 1850s, the language of sentimentalism and its structures of sympathy were so oriented toward issues of race and slavery that anti-industrial social critiques tended—consciously or not—to be made in racial terms” (Schocket 48).

125 For a fuller account of his excisions from *The Whale*, see Ament’s “Bowdler and the Whale” and “Some Americanisms in *Moby-Dick*,” as well as Parker’s “Historical Note” to the Northwestern-Newberry edition of the novel.

126 Stephen Spender echoes this theme of transatlantic interconnectedness: “That England casts a shadow of guilt across the American innocence is the point of his two sketches, *The Paradise of Bachelors* and *The Tartarus of Maids*” (60).
“Paradise” borrows from the *Decameron* not only the scene of refuge from harsh reality but also the *Canterbury Tales*-like structure of a group of people entertaining each other with stories. Ironically, while Melville’s bachelors discuss business and scholarship, the stories in the *Decameron* are all about the funny or tragic aspects of love, an arena not familiar to Melville’s bachelors, whose expertise in other areas is so vast. One scholar notes the irony that “Women are excluded from this society; yet some of the bachelors go back to their chambers to read a fourteenth-century collection of tales of heterosexual love” (Rowland 397). For these bachelors to read the *Decameron* is analogous to children frightening themselves with ghost stories.

It would have been an extremely odd gesture if he had; revolution is precisely the opposite of what 19th-century industrial fictions advocate: “They are demanding a revolution in class relationships without any alteration in the balance of power. By personalizing class conflict and placing blame on the human failings of individual employers and employees, sympathy is aroused for the workers’ appalling conditions without this being taken to imply that there is anything fundamentally wrong with the social structure as a whole” (Keating 227-8).

Weinstein observes: “In much of the short fiction, Melville is interested in interrogating the relations between his own scenes of literary production and other scenes of production” (214).

Arnold Goldman, among others, assesses Melville’s short fiction as a mere mercenary pursuit, as well as a reversion to old-fashioned English forms (76).

In “Nested Inversions: Genre and the Bipartite Form of Herman Melville’s *Pierre*,” Crimmins convincingly characterizes *Pierre* as being split between the rural, “sentimental and Gothic” first half and the “urban and Romantic” second half (440).
Chapter Four

Department of Veterans’ Affairs: Israel Potter’s “enduring monument”

And then, when honored and decrepit age shall lean against the base of this monument, and troops of ingenuous youth shall be gathered round it, and when the one shall speak to the other of its objects, the purposes of its construction, and the great and glorious events with which it is connected, there shall rise from every youthful breast the ejaculation, “Thank God, I — I also — am an American!”

--Daniel Webster, dedicating the Bunker Hill Monument on June 17, 1843

And now, sir, in room of giving them the bread that was solemnly promised, the debt is to be paid by a stone!!

--Caleb Stark, veteran of the Battle of Bunker Hill, in a letter to the Bunker Hill Monument Association

Born of the sketch genre, Herman Melville’s diptych stories focus on scene and situation; one could almost classify them as situation-tragedies. As Melville’s career as a writer for American literary magazines progressed, however, he found a way to expand upon the diptychs’ recurring themes of poverty and exile while also developing fuller, more rounded characters. The idea for Israel Potter percolated in Melville’s mind for several years. In the journal of his 1849 visit to London, Melville notes: “Looked over a lot of ancient maps of 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). That “serve up” indicates, as Hershel Parker notes, that at the time Melville was planning on another simple commercial project along the lines of Redburn and White-Jacket (605). For some reason, Melville came home from his European travels and set the Revolutionary narrative aside, embarking instead on Moby-Dick. Several years later, after the critical and commercial failures of Moby-Dick and Pierre, at a time when he was likely running
short of creative inspiration, Melville returned to the idea of adapting Israel Potter’s Revolutionary War narrative for a modern audience.

The historical Israel Potter was an American soldier in the War of Independence. During the war, he was taken prisoner and transported to Britain. Potter escaped from prison but did not return from England for some fifty years. When he did make his way back, as an old man, he applied for a U.S. Government pension and was denied. When Potter appealed this decision, his pension application was abetted by a printer named Henry Trumbull, who ghost-wrote a purported “autobiography” chronicling Potter’s service to the United States and his years of yearning to return. Trumbull’s *Life and Remarkable Adventures of Israel R. Potter* (1824) is one of the last of the hundreds of Revolutionary War narratives that were published at the start of the 19th century, often in the service of applications for Federal pensions. Trumbull presents Potter as a true American patriot, one who sustained wounds in the Battle of Bunker Hill and took advantage of his time in Europe to smuggle secret documents to Benjamin Franklin, who was then in France. These last two resume items are questionable at best; Chacko and Kulcsa trace the many inconsistencies between the Trumbull pamphlet and the documentary record of Potter’s life, noting that no regiments from Rhode Island (Potter’s birthplace) saw combat at Bunker Hill, and they also present a convincing case that while in England Israel Potter did indeed work as a spy—for the English.

Melville was likely to have known that much if not all of Trumbull’s narrative was fiction. Henry Trumbull, who was Potter’s neighbor in Providence, Rhode Island in the 1820s, was known in the 19th century as a printer, newspaperman, occasional pornographer, and “wild slipshod novelist of penny-thrillers” (Chacko 367). The *Life and
Remarkable Adventures of Israel R. Potter “is so much of a piece with Trumbull’s other writings, so neatly fits the pattern of tall tale and shopworn melodrama” (Chacko 368), that Melville must have felt that he could take some license of his own with the narrative. That he does, changing Potter’s birthplace of Rhode Island for his own Berkshire neighborhood, adding an extensive (invented) interlude in which Israel serves in the navy under John Paul Jones and encounters Ethan Allen, and reducing the second half of Trumbull’s tale, in which Potter suffers the hazards of outrageous fortune for over fifty years, to three short chapters.

While his first few chapters hew closely to Trumbull—are, in fact, the virtual paraphrase promised by the novel’s dedication—Melville soon diverges from his source material. Noting that Melville began Israel Potter with submission to Harper’s Magazine in mind, then changed tack to prepare the novel for publication in Putnam’s Monthly, Sheila Post-Lauria追踪了Melville的将小说从深情的第一人称叙述转换为嘲讽的第三人称叙述的过程，以及Melville如何适应这两个杂志的意识形态和风格要求。Peter Bellis认为，这种转换是Melville对于两种平行问题的“冥想：第一人称和第三人称文本之间的差异（例如Moby-Dick和Pierre），以及个人意识（自传）与整体历史的更广泛视角之间的差距”（607）。在转换第三人称时，Melville给了自己许可，以历史的声音——与历史保持距离，批判性地，对解释开放。他也允许自己在两个流行的流派之间穿梭：Trumbull的夸张版本的Potter的生活是19世纪早期的典型例子。
autobiography, Melville incorporates that form but also finds a way to participate in and parody a more recent literary trend: the historical novel.

What makes a novel that is set in the past a *historical* novel as such is (1) the appearance of at least one major historical figure, (2) a protagonist whose destiny is shaped by the larger historical forces being described, and (3) as Georg Lukacs avers, an acknowledgement of “the past-ness of the past.” Historical novels are essentially about obsolescence, hence the profusion of “last” titles, most famously Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s *The Last Days of Pompeii* and James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans*. Henry Trumbull published a biography of Israel Potter in 1824 because it was immediately relevant: Potter’s rejected pension application was up for review. In the 1820s the Revolution was still recent history, and veterans were available to describe their experiences. Melville’s own grandfather, Major Thomas Melvill, “kept a glass vial on the mantel to show visitors the tea leaves he had found in his boots the night he and his cohorts dumped the British tea in the harbor” (Robertson-Lorant 17). Throughout the 1830s and 40s, journalists and other social critics bemoaned the country’s lack of gratitude toward veterans of the Revolution. For example, John Greenleaf Whittier’s “The Prisoner for Debt,” about a veteran imprisoned in Charlestown Jail for a debt, argues for the abolishment of debtors’ prisons. In these stanzas, Whittier notes the disproportion between the veteran’s sacrifice for his country and the recompense he has received:

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What has the gray-haired prisoner done?
Has murder stained his hands with gore?
Not so; his crime’s a fouler one;
God made the old man poor!
For this he shares a felon’s cell,
The fittest earthly type of hell
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For this, the boon for which he poured
His young blood on the invader’s sword,
And counted light the fearful cost;
His blood-gained liberty is lost!

And so, for such a place of rest,
Old prisoner, dropped thy blood as rain
On Concord’s field, and Bunker’s crest,
And Saratoga’s plain?
Look forth, thou man of many scars,
Through thy dim dungeon’s iron bars;
It must be joy, in sooth, to see
Yon monument upreared to thee;
Piled granite and a prison cell,
The land repays thy service well! (Whittier 549)

Here Whittier strikes at several targets that we see again in Melville: The grand Bunker Hill monument is a symbol of the reverence the soldiers should be receiving, contrasting with the structures that better define their fate—in Whittier, a prison; in Melville, “the grave of Israel Potter” (IP viii). Also, in Israel Potter, as in “Poor Man’s Pudding,” Melville satirizes the American tendency to blame the poor for their own plight, offering Franklin’s maxims on self-help as a precursor to Blandmour’s blandishments on nature’s bounty, whereas Whittier forgoes satire for direct contradiction: No lesser being than “God made the old man poor!” If in the 1830s and ’40s impoverished veterans were an acknowledged American social problem, in the 1850s, by contrast, the veterans of the Revolution were in their graves, freeing the country they left behind to debate the meaning of their sacrifice—or to forget about it entirely. True to the strictures of the historical novel, in the 1850s Israel Potter is one of the “last of” his kind, prompting a nostalgic response not engendered by the poor who are always with us. Elisa Tamarkin argues that the nostalgia of 19th-century Americans for institutions that were essentially irrelevant to American life, such as the British monarchy, was fueled by a longing for
national consensus, as well as by a desire, in a rapidly industrializing civilization, for greater reverence to be granted to people and ideas whose economic use-value was not clearly demonstrable. Melville’s account of Israel Potter’s life shows a similar tenderness toward a generation who are gone, and who may or may not have left behind adequate path-marks for Melville and his peers.

Character becomes an explicit theme in *Israel Potter*, in terms of literary characterization and national characteristics, as well as the sort of guts-and-grit traits that get Israel through the war and then his civilian life, which is in many ways more difficult. Melville portrays Israel Potter as a good-natured innocent whose work ethic and can-do spirit endear him to those around him. He is also a stock comic figure, the Yankee who cannot bring himself to address a knight as “sir,” even when trying his hardest: “John—I can’t—Sir, sir! Your pardon. I didn’t mean that” (IP 26). Israel begins life as an impetuous boy who lights out for the territories because his romantic designs have been thwarted; this same spirited but callow nature brings him to fight in the Revolutionary War. Israel is unfailingly brave, so much more so than his peers that he often faces danger alone. Throughout the war, Israel’s work ethic and geniality find him English patrons who give him work and protect his identity. In the company of senior American military and diplomatic personnel, however, Israel’s modesty and sense of duty are liabilities that keep him from taking credit for or reaping any benefit from his exploits.

Historical novels require encounters with at least one well-known historical personage; *Israel Potter* offers a bounty of such encounters, to the point where Israel’s happening to meet so many prominent people becomes a source of comedy in itself. While the profusion of famous figures in the novel is gently amusing, Melville’s
portrayal of the famous real-life characters themselves is heavily ironic. When Israel first encounters Benjamin Franklin, he is awed, and Melville goes on at some length expounding upon, though not illustrating, Franklin’s infinite sagacity:

It seemed as if supernatural lore must needs pertain to this gravely ruddy personage; at least far foresight, pleasant wit, and working wisdom. Old age seemed in nowise to have dulled him, but to have sharpened… But when Israel stepped within the chamber, he lost the complete effect of all this, for the sage’s back, not his face, was turned to him” (IP 39).

That turned back is a problem: Franklin does not have time for ordinary people, as we see when he greets Potter: “‘Bon jour, bon jour, monsieur,’ said the man of wisdom, in a cheerful voice, but too busy to turn round just then” (IP 39). Franklin only turns when Potter addresses him in American English; this is how the famous democrat treats strangers. Melville offers the possibility that Franklin is distracted because he is immersed in scholarship. In a room buzzing with flies, Franklin is serene: “Absorbed in some other world of his occupations and thoughts, these insects, like daily cark and care, did not seem one whit to annoy him” (IP 39). The trademark Franklinian equanimity eventually comes to seem more like indifference than inner calm, and the “daily cark and care” that fail to trouble Franklin, to echo “the thing called pain, the bugbear styled trouble” that do not register in “The Paradise of Bachelors” (209). Franklin is immersed in study to the point that he is inured to the realities of daily life—and thus to the feelings of others.

These limitations in Franklin’s character, a “defect in the region of the heart” in their own right, are shown in full force when Franklin attempts to inculcate in Israel his own notions of domestic economy. Though Israel is weary from his journey and hungry, Franklin refuses him a glass of porter, serving water alone, and provides plain food at
home rather than the benefit of any of Paris’s fine cafes. Similarly, when Israel wonders at the sugar and brandy on his mantelpiece and inquires after their use, Franklin whisks them away, insisting that such luxuries are an unnecessary expense. Melville acknowledges that the private Franklin does not quite measure up to the public self:

This casual private intercourse with Israel, but served to manifest him in his far lesser lights; thrifty, domestic, dietarian, and, it may be, didactically waggish. Seeking here to depict him in his less exalted habitudes, the narrator feels more as if he were playing with one of the sage’s worsted hose, than reverentially handling the honored hat which once oracularly sat upon his brow (IP 48).

Thus the narrator does and does not apologize for possible disrespect to the Founding Father, acknowledging that there is more to Franklin than his stinginess and didacticism, but implying as well that the reader has likely heard more than enough about Franklin’s admirable qualities. This private view of the man is meant as a corrective to the mythology of the revolution, in which Franklin is synonymous with sagacity. Reminding the reader that the Founders were also people, Melville shows how little fun is to be had in the company of someone who insists at all times upon being wise.

When not spouting maxims that simultaneously diminish Israel’s experience and blame him for his problems, self-involved Franklin is forever plugging his book. On sending Israel to bed without so much as a glass of port, he hands him a copy of Poor Richard’s Almanac and advises him to read it. If Franklin were truly eccentric, even a crank, and incapable of acting otherwise, the narrative would likely forgive him his foibles. However, though he is inflexible in the face of a working man like Israel, Franklin adapts himself readily to the social requirements of aristocracy: “Franklin was not less a lady’s man, than a man’s man, a wise man, and an old man… Having carefully weighed the world, Franklin could act any part in it” (IP 48). On its surface, this
adaptability is the essence of sophistication. But in a novel about American independence and the birth of a society of equals, Franklin’s adaptability to the conversational needs of his European patrons leaves his authenticity—even his integrity—in question.

To previous generations, the straightforward simplicity of Ben Franklin’s character, even in light of his prodigious intelligence and obvious cosmopolitanism, was a commonplace. To see how far Melville has strayed from his literary predecessors in this portrayal of Franklin, we need only look at John Neal’s *Brother Jonathan* (1825).

Savage led him, without speaking, by the way, to a large battery, on the East River. Washington was there, on horseback, superintending the embarkation of troops: near him—with one arm over the neck of his large white horse, there stood a plain, aged, quaker-looking [sic] man; his hat on—his hair flowing about his broad, square, shoulders. The face of Washington, either because of the new day light; or from watchfulness—toil—great anxiety—was very pale;—but profoundly quiet nevertheless; while that of the stranger was remarkable for a sort of steady, grave, amplitude;—a benevolent mouth;—a wise, great, clear forehead;—a serious, though cheerful eye, and a look of sincerity, such as no man would have the courage to interrogate (v.3 48-49).

*Brother Jonathan* is a warts-and-all account of the Revolutionary War, which includes a drunken brawl between Northern and Southern soldiers at the moment that they are celebrating the Declaration of Independence. The novel’s battle scenes are unremittingly bloody, even “sordid,” as one critic put it, yet the portrayal of Franklin is respectful, almost religious (Quinn 49). This is the force of the mythology that Melville is up against. If in 1825 no one would dare to question Franklin’s sincerity, by 1854 such interrogation seems entirely necessary. While Franklin’s usurpation of Israel’s hotel luxuries and dismissal of his sexy chambermaid are played for laughs, Israel’s complaint that “Every time he comes in he robs me” has the ring of truth to it, as does Israel’s realization that he has been lulled and gulled by Franklin’s better qualities into submitting to his bullying: “Not till the first impression of the venerable envoy’s suavity had left him
did Israel begin to surmise the mild superiority of successful strategy which lurked beneath this highly ingratiating air” (IP 53, 52).

Even Franklin’s vaunted wisdom, conveniently packaged for future generations, does Israel no good. Alone in his room with no comforts or amusements, Israel takes to fantasizing: “I wish something extraordinary would turn up now; for instance, a man come in and give me ten thousand pounds” (IP 53). Opening Poor Richard’s Almanac, he hopes to find consolation or advice from someone who understands his experience of poverty: “But here’s ‘Poor Richard;’ I am a poor fellow myself; so let’s see what comfort he has for a comrade” (IP 53). Instead, Israel is immediately rebuked for having indulged in fantasy. Franklin’s book says: “So what signifies wishing and hoping for better times? We may make these times better, if we bestir ourselves” (qtd. IP 53). While this is technically true, it is not emotionally helpful, and as an imaginative writer Melville is unlikely to have been entirely in sympathy with the sentiment. Sure enough, faced with “There are no gains, without pains,” “God helps them that help themselves,” and other such maxims, Israel is offended: “It’s a sort of insulting to talk wisdom to a man like me. It’s wisdom that’s cheap, and it’s fortune that’s dear. That ain’t in Poor Richard, but it ought to be” (IP 54). Franklin is the ultimate example of a Rich Man speaking prosperously not only of but also to a Poor Man, offering the sort of domestic advice that incenses Melville with Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s work. But Israel’s Yankee common-sense cuts through Franklin’s obfuscations. Poor Richard is nearly as useful to him as The Wealth of Nations is to Redburn, who uses the book as a pillow. What has happened in the thirty-odd years between Neal and Melville, to make Franklin seem an entirely different sort? First of all, the United States have changed internally, becoming a country
where the ideal of social mobility is used to stigmatize the poor. When Franklin lectures Israel on domestic economy, he is presenting the young man’s poverty and vulnerability as “the failure of individual character” (Lackey 1994 38). Second, the United States has changed in its external inclinations, developing expansionist ambitions that lend a sinister tone to Franklin’s exhortations toward self-help. As Samson argues, Franklin’s “philosophy allows Franklin to ‘help himself’ to everything from Israel’s sugar to his French maid, just as the America of the 1850s, with a similarly rationalized altruism, had helped itself to Texas” (187).

America’s aggressive foreign policies in the early 19th century also likely affected Melville’s portrayal of John Paul Jones. There is no mention of Jones in Trumbull’s narrative; Melville succumbed to the commercial requirement that his story be an adventure, as well as his own nautical inclinations, in bringing Jones into Potter’s story. The two first meet in Ben Franklin’s Parisian rooms. From the start, Melville portrays Jones as simultaneously wild and over-cultivated, a savage and a dandy. Perhaps to overcome the fact that Jones was British, and thus betraying his country by fighting on the American side, Melville makes Jones ethnically “other” in various ways, including giving him “tawny” skin. Here is our first glimpse of the man: “He was a rather small, elastic, swarthy man, with an aspect of a disinherited Indian Chief in European clothes. An unvanquishable enthusiasm, intensified to perfect sobriety, couched in his savage, self-possessed eye” (IP 56). Even Israel, still a relative innocent, describes something unusual in Jones: “Though dressed à-la-mode, he did not seem to be altogether civilized” (IP 56). When Israel shares a room with Jones, he discovers that beneath his clothes the older man’s arms are covered in tattoos: “It was a sort of tattooing such as is seen only on
thorough-bred savages—deep blue, elaborate, labyrinthine, cabalistic” (IP 62). There is no evidence that Jones had any such body-art; this is an invention of Melville’s, one that lets him explore the savagery that is never far from the surface among his warriors—and his people generally. John Paul Jones’s blue tattoos are reminiscent of Lem Hardy, the “renegado from Christendom and humanity” who makes a cameo appearance in *Omoo* (27). Lem Hardy is a former Englishman who has gone native to the point of receiving a tattoo that means he can never return to Western civilization:

> A broad blue band stretched across his face from ear to ear, and on his forehead was the taper figure of a blue shark, nothing but fins from head to tail.
> Some of us gazed upon this man with a feeling akin to horror, no ways abated when informed that he had voluntarily submitted to this embellishment of his countenance. What an impress! Far worse than Cain’s—his was perhaps a wrinkle, or a freckle, which some of our modern cosmetics might have effaced; but the blue shark was a mark indelible (27).

Lem Hardy has no need to return to England; he is “the military leader of the tribe, and war-god of the entire island” (27). Melville’s Jones, similarly, has let his warrior persona supersede his personhood, taking over his entire being. As Rogin points out, in early Melville the uncivilized can be redemptive (227). But at this later stage, Melville’s repeated use of “savage” when describing Jones is no compliment. The historical John Paul Jones was famously a brutal and unfeeling taskmaster toward his men.21 In aligning Jones with cannibal civilizations, Melville is hinting that in all the ways that matter, America’s great naval hero devours his own kind.

Despite such dark suggestions, Melville’s characterization of John Paul Jones in *Israel Potter* remains ambivalent. On one hand, in a departure from all previous accounts of the solitary Jones’s character, in Melville’s version Jones takes Israel into his confidence, in the paternal manner of the Ahab/Pip or Vere/Billy relationships. However,
on shipboard, Jones lapses into the kind of maxim-dispensing that had previously been
Franklin’s purview, which may mean that he is just another figure in Israel’s life making
too vociferous a demand for quasi-filial fealty: “Never kill a king, but make him captive”
(IP 92). “Never be more cheery for another than for yourself” (IP 93). On the other hand,
Jones’s generosity to Israel far exceeds anything ever on offer by Franklin. Having
demanded to hear Israel’s life story (which did not much interest Franklin), Jones
interjects: “But hold; you want some grog first” (IP 90). This is a far cry from Franklin’s
self-regarding lectures over water. However, while there is nothing inherently wrong with
Franklin’s aphorisms on the value of self-help, the problem lying in his and others’
execution, Jones’s advice is pragmatic to the point of being Machiavellian. Even in a
portrayal that leaves standing much of the mythology and veneration surrounding Jones,
there are embedded clues that that veneration may be misguided. Jones refers to himself
in jest as “a democratic sort of sea-king,” and there is something distinctly monarchical
about the way he wields authority (IP 90).

The novel also raises questions around Jones’s non-verbal expressions of
authority. The captain himself brings up the fact that he was accused of beating an
English sailor to death, and that this is his reason for quitting England. Jones says that he
has been slandered, but the violence of his protests, the rage that seems to come from
nowhere, gives the lie to his denials. Then there is his account of the circumstances under
which he is willing to return to Whitehaven: “‘I swore never again to set foot on her pier,
except, like Caesar, at Sandwich, as a foreign invader. Spring under me, good ship; on
you I bound to my vengeance!’” (IP 91). To 21st century readers, Jones sounds like
someone who has been “radicalized” and turned to terrorism. “‘[Y]ou hate so well, I love
ye,’’ he says to Israel, disturbingly, at the commencement of his mentorship of the younger man (IP 92). Is that emotional register appropriate when discussing a political conflict? And is the desire for vengeance over a personal insult—especially one that was likely deserved, as in the case of the accusations leveled against Jones in the British navy—a noble motive for going to war? Over and over in this portrait we see a blurring of the lines between derring-do and war crimes. Jones is energized by danger and by violence, so much so that when setting fire to British coal-ships in Whitehaven, he seems uncharacteristically cheerful: “‘And now, to put an end to all future burnings in America, by one mighty conflagration of shipping in England. Come on, lads! Pipes and matches in the van!’” (IP 103). The narrator makes much of how Jones went easy on the people of Whitehaven, how he did not harm any civilians, but other details in the narrative indicate that Jones went easy on Whitehaven because he was massively outnumbered. Nominally praising the courage of Jones’s attacks on the British navy, Melville suggests that Jones “held at nothing all the prescribed prudence of war, and every obligation of peace” (IP 95).

When not being a savage, Jones is a bejeweled dandy, as well as a clichéd 18th-century “Man of Feeling,” as when he apologizes in florid language to the Countess of Selkirk for his men’s insistence upon looting her household silver. Like Franklin, he is able to put on a front and knows how to make his way in varied scenes. When he brings his talent for shape-shifting, and even his occasionally gentlemanly demeanor, to the field of battle, however, Jones violates the rules of war: “[W]ith such tranquility of effrontery did Paul conduct his ships, concealing as much as possible their warlike character, that more than once his vessels were mistaken for merchantmen, and hailed by passing ships
as such” (IP 116). Jones’s civilian camouflage is certainly clever, but is it right? This is the problem with guerrilla warfare: If an army cannot distinguish between civilians and partisans, it earns the right to treat all civilians as enemy combatants. Thus Jones’s actions, however crafty and stylishly executed, put true merchant ships in danger. At one point Melville calls Jones “chivalrous, however unprincipled,” thus identifying what makes Jones the most ambiguous of characters: He has a code, certainly, but he doesn’t have any rules (IP 96).

Melville claims not to be entering the debate on Jones’s character: “Much subtle casuistry has been expended upon the point, whether Paul Jones was a knave or a hero, or a union of both. But war and warriors, like politics and politicians, like religion and religionists, admit of no metaphysics” (IP 105). However, this claim is built to self-destruct: By definition religion begins with metaphysics, and we are certainly in a position to judge our politicians. Therefore, with a surface shrug, Melville indicates that metaphysical concerns about meaningful action and good and evil are in fact entirely relevant to the practice of war, that we can and should judge our military leaders for their conduct. We can further clarify Melville’s verdict on Jones by looking at another literary predecessor to *Israel Potter*. James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Pilot* is set during Jones’s campaign along the English coast. Jones is a shadowy figure in the novel—cold, abrupt, even rude, but unfailingly brave. He operates largely in secret, and some of his secrets die with him. Yet Cooper’s stance is, overall, laudatory. In his preface to the novel, Cooper says that he is seeking to redress a historical wrong:

The Author wishes to express his regret, that the daring and useful services of a great portion of our marine in the old war should be suffered to remain in the obscurity under which it is now buried. Everyone has heard of the victory of the Bon-Homme Richard, but how little is known of the rest of the life, and of the
important services of the remarkable man who commanded, in our behalf, in that memorable combat. How little is known of… his repeated and desperate projects to carry the war into the ‘island home’ of our powerful enemy (vii).

Reading that first sentence, one would think that the ensuing novel would chronicle an unsung hero along the lines of Israel Potter. Instead, in the very next sentence, Cooper demonstrates that he is less interested in the unknown soldiers of the Revolution than in burnishing the already mythological status of John Paul Jones. Melville must have been amused at this portrayal of Jones’s deeds as tragically underreported. Cooper’s History of the Navy of the United States of America is a major source for the Jones material in Israel Potter, but the Israel Potter project as a whole serves as a rebuttal to Cooper’s rhetoric of glory and to his elitist insistence on further publicizing the deeds of the “great.”

One of the myths of the American Revolution is that the heroes of the war are stand-ins for all of us; they are representative men. In Israel Potter, Melville rehearses this line of rhetoric, in triplicate. First Melville sketches Franklin as a sort of prophet of American expansionism: Franklin’s wall is covered by wide maps of far countries in the New World, containing vast empty spaces in the middle, with the word DESERT diffusely printed there… which printed word however bore a vigorous pen-mark, in the Doctor’s hand, drawn straight through it, as if in summary repeal of it (IP 38).

This is what J.L. Austin would have described as the ultimate performative utterance—just as the Old Testament God physically creates the world merely by saying it shall be, Franklin seems to eliminate the desert emptinesses of the New World, conquering and populating them, with a stroke of his planning pen. When Franklin thinks, he thinks for the nation as a whole, shaping its destiny. Soon afterwards, tracing a parallel between the emerging American nation and John Paul Jones, the narrator asserts:
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 (IP 120).

The analogy, one might note, has implications about America that are not altogether positive. Neither Jones’s violence nor his dandyism provides a productive model for nation-building. David Reynolds elaborates:

In depicting this paradoxical character, Melville reached a larger realization about America. The nation was itself, he realized, a kind of likable criminal constantly reenacting the brash violence of its initial rebellion but always sustaining itself with ideals of decorum and gentility (300).

The figure of Jones combines criminality and sentimental self-delusion with a lack of generosity. As Samson notes, the historical Jones was “wined and dined as the toast of Parisian society” while his men were short of food and winter uniforms: “Thus not only in its violence, but in its denial of support to those like ‘poor Israel,’ America may be the ‘Paul Jones of nations’” (Samson 184). After all, as Melville notes, the king of France “sent Paul a sword and a medal. But poor Israel, who also had conquered a craft, and all unaided too—what had he?” (IP 113). As Jones hob-nobs with royalty in the name of the democratic cause, he seems to be hogging all the credit.

Does Paul Jones embody the American spirit? Generally suspicious of such oversimplifications, Melville is quick to introduce another model American, engineering an entirely fictional encounter between Israel Potter and Ethan Allen. Of the latter, the narrator declares: “His spirit was essentially western; and herein is his peculiar Americanism; for the western spirit is, or will yet be (for no other is, or can be) the true American one” (IP 149). Even today, Ethan Allen’s name remains synonymous with the frontier. Yet elsewhere in the novel, Melville reveals that Allen’s folksy, Western, tall-
tale-reminiscent image is a pose; he looks like one thing but sounds like another. Thanks in large part to clever costuming and Melville’s borrowings from more recent images of Davy Crockett, Ethan Allen looks the part of a wild man:

The stranger was outlandishly arrayed in the sorry remains of a half-Indian, half-Canadian sort of a dress, consisting of a fawn-skin jacket—the fur outside and hanging in ragged tufts—a half-rotten, bark-like belt of wampum; aged breeches of sagathy; bedarned worsted stockings to the knee; old moccasins riddled with holes… all soiled, and stuck about with bits of half-rotted straw (IP 144).

This all seems quite convincingly feral. Allen sounds, however, like someone altogether different. When visited in prison by genteel female fans, he “‘talks like a beau in a parlor,’” as one of the swooning ladies puts it (IP 145). When speaking to a clergyman about the next world, he takes on the oracular speech of an Old Testament prophet:

‘Every one tells me … that I, Ethan Allen, am to be hung like a thief. If I am, the great Jehovah and the Continental Congress shall avenge me; while I, for my part, shall show you, even on the tree, how a Christian gentleman can die’ (IP 145).

Melville borrows some of Allen’s rhetoric from his own narrative of being a British captive, and other prisoners who were confined with him described this quality as well. As one said of Allen, “I have seldom met with a man, possessing… a stronger mind, or whose mode of expression was more vehement and oratorical. Notwithstanding that Allen might have had something of the insubordinate, lawless frontier spirit in his composition” (qtd. Jellison 171). In Melville’s novel, as in life, there is no doubt of Allen’s eloquence. However, considering the American emphasis on authenticity, the disjunction between sound and sight here is disturbing. Written around this time, Matthew Arnold’s poem “Dover Beach” creates a sense of unease through the contrast between the visual cues—a calm sea, a glowing moon—and the “grating roar” of pebbles being thrown about by the waves. Ethan Allen’s uncouth appearance combined with his
cultured speech patterns could bespeak a new American elite based on moral or intellectual qualities, regardless of geographic or economic circumstance. However, the revelation of Allen’s masquerade could also imply that essential Americanness is a mere put-on. Allen is the only legend of the Revolution who gets a nearly positive portrayal in *Israel Potter*, but even he is a chameleon. Worse, like Jones-worship, admiration of Allen has a monarchist tinge. Even in a passage that seems to assimilate the full animalistic Allen myth includes a gesture toward older forms of authority: “[H]is whole matted aspect was that of some wild beast; but of a royal sort, and unsubdued by the cage” (IP 144, italics mine). If Jones is a sea-king, Allen is a lion king, and the American Revolution is rapidly creating new monarchs to replace the one being overthrown.

The novel’s vexed attitude toward monarchy is shown in highest relief when Israel meets King George III, an entirely invented encounter. On spotting the king in his garden for the first time, Israel briefly considers assassinating him but quickly repents. Melville tells us that Israel wants to kill the king because he recalls that “the war was imputed more to the self-will of the King than to the willingness of parliament or the nation,” and that Israel was aware of all that he and his country as a whole had suffered in the war. Thus, Israel has a specific motive for targeting George III. The motivation behind Israel’s decision to leave the king unharmed, on the other hand, is based on more general principles. Israel is tempted to violence by “dim impulses, such as those to which the regicide Ravaillac yielded” (IP 30). Melville is in a quandary here: He wants to allude to the French Revolution and the Terror that followed, but his novel is set prior to those events, so he has to dig deep into French history, to François Ravaillac, who murdered King Henry IV in 1610. However, in the 19th century, the word “regicide” was so coded
that no reader could mistake the allusion to the French Revolution. The fact that Potter decides not to be a regicide signals to Melville’s readers that the American Revolution is on morally different ground from its French equivalent: “But thrusting Satan behind him, Israel vanquished all such temptations” (IP 30). Significantly, Israel chooses to follow the rules of war that Jones ignores; when dressed as a civilian, Potter does not fight.

Some time after choosing non-violence, while still working in the garden at Kew, Israel exchanges a few words with the king. George III recognizes immediately that his interlocutor is an American and an escaped prisoner-of-war, yet he promises Israel that he will always be safe while in his employ. While able to offer the protection of his immense authority, the king is also clearly a human being: He has an odd speech-pattern that makes him repeat words and phrases. The overall effect is endearing, and the king’s speech impediment plays against the idea that the articulate English own the language that bears their name. In this conversation, the young Yankee has a greater command of language. When he says “‘God bless your noble majesty,’” the king exults, only to have Israel clarify that it is “‘[n]ot the king, but the king’s kindness’” that has conquered him (IP 31). The personal encounter with royalty so charms Israel that, despite republican sentiments so ingrained that he cannot call a knight “sir,” he finds that he is anti-monarchy but not anti-monarch. Israel’s emotions here are at odds with the ironic narrator, who sniffs: “Thus we see what strange and powerful magic resides in a crown, and how subtly that cheap and easy magnanimity, which in private belongs to most kings, may operate on good-natured and unfortunate souls” (IP 32). In this version of events, George III’s kindness affects Israel so profoundly because the latter is in a vulnerable state. Though Melville may share his narrator’s skepticism about George III’s personal
qualities, he does endorse Israel’s decision to leave the king in peace. In *Mardi*, the mysterious scroll, essentially the voice of truth in the novel, declares that in themselves, monarchies are not utterly evil. For many nations, they are better than republics; for many, they will ever so remain. And better, on all hands, that peace should rule with a scepter, than that the tribunes of the people should brandish their broadswords. Better be the subject of a king, upright and just; than a freeman in Franko, with the executioner’s ax at every corner (527).

Franko is *Mardi*’s stand-in for France, and this passage indicates that Melville sees monarchy as preferable to revolutionary chaos.

Just as in *Mardi* Melville refuses to privilege one form of government over another, seeking instead to judge by results, in *Israel Potter* he has several opportunities to praise the United States at the expense of England, and he refuses them. As Chacko and Kulcsa point out, Henry Trumbull’s narrative of Israel Potter’s life in England is full of “page after page of a descending spiral of misery, disease, and misfortune, with incessant bursts of anti-British sentiment, which was precisely what the audience of 1824 expected” (385). In Melville’s version, Israel’s decades in England are summarized in three short chapters, in which his suffering is often expressed metaphorically rather than using the kind of realistic detail that is the trademark of Melville’s nautical fiction. Chapter 23, “Israel in Egypt,” plays on Israel Potter’s name to invoke the Biblical story of exile, slavery, and exodus. The Israelite slaves in Egypt made bricks and built the cities of Pithom and Ramses, and Israel Potter initially works in a brick-yard just outside London, literally providing the building-blocks of the British Empire. Over time, like the factory operatives in “The Tartarus of Maids,” Israel finds that the repetitive nature of his work has a profound effect on his physical and then his mental being. He and his colleagues are progressively demoralized:
[T]his continual, violent, helter-skelter slapping of the dough into the moulds, begat a corresponding disposition in the moulder; who, by heedlessly slapping that sad dough, as stuff of little worth, was thereby taught, in his meditations, to slap, with similar heedlessness, his own sadder fortunes, as of still less vital consideration. What signifies who we be—dukes or ditchers? thought the moulders; all is vanity and clay” (IP 155).

Working the shapeless clay into uniform bricks, these men come to see themselves and other people as uniform, and struggle as pointless. “All is vanity” is from the beginning of Ecclesiastes, in a passage expressing complete despair: “Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun? One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever” (Eccl. 1:2-4). In a novel about the failure of one generation to appreciate the struggles and sacrifices of the preceding one, this is not one of Melville’s “deliberately random” biblical allusions; it serves to emphasize his theme (Wright 36).

When Israel completes his servitude as a brick-maker, he makes his way to London, but he is in no kind of Promised Land. To portray the metropolis, Melville shifts from Biblical analogies to Dantean language and imagery. On November 9, 1849, Melville noted in his journal: “While on one of the Bridges, the thought struck me again that a fine thing might be written about a Blue Monday in November London -- a city of Dis (Dante’s) -- clouds of smoke -- the damned &c.” (Journal 25). This comparison of London with Dis makes its way into Israel Potter, embellished with descriptions of the city that are over-the-top in their gloominess:

The Thames, ... polluted by continual vicinity to man, curdled on between rotten wharves, one murky sheet of sewerage. Fretted by the ill-built piers, awhile it crested and hissed, then shot balefully through the Erebus arches, desperate as the lost souls of the harlots, who, every night, took the same plunge. Meantime, here
and there, like awaiting hearses, the coal-scows drifted along, poled broadside, pell-mell to the current (IP 159).

The language here is over-the-top, not unlike the prophetic chapters in Dickens’ *Bleak House*, with Melville’s Dantinean references a sort of short-hand for gloominess and squalor. We are back in “Tartarus of Maids” territory here, with the suicidal prostitutes echoing the exploitation and desperation of the New England factory operatives. But whereas Dante wanders through Hell so eventually he can see Paradise, Israel only gets as far as Boston. This chapter borrows from the *Inferno* to present London in as negative a light as possible so as to render Potter’s eventual homecoming all the more anticlimactic and poignant, or else to explain why he did not manage to return to America earlier. Yet the abstraction here, the refusal to offer a realistic depiction of London, indicates as well that Melville is holding something back.

The chapter that follows, titled “Forty-five Years,” runs rapidly through the four-and-a-half decades of its title, providing a bare-bones narrative of Israel’s rapid socio-economic decline in London. Writing of Israel’s hard life, the narrator shuts down any lines of inquiry that would require more detail: “But these experiences, both from their intensity and his solitude, were necessarily squalid. Best not enlarge upon them. For just as extreme suffering, without hope, is intolerable to the victim, so, to others, is its depiction, without some corresponding delusive mitigation” (IP 161). Both of these chapters seem like narrative experiments, attempts to capture a truth about Israel’s experience without fully conveying the experience itself. *Israel Potter* was written during a time of retrenchment, when Melville had to reexamine his creative options. First, the narrator’s assumption that any mitigation of a character’s misery is of necessity “delusive” is no doubt a comment on sentimental fiction that raises social problems only
to make the reader feel better about them. In his dedication of the novel, Melville apologizes for “the gloom of my closing chapters” but refuses to give the fictional Israel a happy ending that the real Israel never experienced, striking a blow for both realism and historical accuracy. Second, Melville raises the question of what is and is not narratable. When justifying his skimming over Israel’s decades of misery, Melville blames the reading public, saying that the writer seeking popularity is “admonished by the fact, that to the craped palace of the king lying in state, thousands of starers shall throng; but few feel enticed to the shanty, where, like a pealed knuckle-bone, grins the unupholstered corpse of the beggar” (IP 161). Leo Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* famously begins with the assertion that “happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” Similarly, in *Narrative and Its Discontents*, D.A. Miller argued that happiness in general (and happy marriages in particular) provide no opportunity for narration; happiness does not make for much of a story. Here, Melville seems to be drawing the opposite conclusion, that failure destroys a narrative arc, that the misery of poverty can barely be put into words. However, in point of fact Melville knew that descriptions of human suffering by the likes of Carlyle, Dickens, and Harriet Beecher Stowe were selling well, so there had to be another reason not to devote time and pages to Israel’s poverty.

*Israel Potter* contains several instances in which the narrator announces his refusal to narrate, among them the Battle of Bunker Hill itself. Whereas Trumbull sketches a full account of the battle, including the three waves of the British attack, Melville focuses on Private Potter’s private experiences. Beginning to narrate the Americans’ fortification of Bunker Hill, the narrator interrupts himself: “But everyone knows all about the battle. Suffice it, that Israel was one of those marksmen whom
Putnam harangued as touching the enemy’s eyes” (IP 13). What is the meaning of that self-interruption, that refusal to narrate? Bellis sees Melville as presenting the battle as “an oft-told tale,” already a cliché, and refusing the connections with the past so emphasized in Trumbull’s account (612). However, with his seemingly dismissive gesture, Melville is following in the footsteps of Daniel Webster. In his 1825 speech at the laying of the corner-stone of the Bunker Hill monument, Webster described the battle at length to an audience containing, amongst its thousands, several hundred veterans of the battle. When he made his speech on the monument’s completion, in 1843, Webster merely outlined the battle’s main events:

I will not attempt to describe that battle. The cannonading; the landing of the British; their advance; the coolness with which the charge was met; the repulse; the second attack; the second repulse; the burning of Charlestown; and, finally, the closing assault, and the slow retreat of the Americans,—the history of all these is familiar (Webster 141).

Both Webster and Melville’s narrator are coping with the literal truth that all their auditors or readers are entirely familiar with the larger historical events under discussion. What they crave is to understand the meaning of those events. In his effort to get at the deeper meaning of his story, Melville alternates the surreal, almost abstract imagery of the “City of Dis” chapter35 or the broad-strokes summary of “Forty-five Years.” When neither technique is adequate, Melville resorts to visual cues.

Comparing Israel Potter’s time in London to the Israelites’ 40 years of wandering in the desert before entering the Promised Land, Melville draws on the story that God helped Moses and his people to navigate in the Sinai Desert by always having a pillar of cloud in the day or a pillar of fire at night that showed them the way:

In that London fog, went before him the ever-present cloud by day, but no pillar of fire by the night, except the cold column of the monument; two hundred feet
beneath the mocking gilt flames on whose top, at the stone base, the shiverer, of midnight, often laid down (IP 161).

“The monument” here is Sir Christopher Wren’s monument to the Great Fire of London on Tower Hill. Erected in the 1670s, “the Monument,” as it is known, remains one of London’s most visible landmarks:
Figure 8. The Monument to the Great Fire of London. Sutton Nicholls. c.1753
The image of a homeless man in the relentless English wet and cold sleeping next to a symbolic representation of fire is poignant enough. However, to Melville and his readers in the 1850s, Wren’s Monument would also have raised associations with another memorial column recently erected in London, Nelson’s Column in Trafalgar Square, which was completed in 1843:

![Image of Trafalgar Square](https://example.com/trafalgar_square.jpg)

*Figure 9. Trafalgar Square, from National Gallery, London, England, c.1890. Library of Congress*

We know from Melville’s journals how much he admired Nelson\(^36\) and from *Redburn* how the Liverpool memorial to Nelson caught his imagination. We also know that Melville saw memorialization and the rewards of heroism as among the primary themes of *Israel Potter*; when converting *Israel Potter* from a magazine serial\(^37\) to a book, he added a long and sarcastic dedication to “His Highness the Bunker-Hill Monument,”
which was dedicated in 1843, in the same year as the Nelson Column. Despite the
anachronism of the allusion, it is entirely possible, even likely, that Melville wished his
readers to imagine a homeless veteran sleeping at the foot of a monument at the top of
which stands a military hero. That image could stand in for the novel as a whole.
Whereas historians had selected the Franklins, Joneses, and Allens of this world to stand
at the top of the American national consciousness, Melville opts in this project to focus
on the experience of one of the people at the bottom of society. Just as the Nelson
monument in Liverpool drags Redburn’s eyes downward, toward the chained figures at
the base, who remind him of slaves, Melville reminds the readers of *Israel Potter* to look
at the people who are sleeping rough at the foot of our own monuments, at the people left
out of the national narrative.

Ultimately, what is least narratable in *Israel Potter* is not poverty but reflexive
nationalism. Melville takes great care to show both the British and the American navies
as behaving brutally, and his account of the battle between the *Bon Homme Richard* and
the *Serapis* relies heavily on images of entanglement:

> Never was there a fight so snarled. The intricacy of those incidents which defy the
narrator’s extrication, is not ill figured in that bewildering intertanglement38 of all
the yards and anchors of the two ships, which confounded them for the time in
one chaos of devastation (IP 120).

As the ships become entwined, they lose their separate identities, just as Israel loses and
regains his national identity throughout the narrative: “The belligerents were no longer, in
the ordinary sense of things, an English ship, and an American ship. It was a co-
partnership and joint-stock combustion-company of both ships; yet divided, even in
participation” (IP 126). Their ships becoming a sort of two-headed monster,
interconnected even while bent on mutual destruction, the British and Continental sailors
continue to batter each other, pausing only to fight the fire that threatens the rigging of both their ships simultaneously. The two ships’ crews share a fate, as they share so much else, and Melville is unwilling to present one side as being in the right. When the Bon-Homme Richard’s pyrrhic victory arrives, Melville is careful to divide the blame equally:

The loss of the two ships was about equal; one-half of the total number of those engaged being either killed or wounded.

In view of this battle one may well ask—What separates the enlightened man from the savage? Is civilization a thing distinct, or is it an advanced stage of barbarism? (IP 130).

Neither Britain nor America is more barbaric than the other. But neither nation has any reason to brag, either. If, in *Mardi*, “in the flush and pride of having recently attained their national majority, the men of Vivenza were perhaps too much inclined to carry a vauntful crest,” in *Israel Potter* any boasting about battles fought gloriously would have to face the image of two interlocked ships, their crews shirtless and screaming, burning each other down (472). This must have been a difficult rhetorical move for a writer who was personally proud of his family’s achievements in the Revolutionary War, which also situated him near the top of American society regardless of his financial circumstances. But abandoning the myth that the Revolution was fought nobly or gloriously is a necessary step in correcting the misplaced emphasis on recounting and rewarding the deeds of the powerful in lieu of caring for the Israel Potters of society.39

As he moves from *Redburn* to the diptych stories to *Israel Potter*, Melville uses his writing to stress-test the integrity of American society, with increasingly damning results. A country that ignores immigrants may perhaps justifiably say that as of yet it has no stake in or commitment from these new arrivals, who may leave tomorrow. However, increasing the severity of Melville’s condemnation, a society that neglects its native-born
poor, offering them rhetoric about self-reliance and quiet dignity instead of nutritious food, livable housing, and fair wages for hard work, will have to tie itself into verbal knots to excuse such conduct. Worst of all, a nation that forgets its veterans has failed in its most basic functions; it has created a country where there is no reward for loyalty or sacrifice. When, on July 4, 1826, Israel finally returns to the United States, he is nearly run over by a carriage decorated with patriotic bunting celebrating the Battle of Bunker Hill. Worse, he discovers that in his home-town no one remembers him. Whereas Irving’s Rip Van Winkle makes his way back home after a twenty-year sleep to find that some of his old friends are alive and well and that his daughter is married and able to support him, Israel Potter finds that his family has gone west, leaving no address. There is also an implication that the New England landscape of which Israel dreamed throughout his exile is actually not much to look at. Israel’s son urges him, “Come away, father, from this dismal damp wood” (IP 169). The only respite Potter finds is on Copp’s Hill, where he sits in the graveyard and looks out at the Bunker Hill battleground. The Bunker Hill Monument, its cornerstone already laid (thanks to Melville’s adjustment of Potter’s return date), is “hard to see, as a struggling sprig of corn in a chilly spring” (IP 167).

The Bunker Hill Monument is the dedicatee of the book version of Israel Potter, His Fifty Years of Exile. Melville’s dedications provide an index of sorts to the author’s professional status and his state of mind. His first four novels are dedicated to close friends and family: his future father-in-law Lemuel Shaw, his uncle Herman Gansevoort, his older brother Allan Melville, and his younger brother Thomas Melville. Perhaps as a mark of the haste in which it was written or Melville’s ambivalence about the project, White-Jacket has no dedication. Moby-Dick has the first dedication in which Melville
reveals professional aspirations and a sense of his own membership, however junior, in a literary fellowship; he dedicates the book to Hawthorne “In Token/ Of My Admiration for his Genius.” As it does in every other way, *Pierre* takes a turn: While all previous dedications were brief and paid tribute to a person in Melville’s life, Melville dedicates *Pierre* to “GREYLOCK’S MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY” and expands upon this homage to Mount Greylock, or “his Imperial Purple Majesty” in a passage that is exceedingly purple in its own right.

In the dedication of *Israel Potter*, Melville perfects the joke he rehearsed in *Pierre*: He dedicates his novel to “His Highness/ the/ BUNKER-HILL MONUMENT,” thus playing on both the monument’s physical stature and the ways in which the mythology of the Revolution has taken on the reverential, hierarchical ideology of monarchism. That Melville is partly joking is evident from his parodying of the toadyish dedications of the 18th century in his closing: “Your Highness’ Most devoted and obsequious,/ The Editor.” But parts of this dedication are also serious, especially those in which Melville contemplates the relation between his book and the enormous monument. Melville’s novel ends with Potter’s death, and it links the literary demise of his memoir with his personal demise: “He dictated a little book, the record of his fortunes. But long ago it faded out of print—himself out of being—his name out of memory” (IP 169).

Going a step further than *Redburn*’s debate over whether the out-of-date guidebook should be preserved, here Melville presents his own book as a corrective for both historical amnesia and literary obsolescence. In bringing Israel Potter’s memory back into the national consciousness, the book is, in the language of the dedication, “a dilapidated old tombstone retouched.” The Bunker Hill Monument’s shape means that it too is a
tombstone of sorts; the ancient Egyptians used obelisks to mark the graves of heroes (Purcell 64). Furthering the premise that his novel is a monument of sorts, Melville chooses June 17, the anniversary of the Battle of Bunker Hill, as the date for his dedication, just as the monument was dedicated on the same date several years earlier. But where the stone monument is blank, even anonymous, Melville’s tribute to Potter is personal. The dedication closes in wishing the monument a happy anniversary, and “that each of its summer’s suns may shine as brightly on your brow as each winter snow shall lightly rest on the grave of Israel Potter.” With this dedication, Melville stakes a claim for his novel as what he described in Redburn as “enduring monuments” that “are built in the closet with the letters of the alphabet” (231).

Israel Potter was largely praised by critics but did not sell particularly well in America, where readers preferred such fare as The Lamplighter and The Life and Beauties of Fanny Fern, the former a work of sentimental domestic fiction that George Eliot would likely have characterized as a Silly Novel by a Lady Novelist, the latter an anthology of satirical pieces by Fanny Fern (Sarah Payson Willis), compiled by a former editor of hers with the express intention of causing a scandal and ruining her reputation (Bezanson 219-20). Even this relatively light work of Melville’s could not compete in such a market. The novel did better in England, where it was pirated by Routledge and sold in a yellow-covered shilling edition. Unfortunately, though Israel Potter was Melville’s most widely read book in England throughout the 19th century, due to the absence of an international copyright he was unable to profit from its sales (Gohdes 259-60). It may seem odd that an American novel about the Revolutionary War was so popular in Britain, but we must remember that by the 1850s Britain and America had
come to an understanding. Some 100,000 people attended the dedication of the Bunker Hill Monument on its completion. The popular Currier and Fisher lithograph commemorating that day shows the vastness of the monument, the enormous crowds below it, and, in the foreground, the soldiers of two armies, standing side-by-side: the blue coats of the Union, and the red coats and bearskin hats of a British Guards regiment.
Significantly, the British soldiers are in the center of the frame, and because their backs are to the viewer, they embody the viewer’s perspective. Thus Americans who purchased this print in the 1840s were consenting to look at the Bunker Hill monument essentially through the eyes of British troops. Five years after regular steamship travel between New York and Liverpool had been established, the Revolutionary War and its after-shock in 1812 were ancient history.

1 Qtd. Purcell, p.65.
2 In “From Pisgah to Egypt,” Judith Hiltner argues that Israel Potter, written shortly after the rejection of “The Two Temples,” incorporates many of that story’s motifs and critiques. It is possible that the novel’s historical setting permitted greater latitude for its satirical content.
3 This entry is dated Tuesday Dec 18th 1849. Bezanson notes that Melville likely intended to do more with London as a setting for the novel; hence his purchase of the map (IP 175).
4 Parker posits that Melville was inspired by what he saw and read on his journey, or else that “he simply felt he had been so good a husband, living cheaply, selling White-Jacket against all odds, renouncing his tour, that he deserved to write a book he wanted to write” (605).
5 Delbanco argues that Melville’s “powers of invention were patently declining. In the past, he had poached incidents or descriptions from other writers, but he had never looked to others for subject or theme” (225).
6 Perhaps the most glaring among these is that Trumbull’s narrative presents Potter as being the son of a respectable married couple, whereas his birth certificate indicates that he was the son of a single mother and was apprenticed to (and de facto adopted) by John Potter, a respectable elder of the Quaker church in which Israel was raised (Chacko 368). Then there is Potter’s first journey aboard the U.S.S. Washington, which ended in a mutiny; this voyage is entirely omitted from Trumbull’s Life, which describes only Potter’s second journey on the Washington, which ended in capture (Chacko 375-7).
7 Melville eliminates this problem and gives himself latitude to describe his beloved landscape by having Potter hail from the Berkshires rather than Rhode Island.
8 See Chacko and Kulcsa, especially pp.379-85.
9 See “Magazine Practices and Melville’s Israel Potter.”
10 Edward Tang notes that this genre which included Indian captivity and slave narratives as well as accounts of action seen in the Revolutionary War. In this latter category, some 200 accounts appeared in print after the War of 1812 (70).
11 Rosenberg argues that “[s]ince there is evidence that Melville had read Sir Walter Scott, James Fenimore Cooper, Carlyle, Dickens, and Thackeray by the time he wrote Israel Potter, it seems reasonable to assume that he was at least roughly familiar with the tradition of imaginative history and that, on some level, he was reacting to that tradition” (177).
12 For a full analysis of the historical novel in general and the English tradition of historical fiction, see Georg Lukacs’s The Historical Novel and Avrom Fleishman’s The English Historical Novel: Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf.
13 In these references, “IP” stands for the Northwestern-Newberry edition of Israel Potter.
15 As Rosenberg says, “There is something comic in this fortuitous series of historically meaningful experiences, as if Melville were deliberately exaggerating the propensity of the traditional hero of historical fiction to be a perfectly placed eavesdropper and eyewitness” (Rosenberg 179).The same joke will be used, to lesser effect, in Winston Groom’s novel Forrest Gump (1986), in which an innocent stumbles into major moments of 20th-century history.
16 We can see a precursor to this jaundiced revisionism in William Makepeace Thackeray’s Henry Esmond (1852), which deflates its public heroes so as to have no heroes. In that novel, the protagonist is
disillusioned by personal contact with his monarch, which leads him to conclude that all kings are chosen arbitrarily and that law and order are more important to him than any particular family’s succession to the throne. In Thackeray, the “great man” theory of history is officially dead, as is the notion that literature should be about the doings of kings. As readers, we are more invested in Henry’s career than in that of King James. Melville also had professional reasons for adopting a Thackerian tone; Post-Lauria argues that the “undercutting of idealized portraits of American heroes… locates this work as a distinctively Putnam’s production (129).

17 This was Melville’s diagnosis of Emerson; see ch.1.

18 Though a joke on Franklin’s famously rigid notions of domestic economy, this detail may also be due to the fact that at the time that he wrote *Israel Potter* Melville had not experienced much Parisian fine dining himself. Melville was on a tight budget during his 1849 trip to Europe, drinking in London’s better-known pubs, but “for economy’s sake usually eating at cheap and obscure places” (Journals 173).

19 It is also possible that Melville was trying to make Potter a hero of the Revolutionary War on both land and sea. Lackey argues that “in order to communicate effectively the pathos of Israel’s fate, the novel’s denouement requires that Potter have made a worthy contribution to the Revolution” (1994 41).

20 Both of Melville’s grandfathers, who fought in the Revolution on the American side, were born British. They lived their adult lives in America, however, which was not the case for Jones.

21 Samson points out that “severity toward his men was of such notoriety that Jones himself, his editor Sands, and Cooper all feel called upon to controvert it” (183).

22 For more on the British army’s rules of engagement and the issue of disguise, see Michael Walzer’s *Just and Unjust Wars.*

23 See Bellis’s “Autobiography as History as Fiction” for an account of Melville’s borrowings from Cooper.

24 Rosenberg sees these stereotypes as primarily a generic issue: “Melville once more appears to be parodying the simplifying vision of most historical fiction, questioning the belief that there ever can be a single ‘type’ that defines a complex era or diverse culture” (181).

25 So much so that it is used to market “colonial-style” furniture.

26 The cuteness of George III’s speech here is not unlike the portrayal of George VI’s speech impediment in the 2010 film *The King’s Speech,* which was a box-office success and won numerous awards on both sides of the Atlantic.

27 In the 19th century, this is a mainstream attitude: “English kings and queens were usually liked, even enjoyed. … George III was all but an object of affection for the American traveling in England in the first quarter of the nineteenth century” (Mulvey 66).

28 This argument is in line with Elisa Tamarkin’s idea that antebellum America’s enthusiasm and even nostalgia for the British monarchy were rooted in a sense of national disunity and vulnerability. On the brink of civil war, Americans relished imagery of universal national sentiment, even when that sentiment was counter-revolutionary. For more on this idea, see Tamarkin’s book *Anglophilia.*

29 It is quite possible that Melville wrote this chapter in tandem with “The Tartarus of Maids.” The latter sketch was published in *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* in April 1855; *Israel Potter* was serialized in *Putnam’s* from July 1854 through March 1855.

30 Sten argues that “in making London an urban inferno, Melville was trying to create an environment from which there would appear to be no exit” (279).

31 Given that the years of exile in London were the initial inspiration for Melville’s reworking of the story, it is surprising that he chooses in the end not to write much about them. Sten attributes the rapid skimming of “Forty-five Years” to a need to keep up the quick pace of the rest of the narrative (277). Reynolds agrees, arguing that the novel “approximates the mode of Dark Adventure: a rapidly moving action narrative punctuated by very brief, usually dark, philosophizing” (299). Reynolds argues that it is this quick pace that made *Israel Potter* resemble the sensation novels of the day and inspired a London publisher to pirate it and release it “as part of a ‘Cheap Series’ of yellow-covered shilling novels” (299). The same thing happened in the U.S. in 1865, only the pirates retitled the novel *The Refugee,* to Melville’s horror.

32 *Pierre* had failed; *The Tortoise-Hunters* and the “Agatha” story were rejected by publishers.

33 Hiltner, in agreement with Rowland, sees Melville’s elisions here as yet another instance in which the “universal psychological resistance to the chronic suffering of others is provided by a Melville narrator as his reason for deleting certain painful facts in his narrative” (Charity 59).

34 For this reason, Miller says, courtship novels such as *Pride and Prejudice* and its inferior analogues ended with marriage, and George Eliot’s revolutionary approach, in *Middlemarch,* was to begin a novel with a
marriage and then depict the deep unhappiness of that relationship. See Narrative and Its Discontents for Miller’s full analysis.

35 It is noteworthy that this chapter’s most over-the-top passage, which seems like a precursor to T.S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land,” was omitted when the serial became a book: “On they passed; two-and-two, along the packed footpaths of the bridge; long-drawn, methodic, as funerals: some of the faces settled in dry apathy; content with their doom; others seemed mutely raving against it…” (160). Either Melville or his editors must have felt that this passage was too bleak to maintain the novel’s generally jaunty tone.

36 On entering the English Channel in 1849, Melville notes in his journal: “Thro’ these waters Blake & Nelson’s ships once sailed” (10). Throughout his trip to London, he visits various Nelson relics, including his coat, a bust of him, and the H.M.S. Victory.

37 In his “Historical Note” to Israel Potter, Walter Bezanson makes a convincing case for the novel’s initial serial publication as being all but irrelevant to its construction: The divisions of the installments seem geared toward the space needs of the magazine rather than any cliff-hangers or turns in Melville’s plot. See Bezanson pp. 207-9 for more on the serialization of the novel.

38 Numerous critics have hit upon the phrase “bewildering intertanglement” as nicely describing Melville’s view of American and British cultural and political engagement. Giles notes that “the inchoate nature of the naval battle, in which ‘Israel is Sailor under Two Flags, and in Three Ships, and All in One Night’, reflects the muddled and arbitrary status of national identity and of patriotic allegiance more generally” (240).

39 Klaus Lanzinger sees Melville as being torn between “his democratic ideals and feelings of genteel class distinctions” (73).

40 In Trumbull’s narrative, Potter returns to America on May 17, 1823. Melville changes the date to July 4, 1826, the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, and also the day that John Adams and Thomas Jefferson died. Bellis points out that this rearrangement also rounds out Potter’s exile as an even fifty years and brings him back to Boston after the cornerstone of the Bunker Hill monument has been laid (620).

41 Which is actually on Breed’s Hill.

42 The magazine serial was titled Israel Potter, or Fifty Years of Exile: A Fourth of July Story.

43 Even a cursory search of online art auctions indicates that numerous copies survive today.

44 In his history of the Bunker Hill Monument Association, Warren makes no mention of the presence of British soldiers at the dedication ceremony; in fact his account implies that the tenor of the day was anti-British, as Webster was toasted not only for having been “the Orator of the Day” but also for having recently written a letter of rebuke to Lord Ashburton, “repudiating for his country henceforth and for ever the right of search on behalf of Great Britain” (325).

45 For more detail, see “On the Beginning of Transatlantic Steamship Service.”
Afterword: England’s Melville

*Israel Potter* was only one of Herman Melville’s works that resonated with English readers. Even during the earliest phases of his career Melville received broader and deeper critical attention in Britain than in America. Anderson characterizes Melville’s reception by American and British critics as follows: “the former was heavy and patriotic in its praise; the latter, light and urbane. America was proud of Herman Melville; England enjoyed him” (37). Hence, when *Moby-Dick*, published in England as *The Whale*, was released, though some reviewers carped at its “blasphemy and indecency,” reviews in both *Britannia* and *John Bull* gave it the high compliment of calling it “extraordinary,” and the *John Bull* reviewer expanded on the theme: “Of all the extraordinary books from the pen of Herman Melville this is out and out the most extraordinary. Who would have looked for philosophy in whales, or for poetry in blubber?” (Giles 236; qtd. Peach 4). Melville’s originality, to the *John Bull* critic, was in using raw materials not hitherto seen as the stuff of high art.

When *The Whale* and *Moby-Dick* appeared, literary criticism as a profession was in a more advanced state in Britain. As Hershel Parker explains, *The Whale* was reviewed in London by “professional literary men and women—experienced critics and trenchant prose stylists,” who greeted Melville’s novel as an original and brilliant book, whereas most American reviews of *Moby-Dick* “were written by newspaper staffers with their minds on partisan politics or else by amateur contributors more noted for religious piety than critical acumen” (700). Melville is not likely to have known how overwhelmingly positive the response of British reviewers was to *The Whale*; the only reviews reproduced in America were negative, and they likely influenced insecure or lazy American
reviewers as well (Parker 703). The warmer British reception of Melville’s work was also a matter of fashion: William Spengemann points out that “Hawthorne, Longfellow, Poe, Melville, and Brown were all better received in England than in their own country” (218).

At a time when culturally aspirant Americans sought sophistication from overseas, British readers seeking a fresh cultural experience were more open to work coming from the United States. However, as Melville’s cultural capital declined in America, his popularity in Britain waned as well, which we can see from the fact that *Pierre* never found a British publisher and from Melville’s representation in the catalogs of Mudie’s circulating library. The Mudie’s catalog of 1862 included “all the novels of Melville excepting *Redburn*, *White-Jacket*, and *Pierre*” (Gohdes 359). The 1869 catalog, however, which includes a far broader range of American literature, lists only *The Whale* and *Israel Potter* (Gohdes 359-60).

Parker categorizes Melville’s early British admirers as being members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood such as Dante Gabriel Rosetti and his brother William Michael Rosetti, members of the working-men’s movement, Fabian Socialists, and nautical or travel writers (735). These groups were politically radical, and A. Robert Lee imagines that Melville’s British boosters sensed “Melville’s expansive American openness to life as against the more circumscribed Britishness” (42). This openness included an inclusive, modern approach to sexuality and a worldview that included social classes other than his own, or as Parker puts it “a class-bridging philanthropic idealism not without an element of seductive eroticism” (742). In an 1874 article, the poet James Thompson published an article that praised Melville for being nearly equal to Whitman “in his sympathy with all ordinary life and vulgar occupations, in his feeling of brotherhood for all rough workers”
(qtd. Parker 737). For several decades, Melville’s work was appreciated in Britain as alternative or underground art.

In the 1880s, when in New York Herman Melville was a semi-anonymous customs inspector, in England he was yet again a respected author. As Parker insists, “It needs to be stressed: the revival of Melville’s reputation was almost exclusively a British phenomenon until after all the hard work had been done” (732). In 1883 William Clark Russell, the British writer of nautical fiction, praised Redburn as “one of Herman Merivale’s [sic] delightful sea tales” (qtd. Marovitz 515). Despite the misspelling, Melville was pleased and wrote to Russell to thank him. The two began a correspondence that culminated in Melville’s dedicating John Marr and Other Sailors (1888) to Russell, who responded in kind, dedicating An Ocean Tragedy (1889) to “that magnificent American sea-novelist” (qtd. Marovitz 515-16). Russell was not alone in his enthusiasm for Melville: The political reformer James Billson, who taught Latin in working-men’s institutes, corresponded with Melville and assured him that he was part of “a rapidly increasing knot of ‘Melville readers’” in Leicester (qtd. Parker 737). Lease posits that it “is possible (if not probable) that, in 1884, there were as many (if not more) devoted and knowledgeable readers of Melville’s writings in the town of Leicester than in the whole of America” (146). The August 15, 1885 issue of Academy includes “Socrates in Camden, with a Look Round” by the Scottish poet Robert Buchanan. The “Socrates” of the poem’s title is Walt Whitman, but the poem heaps extravagant—if somewhat left-handed—praise upon Melville as well:

Melville, whose magic drew Typee
Radiant as Venus, from the sea,
Sits all forgotten or ignored,
While haberdashers are adored!
... Long as the sea rolls deep and blue,
While heaven repeats the thunder of it,
Long as the White Whale ploughs it through,
The shape my sea-magician drew
Shall still endure, or I’m no prophet! (Buchanan 103).

By the late 1880s better writers than Buchanan championed Melville. Charles Reade read The Whale and may have considered abridging it; William Morris quoted from it in conversation; Kipling placed several of Melville’s works on a required reading list for the Empire League (Parker 738, 739, 743). In a letter to a friend, Robert Louis Stevenson crowed that his own forthcoming travel book “will tell you more of the South Seas after very few months than any other writer has done – except Herman Melville, perhaps, who is a howling cheese” (qtd. Lee 42). That cheese howled in more than one register; more than a mere writer’s writer, Melville also appealed to British scholars, whose reassessment of his work commenced some 30 years prior to that of American academics. The Eton schoolmaster and cultural critic H. S. Salt traded letters with Melville and published significant articles in his praise in 1889 and 1892 (Marovitz 516). The critical reassessment had its effect; Spengemann notes that “[b]etween 1880 and 1900 alone, British publishers brought out nine editions of works by Melville” (219). By the end of the century, Melville was back in demand in Britain, and Mudie’s 1896 catalog includes “Type, Omoo, White-Jacket, and Moby-Dick, the first two works being classified as nonfiction” (Gohdes 360). By the early 20th century, Melville was not only a fan favorite among bohemian Britons but also an influence: When J.M Barrie created Neverland, he based his damaged but charismatic villain, Captain Hook, on Captain Ahab.

Perhaps because of all the encouragement he received from British quarters, Melville’s final novel, Billy Budd, is set on a British warship and dedicated to “Jack
Chase, Englishman/ Wherever that great heart may now be/ Here on Earth or harbored in
Paradise/ Captain of the Maintop/ in the year 1843/ in the U.S. Frigate United States.” In
his shipboard career as well as his writing life, Melville had always traveled in circles
where national boundaries were largely arbitrary. Having striven for decades to become
the American Shakespeare only to lose his American readership, near the end of his life
Melville was embraced by English readers as a unique and exciting artist—and as one of
their own.10

1 Melville’s work was reviewed in depth in “in the Spectator, The Times, John Bull, the Daily News, the
Athenaeum, Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine, Dublin University Magazine, Academy, the Scottish Art
Review, and the Gentleman’s Magazine” (Lee 41). When Typee and Omoo first appeared, Anderson notes
that the “only noticeable difference in Melville’s reception on the two sides of the Atlantic was just what
one would expect: the seasoned and urbane British critics were not so extravagant in their praise or so long-
faced in their censure” (24). For a selection of British and American reviews, see Hershel Parker’s The
Recognition of Herman Melville.

2 Parker explains that only Horace Greeley paid critics adequately, so there was close to no such thing as a
professional literary critic working in American journalism in the mid-1850s (700).

3 The November 1851 issue of the London Leader announced a birth of sorts: “Want of originality has long
been the just and standing reproach to American literature; the best of its writers were but second-hand
Englishmen. Of late some have given evidence of originality; not absolutely originality, but such genuine
outcoming of the American intellect as can be safely called National. Edgar Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne,
Herman Melville are assuredly no British offshoots; nor is Emerson – the German American that he is!”
The article declares the “commencement of an American literature, properly so called” (qtd. Peach 5).

4 Richard Bentley, publisher of The Whale, was the only bidder, and he required such extensive cuts and
offered terms so low that Melville did not accept (Giles 236).

5 Clarence Gohdes argues that Mudie’s offered a wide variety of American literature from its inception
because Charles Edward Mudie himself was “a radical in politics and a liberal in religion—and thus was
more favorably disposed toward the democracy across the sea than most of his fellows” (358).

6 In 1899, a New York Times London correspondent reported that the endorsement from Russell had
sparked “a conspicuous revival of interest in America’s sea author” (qtd. Marovitz 516).

7 Robert Lee suggests that “‘Howling cheese,’ as memorable a bit of phrasing for Melville as exists,
presumably is meant fondly yet wryly” (42).

8 Melville appears to have been rehabilitated in Britain as a writer in general but not specifically as a
novelist; Clarence Gohdes observes Melville’s “name is not separately listed in the section of the catalogue
dedicated to fiction” (360). The Melville name was clearly not the selling-point in 1896 that it is today.

9 Barrie was familiar with Melville’s oeuvre overall; in an 1893 letter to a friend he strongly recommends
Typee and Omoo as adventure stories (Giles 247n5, 225).

10 Benjamin Lease suggests that these transatlantic plaudits may be why Melville returned to fiction after a
hiatus of more than 30 years.
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