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Subversive dialogues: Melville’s intertextual strategies and nineteenth-century American ideologies

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University of Hawai‘i, 1994
SUBVERSIVE DIALOGUES:
MELVILLE’S INTERTEXTUAL STRATEGIES
AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN IDEOLOGIES

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by
Moonsu Shin
To Kilsoon Lee,

for all of her love, support, and patience,

with deepest affection and thanks
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines Herman Melville's self-consciously intertextual use of antebellum popular texts to register and critique the prevailing ideological assumptions and values which underwrote the American exclusionary culture of the period. Through a subversive dialogue with his source texts which he maintains while refashioning them into his own texts, Melville simultaneously exposes and parodies, installs and negates, the dominant American ideologies embedded in them. This study also focuses on Melville's deconstructive practice in an attempt to explore his concern with the interactions among narrative, generic conventions, and ideology.

Consisting of five chapters and an epilogue, this dissertation begins with a theoretical discussion of intertextuality, ideology, and the problems of traditional approaches to Melville's use of his sources, and then goes on to examine four texts which prominently exemplify how Melville uses the intertextual practice of subversive dialogue as a central textual strategy. Chapter Two deals with Typee in which Melville's dialogue with two American travel narratives, David Porter's Journal of a Cruise Made to the Pacific Ocean and Charles Stewart's A Visit to the South Seas, textualizes his critique of the ideologies of American expansionism and messianic nationalism. The third
chapter discusses the relationship between Israel Potter and its key intertext, Henry Trumbull’s Life and Remarkable Adventures of Israel R. Potter, examining Melville’s demystification of the myth of the American Revolution and his deconstruction of the hero-oriented American biographical tradition. Chapter Four explores the antebellum racial ideologies which served to justify the institution of slavery by analyzing the way Melville refashioned a chapter of Amasa Delano’s A Narrative of Voyages and Travels into "Benito Cereno." Chapter Five discusses the Indian-hating section in The Confidence-Man to demonstrate how its intertextual dialogue with James Hall’s frontier narrative, Sketches of History, Life and Manners in the West, exposes the complicity of the rhetoric of Manifest Destiny in the removal and subjugation of American Indians. Finally, the epilogue analyzes the significance of Melville’s meta-commentaries on the narrative form of fiction and explores the social potential of his subversive poetics for our age.
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"I don’t like this cobbling sort of business--I don’t like it at all; it’s undignified; it’s not my place," complains the Pequod carpenter, when he is told to rework the coffin he made for Queequeg into a life-buoy, the one which will eventually save Ishmael. Melville, as Harrison Hayford has suggested, seems to grumble through the voice of his character about his own practice of continual tinkering and reworking in the course of producing Moby-Dick. In fact, it has now been amply demonstrated that Melville stuck to "this cobbling sort of business," however undignified and distasteful he may have found it, for his trade of book-making throughout his career. From Typee and Omoo through Moby-Dick to Billy Budd, Melville’s work was constructed upon his willful practice of purposive mixings and interweavings of experiences and knowledge, inventions and borrowings, and the factual and the fictional. As Charles Olson has suggested in Call Me Ishmael, Melville reads as he writes, and writes as he reads, borrowing and appropriating, cutting and rearranging all sorts of facts, formulas and motifs, tropes and languages, styles and genres. At another well-known metatextual moment in Redburn, Melville more specifically explains how books are produced: writers
manufacture books out of "odds and ends" of old "yarns," just as sailors pick "yarns" to pieces so they can be "twisted into new combinations" (Redburn, 116).

This particular, if not unique, writing practice of mixing and tinkering makes for the notoriously unwieldy shape of the Melvillean texts, which have often been characterized as "botches," a "hodge-podge," a "monstrous compound," or a bit approvingly, a "disorderly order." Melville's text perhaps can best be figured in Queequeg's coffin itself, which is also a canoe, later used as a sea-chest, and finally made over into a life-buoy. Made of "heathenish" old lumber aboard an American whaler, the canoe-coffin-sea-chest-life-buoy is, in cultural terms, a composite of Yankee craftsmanship and the savage art of tattooing, whose manufacture has been prompted by Queequeg's cross-cultural recognition of the similarity of the Nantucket whalemens' funeral custom to his own Pacific practice. Thus Melville's work is something like a mosaic composed of bits and pieces of various shapes and colors culled from all kinds of cultural capital available at the moment, an assemblage which frequently marks the diverse cultural encounters or shocks dynamically experienced in antebellum American society.

If we accept as central to Melville's poetics his textual practice of borrowing, cutting, cobbling, twisting, or reworking, this intertextual situation becomes an
obligatory component to be addressed in understanding his fictional world. Melville’s text is palimpsestic in essence, enriched and thickened with references, quotations, echoes, reworkings of traditional themes and motifs, recastings of literary characters, and juxtapositions of different styles and generic features, enacting the inescapable drama that literature feeds upon literature. Intertextuality thus informs Melville’s unique imagination, helping define the textual identity of his work. Different languages, styles, and world-views that Melville digests in his omnivorous textual world, however, are not simply there as neutral assets, but rather as forces that both activate and regulate his creative energy. Melville weaves all the cultural capital available into new combinations which make the warp and woof of the dense fabric of his texts, but this textual move most often involves his responses not only to the force of narrative conventions and generic codes but also to existing social, religious, economic, political, or aesthetic ideologies and values.

Melville’s fiction is a product of the process of "the interlocked complications." In continually rearranging and refashioning what he has borrowed, Melville shows his keen interest in the workings of ideology which are inscribed in formal strategies as well as in refiguring thematic concerns of the source texts. Melville’s writing is a process of exposing and inscribing the ideologies that govern the texts.
with which he has opened up an intertextual dialogue. Melville’s intertextual operations also include designs to replace, correct, or provide an alternative perspective to the ideologies represented by hegemonic pre-texts and genres. Reading Melville’s texts and pre-texts along this line, therefore, entails an experience of the conflicts and contestations of radically different ideologies surrounding the production and reception of his work. In this study, I shall investigate the ways in which Melville’s self-consciously intertextual uses of previous materials serve not only to reveal but also to subvert the dominant ideologies which underwrote the American exclusionary culture of the antebellum period.

Recently, critics have turned their attention away from the lofty mast-head of metaphysical ideas to the material milieux encompassing Melville’s life, work, and heritage. Such a change in critical approach eventually helps us to understand more deeply Melville and his work by re-placing the spiritual or "original" Melville pursued by traditional Melville criticism within the dense fabric of his social, political, and economic contexts. Most notable among such critical efforts are Michael Paul Rogin’s Subversive Genealogy: The Politics and Art of Herman Melville, James Duban’s Melville’s Major Fiction: Politics, Theology, and Imagination, John Samson’s White Lies: Melville’s Narratives of Facts, and Wai-chee Dimock’s Empire for Liberty: Melville
and the Poetics of Individualism. These studies have done much to retrieve the dynamic interactions between Melville’s text and its historical context. Sharing with these works a concern with describing the exchange and negotiation of the social energy circulating in antebellum American society, my study examines the dynamic of the ideological formations and transformations of the period as it is inscribed and contested in Melville’s works. The literary space is ultimately constructed upon the writer’s choices of particular thematic concerns and textual strategies. Nevertheless, the verbal realm individually constructed is not altogether subjective, sealed off from the public sphere, just because such choices are controlled and manipulated by the negotiations among the prevailing codes of signification. Melville’s intertextual operation, which is the most prominent of the diverse textual strategies his texts employ, registers the conflicts and negotiations of ideological assumptions within his culture.

The sheer intertextual density of Melville’s text packed with his obsessive allusions, citations, and extensive borrowings has generated an industry of source studies. Scholars have charted the ways in which Melville’s "multifarious, incidental, bibliographic encounterings" poured into the "bottomless spring of [his] original thought" (Pierre, 283). As a result, we now have a quite
detailed picture of what Melville borrows and the way he uses what he has borrowed. We need briefly to look at the history of source study in order properly to situate our approach to Melville’s allusion-suffused prose. During Melville’s lifetime, his early novels, as he claimed, were taken to be based largely on his personal experiences and observations. Some reviewers, particularly those on the British side, called into question the authenticity of his account, but it never was seriously suspected that he quite often borrowed and appropriated material from other writers. Some suggested that Melville’s writing might be affected by his extensive reading and noted the influences on the author of such writers as Defoe, Thomas Browne, Burton, Sterne, Swift, and Rabelais.” But they seldom went further to detail specific parallels.

This critical assessment did not change much even in the 1920s after Melville was “rediscovered.” The three biographies from the twenties—Raymond Weaver’s Herman Melville: Mariner and Mystic (1921), John Freeman’s Herman Melville (1926), Lewis Mumford’s Herman Melville (1928)—took most of Melville’s first-person narratives as autobiographical. But the 1928 publication of Harold H. Scudder’s discovery that Melville had based “Benito Cereno” on Chapter 18 of Amasa Delano’s A Narrative of Voyages and Travels, in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres (Boston, 1817) drastically changed Melville scholarship. In 1932,
following Scuddar, Russell Thomas identified many parallel passages as well as the poetical epigraphs in "The Encantadas", and in 1938, Willard Thorp proved that many passages of Redburn had been appropriated from an actual guidebook, The Picture of Liverpool (1808). This kind of positivistically oriented scholarship culminated in Charles R. Anderson's Melville in the South Seas, completed as a Columbia University dissertation in 1935 and published in 1939. Reading not only through many earlier South Sea travel books, some of which Melville had mentioned in his works, but also through the log and official records of the frigate United States, the original of Melville's Neversink in White-Jacket, Anderson identified sources for Typee, Omoo, parts of Mardi, White-Jacket, parts of Moby-Dick, and parts of The Piazza Tales, thus definitely putting to rest the prevailing notion of Melville as a mere autobiographer. As Mary R. Bercaw has rightly pointed out, no longer could anyone safely identify Melville with his fictive narrators or take their statements as reliably "autobiographical."

Howard P. Vincent's 1949 study, The Trying-Out of Moby-Dick, opened up a new path in illuminating Melville's source in that it tried to combine source work with critical interpretation. Vincent's combination of scholarship and criticism became a model for subsequent studies on Melville, among which William H. Gilman's Melville's Early Life and Redburn (1951), Merrell R. Davis's Melville's Mardi: A
Chartless Voyage (1952), and Harrison Hayford’s studies deserve to be noted. This new breed of Melvilleans directed their primary attention to recognizing a linkage between Melville’s biographical data, now considerably augmented, and the genesis of the text under examination. Their examples promoted a more comprehensive study of how Melville’s works were conceived and written. The still ongoing controversy about the genesis of Moby-Dick among scholars like Leon Howard, Charles Olson, George Stewart, James Francis Barbour, Robert Milder, and Harrison Hayford was originated and stimulated in such an atmosphere that, as Leon Howard has put it, scholarly interest in "the actual motives affecting Melville’s composition and of the methods by which he put his books together" became predominant. This postwar period also saw the pioneering studies of Melville’s literary allusions and influences such as Nathalia Wright’s Melville’s Use of the Bible (1949), Thomas Alexander Little’s University of Nebraska dissertation, "Literary Allusions in the Writings of Herman Melville" (1948), H. Bruce Franklin’s The Wake of the Gods: Melville’s Mythology (1963), and Julianne Small’s University of Tennessee dissertation, "Classical Allusions in the Fiction of Herman Melville" (1974). It was also during this period that Merton M. Sealts’s indispensable checklist, Melville’s Reading: A Check-List of Books Owned and Borrowed (1948-1950, 1966), began to appear. Sealts aimed to list all the
books Melville owned and borrowed on the basis of established external evidence such as his surviving books, library call-slips, publishers' records, and purchases or borrowing records in his letters and journals. His work enabled readers to see not only the range of Melville's reading but also the overall cultural taste which produced such a voracious reading habit.

All these studies have contributed significantly to our understanding the "twisted" shape of Melville's prose. But too often these endeavors cease with the simple identification of particular sources without fully explaining their functions in the text. As we have already suggested, Melville quotes, imitates, borrows, parodies, or reworks previous materials not simply as a neutral means of textual production but as a channel for delivering his reactions to established values and consensual traditions. As my study will show, he sometimes intentionally imitates his source texts to show the emptiness of the ideologies sedimented in them, sometimes juxtaposes different styles and conventions to illustrate their competing pressures on the fabric of his culture, and sometimes analyzes and dissects, rearranges and refigures, to deconstruct views that are widely experienced as natural and manifestly true. Melville persistently refers readers to different styles, forms, conventions, and ways of seeing, thereby exploding what Pierre Bourdieu calls the *habitus*, those systems of
durable, transposable dispositions, which regulate and control their everyday existence and the production of cultural capital as normal and neutral. In this regard, Melville's intertextual strategies do not follow the Renaissance notion of the *imitatio*, according to which the aesthetic quality of a text is determined by the degree to which it re-employs the structural rules and pre-texts of the classical canon. Rather, they work more like postmodern parody, which at once installs and ironizes past representations, often to expose their embedded ideologies.

The narrator of *Pierre* insists that "no one great book must ever be separately regarded, and permitted to domineer with its own uniqueness upon the creative mind; but that all existing great works must be federated," so they can be recognized as "but the mutilated shadowings-forth of invisible and eternally unembodied images in the soul," or "but the mirrors, distortedly reflecting to us our own things" (*Pierre*, 284). Regarded thus, Melville's characteristic encyclopedism which allows the text to be permeated with allusions to various cultural idioms, legends, allegorical narratives, proverbs, mottos, and sayings of various kinds has the effect of simultaneously desaturating and denaturalizing the dominant ideologies. Therefore, it is important to look beyond the level of specifying allusions and echoes into the more general
discursive structure governing the intertextual encounterings. A full appreciation of intertextual effects demands more than an investigation of sources and influences; one must cast a critical net more widely to include, as Jonathan Culler puts it, "the anonymous discursive practices, codes whose origins are lost, which are the conditions of possibility of later texts."¹⁴

Modern theorists of intertextuality such as Mikhail Bakhtin, Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, Gérard Genette, Michael Riffaterre and others have emphasized intertextuality as something more than a matter of picking up words and facts. Rather, for these pioneering interpreters and practitioners of intertextuality, the term means an inescapable condition of a text dependent on and infiltrated by prior codes, concepts, conventions, unconscious practices, and texts, and furthermore connotes a fundamental way of making sense of our lived experience, an indispensable leverage of signification by which the text, the self, and the everyday world are constituted. Barthes says that intertextuality is "the impossibility of living outside the infinite text...; the book creates meaning, the meaning creates life."¹⁵ The notion of intertextuality also invites a new conception of the text under which it becomes a site in which a dialogue (or a battle) of cultural codes and discursive practices takes place rather than a
spontaneous and transparent expression of a writer’s intention. In the same vein, the writer is redefined as an amanuensis or an "echo chamber," as Barthes defines himself, through which the rules of discursive formations are transmitted, rather than a transcendental source of meaning as traditionally conceived. This explains why Julia Kristeva declared that "the notion of intertextuality replaces that of intersubjectivity," when she coined and tried to define the term intertextuality for the first time.

These implications and assumptions behind the notion of intertextuality raise another serious problem involving traditional source study. As we have indicated earlier, more advanced source studies not only try to identify sources but also to examine how Melville’s writing was changed or influenced by their use. Yet these examinations are too often restricted to the narrow domain of literature, focusing exclusively on Melville’s literary indebtedness to previous literature in choosing particular forms and styles or in characterization. Their explanations are most often governed by a unitary causality in which Melville’s artistic transformations are described as directly and exclusively tied to his reading experience. They seldom attend to the social, cultural or political implications of such choices in a broader context. Merrell Davis’s explanation of Mardi’s textual transformations in his Melville’s Mardi: A
Chartless Voyage is a good example. He assumes that Mardi began as a "narrative of facts," one about sperm whale fishery in the South Seas based on Melville's six months' experience as a boat steerer aboard the Charles and Henry, a Nantucket whaler. But in the process of being written, Davis argues, the narrative changed itself into "a romance of Polynesian adventure," as defined in its preface. Taji's jumping ship and his subsequent adventures on his chartless voyage, Davis explains, were caused by the author's reading of such classic writers as Shakespeare, Montaigne, Seneca, Browne, Ossian, Coleridge, and Rabelais, a few months after he started writing the book. Davis claims that these writers to whom the book repeatedly alludes "contributed to the content or the literary manner of Mardi as Melville followed his 'bold aim' with the alert ear and ready memory of a writer exploring new fields." Davis's argument certainly helps enrich our understanding of how Melville went "deeper and deeper into himself" until he had "created the creative" (Mardi, 595), but it is not enough. One must explore what makes Melville turn to classic writers and his preference for romance over "narratives of facts" at that particular moment in order to get a clearer picture of such a change. And those reasons can hardly be sufficiently articulated without paying attention to the social context which prompted and generated these particular inclinations. As Davis himself demonstrates, the contours of that context
are already defined by Melville’s later inclusion into his text such historical events as the 1848 Paris revolution, the Chartists’ march on Parliament in 1848, the Free-Soil Convention at Buffalo, and the gold rush in California. Therefore, the restriction of intertextual activation to the realm of the literary alone appears to be particularly arbitrary in light of the fact that quite a number of Melville’s imported texts are by generic classification nonliterary, including travel accounts, scientific reports, biographies, court proceedings, and frontier narratives.

Genetic theorists’ treatment of Shakespeare’s influence on Melville in general and on *Moby-Dick* in particular is another case in point. Charles Olson, Leon Howard, F.O. Matthiessen, and others have detailed Shakespeare’s pervasive influence on Melville’s dark imagination, arguing that Melville’s reading of Shakespearean tragedy—particularly *Macbeth* and *King Lear*—while he was writing *Moby-Dick* contributed to the transformation of the book from a realistic story of whaling into "a wicked book" with its hero touched by demonic madness. Yet the implications of Ahab’s monomaniac quest and the book’s plunge into darkness cannot be exhausted by such a single account in which life and art are linked in a univocally causal fashion. These probings into Melville’s dynamic communion with Shakespeare would be more enlightening if they were placed within, say, the political dimensions which Melville himself voiced in
his review essay on Hawthorne. As Larzer Ziff has demonstrated, the question of Shakespeare's usability in democratic America, as opposed to the "absolute and unconditional adoration of Shakespeare" which had grown to the proportion of a religious "superstition" ("Mosses," 245), was quite controversial in Melville's day.¹⁹ In this regard, one may connect Melville's democratic accommodation of Shakespeare to Ishmael's uncontrollable dream of masterlessness against the "slavish shore" (Moby-Dick, 107).

In short, traditional source-hunting scholarship centered on the intertextuality of language has too often treated Melville's works as if they existed in a cultural vacuum cut off from other societal domains and the negotiations among the social forces.

Similar problems are found in researches on Melville's allusions. Certainly these studies should be praised for clarifying the grain of Melville's imagination, which is uniquely open to rich cultural memory, but most often they remain content with tracing the learned references and quotations Melville invokes into his narratives. However, as exemplified by his use of various acknowledged and unacknowledged citations and references including those from Spenser's Faerie Queen in "The Encantadas," Melville's method of refashioning his sources is quite complex.²⁰ Intertextual incorporations are not so much innocently or monologically executed as multi-layered and ideologically
ingrained. Allusions, as they get textualized, are often already truncated, refigured, or expanded to their respective contextual needs. The fragmented sketches about the Galapagos Islands are studded with citations from the classics, shreds of descriptions, relics from memory, scientific accounts, words, sentences, passages from books, stories from shipmates "learned in the lore of outlandish life" (*Piazza Tales*, 146), grave-stones, graveboards, half-mildewed documents, and "doggerel epitaphs" (173). The narrator of the sketches presented as the product of Salvator R. Tarnmoor, whose name evokes the seventeenth-century Italian landscape painter Salvator Rosa, quotes these "authorities" to lend authentic verity to his own accounts. But those authorities are immediately undermined by the narrator’s simultaneous impulse to ironize and trivialize their perspectives.

By seeking and then negating an authority of reference, Melville puts into question our facile belief in the authority of the literary signified by the authorial signature, which is here undercut by his use of a pseudonym. At one point in the narrative, Melville speaks of "barren, bootless allusions" (143), but allusions in Melville, as this work suggests, are by no means vacuously neutral. They are brought to an interstice of textual layers in so persistent a way that the ideologies embedded in them are brutally exposed. Ironized, parodied, or
defamiliarized, by way of adaptation or by the surrounding uncongenial context into which they are inserted, allusions in Melville's texts frequently provide opportunities for referring the reader to different perspectives and alien world-views.

Intertextual appropriations, as Peter J. Rabinowitz has proposed, can involve plagiaristic repetition, adaptation, retelling, parodying, interpreting or criticizing, and revising or expanding, but they work only within the horizon of the reader's familiarity with the sources concerned. In proportion to the degree of their knowledge of original sources, readers will experience different intertextual effects. In other words, significance hinges not only on the textual context in which sources are inserted but on the cultural context (represented by the range of the reader's familiarity) in which the text is embedded. When Melville has Redburn say that "Every age makes its own guide-books," he seems to be well aware that allusive languages and styles count for their effectiveness on the reader's coordinative associations which are in turn conditioned by the cultural codes regulating the general attitudes of the responding community to which he or she belongs. Since each age brings different sets of associations and assumptions to the shared sources, "the thing that had guided the father," as Melville says in Redburn, "could not guide the son" (Redburn, 157). In order fully to appreciate the significance of Melville's
allusions, therefore, one has to go beyond the initial task of locating their myriad sources to an understanding of the cultural code of their dialogics.

I will claim that Melville’s intertextual transactions are activated under three different categories. The first type, which we may call allusion, is to bring to intertextual activation references to classic antiquity, the Bible, classic writers like Shakespeare, Montaigne, Spenser, and Milton, myths and legends, sayings and proverbs, words and phrases from familiar sources, names, titles and epigraphs, places, events, and cultural facts. As tassels and patterns with which Melville’s colorful textual tapestries are tesselated, Melville’s allusions, borrowings from the common stock, not only illustrate the grain of his encyclopedic imagination, but also define the contours of his culture which has nurtured that imagination. For example, Melville refers to "Captain Marryat," "Sylphides," and "Teniers’ saints" in Typee, suggesting his link to the tradition of travel writing and his diverse artistic concerns. These allusions also outline the general ambience of the high-brow culture of mid-nineteenth-century America which has cultivated Melville’s literary sensibilities, as is suggested by his later enforced excision in the book’s Revised American edition of all of them under the pressure of his publishers’s concern for the proprieties. Allusions
in Melville’s texts thus help to define or identify the contours of cultural, social, and textual formations which nurture and regulate his interests and sensibilities.  

The second type of intertextuality, which we may call citation, serves to incorporate and assimilate information, knowledge, and blocks of passages related to what he describes into his running texts. In writing the cetological chapters of *Moby-Dick*, for example, Melville went from one source-book to another, including Thomas Beale’s *The Natural History of the Sperm Whale*, William Scoresby’s *Journal of a Voyage to the Northern Whale-Fishery*, Owen Chase’s *Narrative of the Most Extraordinary and Distressing Shipwreck of the Whale-ship Essex*, Pierre Bayle’s *An Historical and Critical Dictionary*, *The Penny Cyclopaedia*, and many other minor sources, in search of factual information on various aspects of whaling and incidents in which whales attack ships. In the practice of citation, Melville tends to synthesize several materials at one time rather than to treat sources sequentially. Citation thus affords "a glancing bird’s eye view of what has been promiscuously said, thought, and sung" of the topic chosen "by many nations and generations" (*Moby-Dick*, xvii), dramatizing Melville’s insatiable impulse toward, to borrow Frye’s phrase, "a total body of vision," a passion for summing up and eternalizing the knowledge of a culture.  

Source referents are sometimes cited, but more often, they
are not. Melville’s silencing of his sources can be justified, after all, by his characteristic intertextual management, which entails a radical revision and contextual rearrangement rather than a mere copying. More importantly, this peculiar practice implies that most prior texts come to Melville as representatives of the general discursive field or the general culture, propagators of what Roland Barthes calls "circular memory," knowledge considered in a culture as manifestly true, rather than as the sublime giants that cause Bloomean anxiety of influence. 

The third type of Melville’s intertextual practice, with which my study is primarily concerned, may be called subversive dialogue. In this form of intertextuality, Melville privileges one particular source as a key intertext and maintains an extended dialogue with it, while refashioning it into a new text of his own. Notable examples are found in Israel Potter, "Benito Cereno," and The Confidence-Man. Melville refashions Chapter 18 of Amasa Delano’s Narrative of Voyages into "Benito Cereno," Henry Trumbull’s Life and Remarkable Adventures of Israel R. Potter into Israel Potter, and Chapter VI of James Hall’s Sketches of History, Life, and Manners, in the West into Chapters 26 and 27 on Indian-hating and Indian-haters of The Confidence-Man. Rather than continually going from one source to another, Melville here sticks to the "focused" text, with which the intertextual dialogue becomes the
primary thrust of his text-making. Melville’s text establishes itself as he proceeds to reinterpret and refashion the original. Here writing becomes a process of both acknowledging and contesting the narrative codes and the thematic concerns which inform the source text. As a result, the ideological content implicated in the form of the source and the ideological structure buried in the story are starkly exposed. Melville’s numerous allusions and quotations and subversive rewriting leave textual “seams” whereby we can glimpse the intimate, yet active, interactions between the textual and the ideological. And among these, the dialogic form of intertextuality most powerfully demonstrates the complex transactions between styles and perspectives, between genres and ideologies, between the forms of literary expression and the system of beliefs which produce them.

Consider Melville’s rewriting strategies in The Confidence-Man, for instance. For his narrative of confidence-men, Melville adapts a story about an Indian-hater called John Meridic, originally rendered by James Hall, a district judge in Illinois, banker, journalist, and one of the age’s best known writers on the West. In Hall’s account, Meridic the Indian-hater appears cheerful, convivial, and hospitable, a family-man of warm feelings and excellent disposition, so universally respected as to be elected as a member of the legislative council. His
uncompromising Indian-killing originated in familial piety to avenge the murder of his family and from his sense of mission to advance the frontier further west. Melville, however, detects a fundamental barbarism latent in Hall's account of Meridic and his mental attitude toward the Indians which Melville thinks is also widely shared by his neighbors. In the course of rewriting, Melville closely follows Hall's account, sometimes copying it word for word, more often exaggerating or simplifying, cutting or reordering it, puncturing its apparently seamless textual surface. By unmasking the cold-blooded cruelty and greedy self-interest concealed beneath the genteel facade of Hall's narrative, Melville's act of rewriting satirizes the pervasive sense of the special mission of American civilization as it moves ever westward. Melville's rewritten version of Hall's smoothly narrated history of the West with John Meridic at its center stage thus transforms the popular author into a blind apostle of progress. At the same time it reminds us that the genre of frontier narrative to which Hall's submits had become ideologically tainted by its service as a vehicle for justifying and rationalizing the removal and subjugation of American Indians.

In Melville's subversive dialogue, the pre-text functions not merely as a source but as a subject of his writing itself in a double sense; first, it serves as a host upon which his parasitic rewriting sustains itself, and
second, it simultaneously becomes the target of his parodic attack, inviting a violent intervention in the narrative tradition with which it is affiliated. In other words, here intertextuality establishes itself by writing upon and against other traditional narratives whose embedded ideologies govern the desires and history of common people.

Significantly, most of the focalized texts in the dialogic form of intertextuality are popular narratives which had widely circulated in antebellum America. Melville approaches such popular texts and attempts to debunk their influences upon the public mind as ideological indoctrination by deconstructing their formal as well as thematic choices. Melville acutely senses that those popular narratives against which he has chosen to write do more than entertain public fantasy. They participate in facilitating the storage and transmission of customs, beliefs, values, that is, what Jean François Lyotard has called savoir. Their general iterability and high citationality also enhance their function of ideological normalization. Melville’s choice of refashioning popular narratives as a tactic of critiquing broadly shared cultural assumptions comes from his sharp recognition of the ideological functions which these apparently innocuous forms of narratives he has voraciously read possess. Despite his frequent casting of himself as an "isolato," marginalized in his culture, Melville’s textual world is deeply embedded
within the popular imagination, responsive to its ground, and nourished by its products, as David S. Reynolds has recently demonstrated in *Beneath the American Renaissance*.

While allusion and citation are used as crucial textual devices in all of Melville’s books, the practice of subversive dialogue becomes increasingly conspicuous in his later phase of public writing. This suggests that, as his career proceeds, Melville becomes more and more fascinated and repulsed by the interlocking ideological interventions of languages, conventions, and genres. In his later works, Melville’s narrators and characters become more deeply entrenched in biased and self-contradictory ideologies and his parodic engagement with his sources makes that ideological entanglement acutely felt. For example, "Benito Cereno," which exemplifies Melville’s authorial stance of the period, debunks Amasa Delano’s extremely naive preconceptions of black people as an ideology of what John Samson calls "white lies" permeating his culture by rewriting Delano’s own story and by refashioning the court proceedings of Benito Cereno and his surviving sailors. At the same time, the novella demonstrates the complicity of particular signifying practices--here, the narrative form of sea travels, as well as the court trial and the deposition which is its written manifestation--with the ideologies of the society where they are circulated. It was no accident that he wrote "The Piazza" as the title story to *The Piazza*
Tales including "Benito Cereno," a story whose central themes and technique are directly related to the concept of point of view. Coming to The Confidence-Man, the last long fiction published in his lifetime, Melville seems to have become obsessed with the tricky rhetoric of ideologies. The novel, which thematizes changing appearances and shifting perspectives, demonstrates that "looks are one thing, and facts are another" (Confidence-Man, 14), and seriously explores what this discrepancy means to the art of fiction. It may be argued on the basis of Frank Goodman’s statement that "You can conclude nothing absolute from the human form" (226) that Melville’s skepticism here reaches its highest pitch at the end of his public career, which overlaps one of the most turbulent moments in American history.

This suggests that Melville’s despairing confirmation of man’s ultimate subjection to his cultural biases and ideologies has a historical basis. The years from 1846 to 1857, the period during which Melville’s major fiction was written, registered a great crisis in American life, embroiled in war, aggressive expansionism, and the vexing question of slavery. The period includes such contentious events as the Wilmot Proviso, the Mexican war, the 1848 Free Soil Convention, the Compromise of 1850, and the Kansas-Nebraska Act. The 1848 bourgeois Revolution in Paris and Marx’s Communist Manifesto of the same year predicting a
violent class struggle also loomed over an already troubled American society. The multi-layered languages, the hybridized form, and the growing cynical vision constitute a uniquely Melvillean scene of writing, simultaneously challenging the limits of the existing signifying systems and responding to the contemporary political crisis caused particularly by the vexing question of slavery, a crisis characterized by divisive sectional politics and endless logomachy. Melville’s fiction, where not only the personal and the public sphere crisscross but different social forces wrangle with one another, then, emblematizes its own crisis-ridden culture.

My study, which ultimately aims to limn out an ideational cartography of antebellum American society, will focus on one early text, Typee, and three later texts—Israel Potter, "Benito Cereno," and The Confidence-Man. In these texts, Melville imports large sections of other works, and refashions, or "novelizes," them, as Bakhtin puts it. The process of novelization always involves a heteroglossic dialogue, which mixes the marginal and the centric, the low and the high, and the profane and the sacred. Translated into political terms, this subversive and anticanonical textual movement represents an impulse toward equality and freedom.

Such textual insistence on heterogeneity and hybridity thus reflects Melville’s earnest desire for the rebirth of
the unbiased principles of liberty that had been wrenchingly betrayed in the course of the American Empire. His purposive practice of subversive dialogue represents one of his culture's efforts to absorb and reformulate the emancipatory social energy inherent, but mostly repressed, in it. In our era of decanonization, Melville's novels seem to urge us more insistently than ever to sail across the cultural, racial, or class boundaries toward the "ocean of heteroglossia." As Eric Sundquist suggests, Melville will continue to occupy the center stage of the recently reorganized field of the American Renaissance which includes such new names as Frederick Douglass, Harriet Beacher Stowe, and Harriet Jacobs—a literary formation advocating the redemptive power of literature as well as the diversity of cultural legacies and perspectives.35

Finally, a word is in order concerning my use of the term ideology. The perimeter of this multi-used word was most succinctly defined by its foremost theoretician, Louis Althusser, who argued that "ideology interpellates individuals as subjects."36 Althusser's definition makes clear that ideology is not just a constellation of false ideas, as was conceived of by Marx, but a whole form of material practice, woven into the texture of everyday life, which functions to constitute concrete individuals as willing subjects of a particular society. Following
Althusser and incorporating the Gramscian notion of hegemony, Raymond Williams elaborates the notion of ideology in more concrete terms: ideology figures "not only the conscious systems of ideas and beliefs, but the whole lived social process as practically organized by specific and dominant meanings and values." It is "a living system of meanings and values--constitutive and constituting--which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming ... a sense of absolute because experienced reality beyond which it is very difficult to move." Thus, for Williams, ideologies are dynamic rather than static and consensual, always in conflict with one another. Generally speaking, my use of the term follows this line of thinking, which emphasizes its negotiations and contestations.

Ideology seeks its realization specifically by mobilizing such institutions as schools, the family, the law, religion, arts, literature, journalism, and culture. Ideology works to legitimate inequality and exploitation by representing the social order which perpetuates these things as unchangeable and immutable--as decreed by God or more simply by nature. On the political scene in antebellum America, the idea of "Manifest Destiny" is a good example of such an ideological appeal to God. The equally powerful appeal to the natural is exemplified by the pro-slavery arguments based on the pseudo-scientific notions of innate racial character that certain intellectual, temperamental,
and physical peculiarities shared by no other race predispose the Negro toward slavery and disqualify him for freedom. In Europe, the appeal to God has tended to give way to the appeal to the natural since the Renaissance period, but both still remain powerful in Melville’s America. The intense religious sentiment found in most of the characteristic American writings including Melville’s attests to the pervasiveness of God-appealing ideological indoctrination at that time.

Although ideology always seeks to achieve domination and hegemony, as Gramsci shows, it is constantly challenged and contested. There are two kinds of disruptions which threaten to destabilize the ideological dominance: contradiction and conflict. Contradiction is opposition generated within the dominant social order as a whole, whereas conflict indicates antagonism produced by the exploited and the marginalized, who have resisted both the oppressive social structures and mystifications of their disadvantaged social positions. Ideologies which represent society as a spurious unity thus must efface or contain contradictions and conflicts which most often occur along the fault lines produced by contradictions. Since ideological confrontations involve a wide range of complex and interrelated factors, they entail, in fact, an endless process of contestation and negotiation.
My study will position Melville in this complex process of negotiation and exchange of social energy, which constitutes that particular set of historical realities called antebellum America. What must be noted here is that the notion of intertextuality elucidates the contradictory nature of a given social reality by emphasizing diverse temporal relevancies. Social formations at any cultural juncture include not only diverse synchronous forces in conflict with one another but temporally different practices. Intertextuality vividly illustrates within a textual space the coexistence of what Raymond Williams terms "residual," "dominant," and "emergent" discourses and processes. Employing a palimpsestic image, Hayden White also stresses the desynchronized depiction of the present: "Historical epochs are not monolithically integrated social formations but, on the contrary, complex overlays of different modes of production that serve as the bases of different social groups and classes and, consequently, of their world-views." This seems particularly true of antebellum America, which marks not only the most turbulent but also the most transitional period in American history.

As historians have argued, Melville’s America was changing from "the stage of primitive capitalist accumulation" in the wake of Andrew Jackson’s Indian removal policies to the stage of what Alan Trachtenberg has called "the incorporation of America." Not surprisingly,
in antebellum America, social conflicts most often arose from the clashes between the values and perspectives nurtured by different historical formations, among which that of the rising Northern capitalism and the increasingly aggravated Southern agricultural economy based on slavery is the most prominent. Melville’s work built on the poetics of intertextuality, where different temporalities, voices, and desires claim a coexistence, then, powerfully mirrors the complex social formations of antebellum America, which can be best illustrated by the corresponding network of different ideologies in conflict with one another.
Notes


3. Charles Olson characterizes Melville as "a skald," who "knew how to appropriate the work of others," pointing out that "He [Melville] read to write ... Melville’s books batten on other men’s books" (*Call Me Ishmael* [New York: Reynall & Hitchcock, 1947], p. 36). Olson’s emphasis on Melville’s vatic role has been carried into the recent scholarship which places Melville in the context of his own popular culture, such as David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988).

4. Melville himself described his books as "botches" in a well-known letter of June 1, 1851 to Nathaniel Hawthorne, and while many of his contemporary reviewers attacked this hybridism found in his texts, modern readers, particularly those trained in the tradition of the New Criticism, tried to detect an order or a structure behind that apparent textual chaos; on the contemporary reception of Melville’s writings, see Hugh W. Hetherington’s comprehensive study, *Melville’s Reviewers: British and American 1846-1891* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1961); William Charvat’s two essays on Melville, "Melville" and "Melville and the Common Reader," both in *The Profession of Authorship in America, 1800-1870*, ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1968), pp. 204-61, 262-??; and Steven Mailloux, *Interpretive Conventions: The Reader in the Study of American Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1982), pp. 170-79. Ann Douglas places Melville’s trouble with the common readership in a cultural context which was becoming increasingly feminized by the inroad of aggressive capitalism (*Feminization of American Culture* [New York: Anchor Books, 1977], pp. 289-326); for an exemplary New


9. In addition to his article about the composition of Moby-Dick, "Unnecessary Duplicates," Hayford’s introduction to the Hendricks House Omoo (1969) was acclaimed as one of the best genetic studies.


13. Linda Hutcheon argues for postmodernist parody against those who accuse it of ahistorical playfulness by stressing that it is "a value-problematizing form of acknowledging the history (and through irony, the politics) of representations" ("The Politics of Postmodern Parody," in *Intertextuality*, p. 225).


23. I am here indebted to Michael Wheeler, who explores the functions of allusion in Victorian novels; he proposes three kinds of allusion: cultural, generic, and textual. Wheeler argues that cultural allusions help to "define national, regional or class cultures"; that generic allusions indicate "the relationship between the adoptive text and a literary convention or tradition"; and that textual allusions establish "the links between specific adopted and adoptive texts" (The Art of Allusion in Victorian Fiction [London: Macmillan, 1979], pp. 1-26); in an interesting study of Melville's style as allusion, Paul Lyons sets up two kinds of allusion: specific and general; "specific allusions include direct reference to an author, character, or event, attributed quotations, or openly recognizable echoes or adaptations of familiar quotations," while general allusion "immediately brings to mind a group of authors, period style, or genre, without having any specific referent" ("Melville and His Precursors: Style as Metastyle and Allusion," American Literature 62 [September 1990], p. 452).


26. Here I borrow the term, "a focused text," from Owen Miller, simultaneously arguing that other texts have the potential to take its place, and indeed are bound to do so as part of the intertextual dynamic (see "Intertextual Identity," in Identity of the Literary Text, ed. Mario J. Valdés and Owen Miller [Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1985], pp. 19-40). What should be emphasized is that establishing acknowledged, obvious, and possible sources does not necessarily mean a regression into an author-oriented teleological model. While not denying the pre-existence of a certain intertext, I propose to treat the intertext not as a source of influence but as a mediator through which the discursive space of a culture that has enabled not only its production but also its interlink to the main text is defined. In connection with this, I want to make sure that I do not deny the centrality of authorial intention to text production. My point is that that authorial intention is not cut off from, but nurtured and
governed by, the socii-historical realities surrounding the author.

27. Adapting Alexander Gaels notion of "parasite talk," which itself echoes Michel Serres in The Parasite, I am here linking intertextuality to a parasite, an organism that feeds on another, with attention to the implication that a parasite "gains its sustenance invalidly, by theft or stealth rather than by work of exchange" (Narrative Crossings: Theory and Pragmatics of Prose Fiction [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1987], p. 90); the image of a parasite is also pointed up by Marc Chénétier in his discussion of the intertextual relationships among Thoreau, Melville, and Annie Dillard ("Tinkering, Extravagance: Thoreau, Melville, and Annie Dillard," Critique 31 [Spring 1990], pp. 157-72); the etymological kinship between parasite and parody validates a connection between intertextuality and parody, which originally means "a song sung beside."


30. This is one of the central points John Samson makes in his provocative study, White Lies: Melville's Narratives of Facts (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1989); see particularly the introductory chapter, "Introduction: Genre, Ideology, and Melville’s Narratives," pp. 1-21.

31. Ibid., p. 12.

32. See, for example, Marvin Fisher’s discussion of the story in Going Under: Melville’s Short Fiction and the American 1850’s (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 13-28.

33. See The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 5-7; for Bakhtin, the "novel" is not just another literary genre but a special kind of force to "spark the renovation of all other genres" (7). As Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist explain, Bakhtin assigns the term to "whatever form of expression within a given literary system reveals the limits of that system as inadequate, imposed, or arbitrary ... The novel is fundamentally anticanonical" (Mikhail Bakhtin [Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1984], p. 276).


40. Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature, pp. 121-27.


CHAPTER II

MELVILLE’S "NARRATIVE OF FACTS":

TYPEE, OR UNCOVERING THE IDEOLOGIES OF "CIVILIZATION"

To read a text, as Jonathan Culler explains, is to "place it in a discursive space, relating it to other texts and to the codes of that space."¹ Writing involves a similar activity for Melville, because his writing is repeatedly energized by positioning itself in relation to other texts which it absorbs, criticizes, prolongs, displaces, or transforms, and to the discursive practices which determine, and are determined by, his culture. Melville’s first book, Typee, which he categorized as "the narrative of facts" (Correspondence, 106), displays keen sense of the discursive codes and practices of that narrative tradition—the genre of travel narrative.

As Columbus’s first letter of 1493, the prototype of the genre, exemplifies, travel narratives have served not only to arouse, to borrow the words of Tommo, the narrator of Typee, an "irresistible curiosity to see" the exotic spaces of the Other, but also to supply information about alien peoples, promoting exploration, trade, and eventually, the colonization of them.² Thus, travel narratives have contributed to opening communication between peoples and cultures. However, this opening always involves what Jacques Derrida has called "a violence of the letter," a
violence "of difference, of classification, and of the
system of appellations," which one culture imposes upon the
other.³ Travel narratives have functioned both to register
and legitimate such violence, making themselves the
nourishing grounds for the Western imperial imaginary.
Since the cultural dialogues recorded in travel narratives
are hardly reciprocal, they show more about Western
preconceptions and cultural assumptions than about the
alleged primitive societies they attempt to portray. They
further reveal the entire system of signification by which
the West comes to interpret, represent, and eventually
dominate the silenced "savage" Other. And yet, the very
ethnocentric ideologies with which travel narratives are
saturated dictate such claims that what is narrated be
factual, objective, or scientific. John Samson enlists the
four most pronounced of these whitened ideologies: "that
other races are more primitive than the white race, farther
back on a line of cultural development; that the Christians
form a religious elite because of their closer connection
with God; that capitalistic economics promote cultural
development; and that America signals the End Times of human
history."⁴

In Typee, Melville cites two texts that "claim
particular notice" (6) among a number of travel narratives
about Polynesia: David Porter’s Journal of a Cruise Made
to the Pacific Ocean (1815) and the Reverend Charles Stewart’s
A Visit to the South Seas (1831). The first of these, Melville says, is "a work, however, which I have never happened to meet with"; of the second, he tacitly acknowledges his acquaintance with it, but later expresses doubts about its reliability by claiming that its author was "a man who, according to his own statement, was only at one of the islands and remained there but two weeks, sleeping every night on board his ship, and taking little kid-glove excursions ashore in the daytime, attended by an armed party" (170). Notwithstanding, or precisely because of, such disavowals, these two texts claim their presence as intertexts which continually provoke Melville to respond to the generic, cultural, and ideological assumptions inscribed in them.⁵

As Charles Anderson has persuasively demonstrated, Melville must have had these texts in front of him while writing Typee.⁶ He frequently borrows information about local customs and history from these source texts, appropriates and synthesizes his precursors' experiences and observations, and sometimes plucks out blocks of passages related to what he describes. While refashioning the borrowed material to his purposes, Melville most often reacts polemically to his precursors' perspectives and attitudes toward the Pacific native peoples. Melville's rewriting thus involves a complex process of acknowledging and discrediting, citing and repudiating, or appropriating
and ridiculing, the authority of his sources. Clarifying this particular mode of intertextual transaction is crucial to understanding what he makes of the discursive tradition to which Typee belongs and the general culture of which it is part.

Melville’s specific citation of these two travelogues written by Americans has immediate implications which are pivotal to defining the context of Typee. If Porter’s Journal, published in 1815 right after the 1812 War with Britain, is the product of the formative years of American imperialism, Stewart’s Visit, published in 1831, represents the zeal of America’s evangelical expansionism at its hatching stage. Products of the early period of American expansion, these two works inaugurated a particular tradition of American travel writing in which the destination of the travel itinerary was set beyond the boundary of the American continent. This signals the change of America’s status on the global political scene. America was now no more a New World to be discovered and exploited, but a global power ready to join European countries for the management of the world system. As William Spengemann has argued, America was not the place to be changed any more but "a source of that change"; not the world that was "growing quantitatively with each new acquisition of territory" but "a world that was changing qualitatively with each deeper penetration into terra incognita." The entry of these two
American narratives into the tradition of western travel writing about the South Seas which had been dominated by Europeans thus defines the broad context of *Typee* in particular and Melville’s whole work in general, a context in which America began to express her growing ambition to become an imperial power. *Typee* registers Melville’s responses to this ascendancy of American imperialism whose sweeping impact was most forcefully felt in the years of the War with Mexico (1846-48), when it was written.

Melville’s reactions to America’s expansionist vision are indirectly expressed through his polemics against the imperialist forces and the Christian missionaries in the South Sea islands, who act under the cause of imparting knowledge and civilization, but they are also manifested in his attempt to deconstruct the very form of travel narrative to which his narrative submits. The travel narrative, as Janet Giltrow has argued, is characteristically teleological, governed by a linear, though sometimes divagating, progression toward home, the origin of civilization, and its plot sequence is a process of enlightening or "civilizing" the traveler (as well as the natives he contacts), a movement from ignorance to awareness, from doubt to certainty, or from unruliness to docility. Certainly, *Typee* ends with Tommo’s escape and a prospective return to "Home" and "Mother," but the authority of the ending, as Wai-chee Dimock puts it, does not allow
him to mitigate feelings of disorientation as he initially had in wondering "Typee of Happar?" In a sense, he becomes more jumbled, disorganized, or disoriented, particularly with regard to his own society. He will return with increasing misgivings and doubts about its social formations and leading values. As we shall see, this sense of uncertainty and dislocation Typee brings to its ending makes it distinct from his source texts, which end up consolidating and reinforcing the ideological biases.

In Typee, Melville also criticizes the imperialist vision of the world by way of disrupting the cherished tropes of the genre by means of which travel writers perceive, judge, or evaluate alien tribes and their cultures. In perceiving and conceptualizing Polynesian life, Melville frequently resorts to the conventional binary dialectic, such as civilization/savagery, law/taboo, Christianity/paganism, and individualism/communalism. However, he does not conceive of these pairs in such a way as to valorize the former of the dyad against the latter. Melville sometimes tries to see the sameness in differences and thus reminds us that differences are not essentially there but culturally constructed. At other times he seeks to invert the normative valorizing scheme to the advantage of the native qualities and to the disadvantage of civilization. But most often, Melville calls into question the efficacy of the binary logic itself; for example, Tommo
bewilderingly confesses his inability to comprehend the Typees' complex system of "Taboo," whose effects are "widespread and universal, pervading the most important as well as the minutest transactions of life," (221) adding that he has never met a Westerner who can give any satisfactory account of its operation.

In short, Melville's final position with regard to the Polynesians is paradoxical. On the one hand, some of his descriptions, particularly those resonating with traditional Occidental imaginings of Polynesia as exotic, natural, communal, pleasure-seeking, and exhibiting primitive qualities fundamental to the ethnocentric representations of the nineteenth-century relations between Polynesia and America, define his position as a white colonizer. At the same time, a deserter from an oppressive American ship, Melville identifies himself as a social outcast with the endangered existence of the Marquesans under the domination and exploitation of the imperialist forces. This split equation of himself with the marginalized Other leads to his emphasis on common experiences among the oppressed under different social and historical circumstances. It is this Melville, for example, who harshly criticizes the missionaries of the Sandwich Islands who "civilized" the natives into "draught horses" and "evangelized" them into "beasts of burden" (196). This logic of sameness enables Melville to recognize the political, economic, and cultural
analogy between the Marquesan colonial encounter and America's continental expansionism victimizing the American Indians, Mexicans, and African-Americans. Thus Melville's double positioning as both an insider and outsider with respect to the dominant discursive system allows his representation of Polynesian societies to intersect with some urgent social problems with which contemporary American society was overburdened. As Larzer Ziff, Wai-chee Dimock, and other scholars have noted, the enduring popularity of Typee stems in part from the book's explicit and implicit allusions to the comparable situations of mid-nineteenth-century America. 10

In his comprehensive study of the Western colonial experience, Peter Hulme has argued that the discourse of colonialism always hesitates over the beginning moment, because it bursts with "ideological implications." 11 The beginning of Typee is typical. Although Tommo has escaped from the oppressive life aboard the ship Dolly, his quest for a new life is inescapably conditioned by the cultural assumptions and predispositions of his society:

The Marquesas! What strange visions of outlandish things does the very name spirit up! Naked houris--cannibal banquets--groves of cocoa-nut--coral reefs--tattooed chiefs--and bamboo temples; sunny valleys planted with bread-fruit trees--carved canoes dancing on the flashing blue waters--savage woodlands guarded by horrible idols--heathenish rites and human sacrifices." (5)

The fragmented images Tommo conjures up here in his excited expectations about the Marquesas islands are stock-in-trade
elements of travel writing. Tinged with a romantic aura, Tommo’s imaginings are characteristically bifurcated: the islands are, on the one hand, exoticized as a primitive land of lushness and pleasure, and on the other, envisioned as a bedeviled place where heathen cannibals live. Tommo himself is conscious that the two pictures are conflicting. So he immediately labels them as "strangely jumbled anticipations" (5). Later he admits that these contradictory images derive from "glowing" accounts by "olden voyagers" he read. In effect, we have two Tommos: one who undertakes adventures into and out of the Typee valley, acting rather naively, and the other, the more retrospective Tommo, who sees his former adventures and their circumstances, as William Ellery Sedgwick states, "at a distance of four years across all the light and shadow of [his] experience in the interim." It is this retrospective Tommo who recounts his experiences from a broad perspective and ascribes an ultimate meaning to them. As he admits, the young Tommo fails to comprehend much of what he has observed in the Typee valley: "I saw everything, but could comprehend nothing" (175). After years of subsequent wanderings about the South Sea islands and reading books about them, Tommo becomes more mature, developing something like an ethnographic imagination which enables him to penetrate the veneer of white ideologies which have conditioned prior American representations of Polynesia. Of course, the
distinction between the Tommo of the past and the narrator Tommo is not always maintained; sometimes it is not clear to which Tommo the anxiety and doubt he shows about the Typees' behavior belongs. Distrust of his own judgment, one must note, is, after all, a measure of Tommo’s maturity as the following remark he made indicates: "My reflections ... on those facts may not be free from error" (199). Such a double role Tommo plays in narrating the story yields the effects of what Carolyn Porter characterizes as "double-talk," in which a narrative voice at once calls on us to keep up with his story and carries us "away from our moorings among familiar assumptions and out to a sea where all assumptions are in doubt."14

As his ship approaches the bay of Nukuheva, Tommo is struck by the primitive grandeur and tropical tranquility of the Marquesan landscape: "as we proceeded, short glimpses of blooming valleys, deep glens, waterfalls, and waving groves, hidden here and there by projecting and rocky headlands, every moment opening to the view some new and startling scene of beauty" (12). At the very next moment, however, Tommo undercuts the objectivity of his vision by suggesting that such a romanticized view of the South Sea islands is part of narrative convention:

Those who for the first time visit the South Seas, generally are surprised at the appearance of the islands when beheld from the sea. From the vaguest accounts we sometimes have of their beauty, many people are apt to picture to themselves enamelled and softly swelling plains, shaded over with delicious groves, and
watered by purling brooks, and the entire country but little elevated above the surrounding ocean. The reality is very different; bold rock-bound coasts, with the surf beating high against the lofty cliffs, and broken here and there into deep inlets, which open to the view thickly-wooded valleys, separated by the spurs of mountains clothed with tufted grass ... form the principal features of these islands. (12)

Tommo’s unusually keen sensitivity to the generic codes and practices of the form of narrative he adopts testifies to the centrality of Melville’s intertextual transaction in producing *Typee*. A glance at David Porter’s *Journal*, one of Melville’s key intertexts, validates Tommo’s warning. On the way to his inland campaign against the Typees after his unsuccessful first attack on the recalcitrant tribe, Porter reaches the top of the mountain looking down over Typee Valley:

> From the hill we had a distant view of every part, and all appeared equally delightful ... the upper part was bounded by a precipice of many hundred feet in height, from the top of which a handsome sheet of water was precipitated, and formed a beautiful river, which ran meandering through the valley and discharged itself at the beach. Villages were scattered here and there, the bread-fruit and cocoa-nut trees flourished luxuriantly and in abundance; plantation laid out in good order, inclosed with stone walls, were in a high state of cultivation, and everything bespoke industry, abundance, and happiness—never in my life did I witness a more delightful scene.

The American naval captain’s description of the home base of his warring partner in highly idealized terms is strikingly revealing, because it powerfully brings to mind one of the repeated patterns of colonial discourse, where the romanticization of the savage Other has always accompanied the process of Western imperial expansion. Porter’s
idealization of the savage society he is to subjugate under military power also indicates that the natives for him are less a real and living presence than an abstract ideal whose purpose lies in their symbolic value for the social and political configurations of his own society.

Despite his warning against conventional viewpoints brought to the representation of alien cultures, Tommo himself habitually turns to such a preconditioned imagining in perceiving the unfamiliar realities of the islands. For example, when he catches his first glimpse of Typee Valley during his arduous flight, Tommo depicts the "beauty" and "charm" of the "dazzling" landscape by using exactly the same rhetoric as Porter employed, thereby suggesting his intertextual indebtedness to his precursor: "Had a glimpse of the gardens of Paradise been revealed to me, I could scarcely have been more ravished with the sight ... Over all the landscape there reigned the most hushed repose, which I almost feared to break, lest, like the enchanted gardens in the fairy tale, a single syllable might dissolve the spell" (49). Looking at native girls bathing in cascading waters, Tommo describes their life "in an atmosphere of perpetual summer, and nurtured by the simple fruits of the earth, enjoying a perfect freedom from care and anxiety" (132). Tommo finds the Typees enjoying "continual" happiness which springs mainly from "that all-pervading sensation which Rousseau has told us he at one time experienced, the mere
buoyant sense of a healthful physical existence" (127). Tommo’s continuing idealization of Typeean life as Edenic, his romantic evocation of nature, and his admiration for the Typees’ harmonious social relationships tellingly indicate Melville’s intertextual appropriation of accounts of the "olden voyagers," including David Porter. And yet, Melville simultaneously contests the tradition they represent by exposing and ridiculing the ideologies of colonialism at work beneath the seemingly innocuous mask of Pacific idealization.

At the beginning of Typee, the barb of Melville’s intertextual contestation gets directed at the enlightenment rhetoric of imperialism. Tommo observes the French frigates disturbingly floating in the midst of the tropical loveliness and tranquility while his ship approaches the harbor, and this kindles Melville’s agon with the agents of Western imperialism. Melville has Tommo remark in anger: "Nothing could be more out of keeping than the presence of these vessels"(12). The sharp contrast between the ugly warships and the beautiful land is established in Tommo’s consciousness as a moral image which represents the essential nature of European and Polynesian cultures--the one proclaiming violence and death, and the other, peace and spontaneous life. Following Joyce Sparer Adler’s suggestion, one can further say that this also represents Melville’s "primal scene," which influenced his perspective
on all he would see in Polynesia and his vision of the nineteenth-century world. Tommo translates his anger into a detailed account of the iniquities the French imperialist soldiers led by Admiral Du Petit Thouars commit on the island: in order to control the whole island under one centralized agency, the French set up a puppet ruler, excite a feud among the tribes, and slaughter "about a hundred and fifty of them [i.e., Polynesians] at Whitihoo" in their "efforts at reform" (7). Melville anticipates other subterfuges the French will commit "to defend whatever cruelties they may hereafter think fit to commit in bringing the Marquesan natives into subjection," and explains that under the cover of a similar pretence, they perpetrated their "outrages and massacres at Tahiti the beautiful" (17-8).

Tommo's association of "reform" with slaughter contains a compelling irony, which hardly fails to ring through his comparisons of civilized and savage societies. The French, who "have ever plumed themselves upon being the most humane and polished of nations" (17), came to Nukuheva as bearers of European civilization. They announced that their aim was to bring refinement, order, and peace to savage life, but what they actually brought about was nothing but mass murder, disorder, violence, genocidal disease, and ineptness on a scale unknown before. Tommo witnesses all kinds of "examples of civilized barbarity" (125) which "the most
humane and polished" people brashly thrust upon the generous and kind natives under the excuse of civilizing them, and laments: "How often is the term 'savages' incorrectly applied!" (27). Therefore, as Adler argues, the question of questions comes: Who are the real savages, the Typees who live simply and harmoniously with each other in nature, or the aggressive civilizers who have come to devour the peaceful island with a slaughtering arsenal? The answer, pursued throughout the book, is given most explicitly by Tommo: "The fiend-like skill we display in the invention of all manner of death-dealing engines, the vindictiveness with which we carry on our wars, and the misery and desolation that follow in their trains, are enough of themselves to distinguish the white civilized man as the most ferocious animal on the face of the earth" (125). Tommo's harsh indictment of the vanguard of Europe's imperialist power puts into question the validity of the traditional valorization given to such key conceptual paradigms of Western ethnographic writing as civilization/savagery and Christianity/paganism.

The Frenchmen's shameless display of imperial violence reminds Melville's narrator-spokesman of another equally flagrant outrage--this time, triggered by his compatriot, Captain David Porter. In Typee, Melville thus interweaves the adventure story of Tommo with the history of Western penetration into the South Seas. In fact, the whole
colonial history of the Pacific islands, the narrative of "a series of cold-blooded robberies, kidnappings, and murders" (27), informs the space for Melville's intertextual operation—a narrative strategy anticipating "Benito Cereno," where the history of the New World slave trade and slavery is superimposed upon the episode of a slave revolt.

Twenty-six years before the French Admiral Du Petit Thouars's invasion, Lieutenant David Porter of the American navy took possession of the Marquesas islands in the name of the United States. Sailing around the Horn chasing British whalers during the War with Britain, Porter arrived at the island of Nukuheva with the Essex and three captive vessels in October 1813. Porter's campaign marked the first dispatch of American troops beyond the American continent with the ambition of territorial expansion. Porter soon got involved in the tribal wars, which he found made it difficult for other parts of the island to provide the pigs and fruits necessary.

Porter joined the Teii, the friendly tribe, in attacking the Hapaa and subjugated the hostile tribe. Finding the Typees the most recalcitrant with supplies, he again attempted to subdue them by means of his superior military power.17 Armed as they were with only slings and spears, the Typees outmaneuvered and thus successfully drove out the invaders, striking Porter with admiration for their intelligence and courage. When they were forced to retreat
and abandon their design of conquest, the Americans perpetrated the most outrageous atrocities in the course of their withdrawal: setting fire to the whole village, which was, in fact, a common practice of whites in warring against the North American Indians. As his Journal shows, Porter looked at this devastating scene not unlike an aesthete:

When I had reached the summit of the mountains, I stopped to contemplate that valley which, in the morning, we had viewed in all its beauty, the scene of abundance and happiness—a long line of smoking ruins now marked out traces from one end to the other; the opposite hills were covered with the unhappy fugitives, and the whole presented a scene of desolation and horror. Unhappy and heroic people!"18

This passage encapsulates the cast of the mind of a Romantic imperialist baptized by the spirit of Enlightenment. We find the typical admiration of primitive culture and its noble, although as yet still savage, architects and the appeals to the Enlightenment values denoting the period’s progressivism such as beauty, abundance, and happiness, on the one hand, and the implied apology for the inevitable use of violence to achieve the task of civilization and the apparently humanitarian gesture of sympathy with the victim of that violence, on the other. Yet the appallingly calm, detached, and meditative tone of the passage describing "a scene of desolation and horror" belies Porter’s apology and his claim of sympathy with "unhappy and heroic people"; it only reveals more glaringly the smugness and condescension with which the imperial self is armed. More appalling is Porter’s insensitivity to the contradiction at the heart of
his imperialist project, the irreconcilable disparity between the Enlightenment morality he claims and the savage violence he himself employs.

Melville exposes the ideologies underpinning such a Janus-faced imperialist enterprise in all their contradictions by rewriting the above passage from Porter’s Journal: on their march back to the sea, the invaders "consoled themselves for their repulse by setting fire to every house and temple in their route; and a long line of smoking ruins defaced the once-smiling bosom of the valley, and proclaimed to its pagan inhabitants the spirit that reigned in the breasts of Christian soldiers" (26).

Melville’s intertextual counterwork transforms the ruined valley itself into a metaphor for the interior landscape of the imperialist under the guise of a Christian civilizer. Melville goes on to point out that the enormities perpetrated by the whites in the South Seas, "the iniquity of which might be considered almost sufficient to sink her guilty timbers to the bottom of the sea," are seldom "proclaimed" at home (27). Thus, in Melville’s view, Western travel narratives play a language game of deceit, wrapping up the imperial heart of darkness with a humanitarian rhetoric of benevolence and sacrifice. Such texts displace the actual structures relating the whites and the non-whites onto the former’s ideological structures, and
thus perpetuate the myth of the white man’s errand into the wilderness to civilize Pacific savages.

Melville’s condemnation of Porter’s reckless military operation sounds all the more harsh when we know that he shares with Porter praise for the innate goodness of the Marquesans. Admiring the inherent "human" qualities of the Marquesans, Porter earlier claims that they "have been stigmatized by the name of savages; it is a term wrongly applied; they rank high in the scale of human beings, whether we consider them morally or physically. We find them brave, generous, honest, and benevolent, acute, ingenious, intelligent, and their beauty and regular proportions of their bodies, correspond with the perfections of their minds."19 Similarly, Melville makes the point that the ascription of savagery to the Polynesians is not warranted. The idea that the natives of Polynesia are wild barbarians, Melville stresses, is not so much the case as ideologically constructed by white travelers who, "having had little time, and scarcely any opportunity to become acquainted with the customs," write them down one after another "in an off-hand, and haphazard style" (171). After passing a few weeks in the valley of the Marquesas, Tommo exclaims: "Are these the ferocious savages, the blood-thirsty cannibals of whom I have heard such frightful tales!" (203).
Porter’s view of the Marquesans as innately good and intelligent, as T. Walter Herbert has argued, had its root in the Enlightenment view of that all mankind was one species, and regardless of skin color, was capable of infinite improvement. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, many American intellectuals under the influence of the Enlightenment spirit and the Rousseauistic idea of the noble savage endorsed such a racial position particularly with regard to American Indians. They argued that born with the same innate capacity as white Americans, the Indians could be transformed through the process of acculturation into civilized fellows who were qualified enough to participate in building the American "empire for liberty" that Jefferson envisioned. Although this view denied any essential differences among races, it nevertheless did not abandon the Manichean opposition between the superior development of the whites and the inferiority of the non-whites. The Anglo-American social systems and their values and beliefs were recommended as the most advanced and the best ones for the other races to emulate. Thus, their professed belief in human equality notwithstanding, American Enlightenment intellectuals never got away from the ethnocentric conception of race, which would strengthen over the years and ultimately develop into a powerful racial ideology to propagate Anglo-Saxon
supremacy by the time Indian Removal began to be officially enforced in 1830.\textsuperscript{21}

Throughout his Journal, Porter takes a favorable stance toward the Marquesans, praising their law-abiding life and their unrefined yet egalitarian social structures, and admiring their superior navigational skills and their artistic tastes. Porter's wonder at the massive Marquesan stonework is typical: "Our astonishment is raised to the highest, that a people in a state of nature, unassisted by any of those artificial means which so much assist and facilitate the labor of the civilized man, could have conceived and executed a work which, to every beholder, must appear stupendous."\textsuperscript{22} This passage again typifies the \textit{modus operandi} of Porter's Enlightenment ethnographic imagination, in which even a modicum of cultural development found in alleged natural life becomes a source for celebrating man's innate potentialities. It also reveals that Porter's estimation of Marquesan life, however favorable, bases itself on the long cherished western tropes that, while pairing a cultural "we" and a primitive "they," suggest that primitives are like children, untamed, violent, free, dangerous, and hence in need of control; that they are mysterious, in tune with nature, part of its harmonies; and that they are at the "lowest" level, while Europeans occupy the "highest," in a social, cultural, or racial system of hierarchy.\textsuperscript{23} To speak more strictly, therefore, Porter's
"astonishment" comes from nothing other than his recognition of a seam in a given conceptual framework.

In much the same way, Porter becomes amazed at the maintenance of social order in Marquesan society without any formal legal system. He was also impressed by the natives' spontaneous cooperation in communal projects: "It seems strange how a people living under no form of government that we could ever perceive, having no chiefs over them who appear to possess any authority, having neither rewards to stimulate them to exertion nor dread of punishment before them, should be capable of conceiving and executing, with the rapidity of lightning, works which astonished us." Echoing Porter, Melville also has Tommo pay high tribute to the "unparalleled" social harmony maintained in Typee with no support of "legal provisions":

During the time I lived among the Typees, no one was ever put upon his trial for any offence against the public. To all appearances there were no courts of law or equity. There was no municipal police for the purpose of apprehending vagrants and disorderly characters. In short, there were no legal provisions whatever for the well-being and conservation of society, the enlightened end of civilized legislation. And yet everything went on in the valley with a harmony and smoothness unparalleled, I will venture to assert, in the most select, refined, and pious associations of mortals in Christendom. How are we to explain this enigma? (Typee, 200-201)

Both Melville and Porter consider a legal system essential to maintaining social order--an idea which, as Brook Thomas has pointed out, is peculiarly associated with the Anglo-American middle classes. But it must be noted that
Melville is not simply paraphrasing Porter. His language is more concrete, more tightened, yet deliberately exaggerated, and consistently sustained with an incisive irony. While noting the absence of any legal provisions in Typee, Melville simultaneously evokes the difference between the harmonious Typees and oppressive ambience of civilization. Melville’s implication is that coercion and violence are the guards of civilization. This ironic twist Melville gives to his source text also highlights the absence of "equity" and justice in America’s civilized society fully equipped with the "courts of law." Melville’s subversive dialogue thus exposes the emptiness of Porter’s ideological view that equates the presence of law with social harmony and equality. Such intertextual effects are increased by familiarity with his later work such as "Benito Cereno" and Billy Budd. As we shall see later in the chapter on "Benito Cereno," Melville is extremely skeptical about the idea of enforcing legal justice, which was one of the central issues in the debates over slavery in the America of the 1850s.

In Melville’s cultural poetics, comparison and contrast are the most important tropes. Tommo habitually compares and contrasts what he has observed in the Typee vale with the life of civilization he left behind. For example, the Ti, the gathering place of the Typee warriors, seems "a sort of Bachelor’s Hall," a "savage Exchange, where the rise and fall of Polynesian Stock was discussed" (157); the "triply
hooped" tattooing on Kory-Kory's face reminds Tommo of "those unhappy wretches ... gazing out sentimentally from behind the grated bars of a prison window," his tattooed body suggests "the idea of a pictorial museum of natural history, or an illustrated copy of 'Goldsmith's Animated Nature'" (83); and Kory-Kory's mother reminds him of "an exceedingly muscular and destitute widow, with an inordinate supply of young children, in the bleakest part of the civilized world" (85). This descriptive strategy that associates alien customs and practices with accepted civilized modes of behavior may undermine Melville's claim of objectivity, because it implies that he, like many a previous travel writer, also sees Marquesan life under Western eyes rather than just as it is.

However, unlike his predecessors, Melville shows an awareness that any ethnographic representation is inevitably colored by the writer's own cognitive system or social habitus. He frequently questions the veracity of previous representations of Polynesia. For example, observing a war between the Typees and the Happars which ends up with only a few injuries for both parties, Tommo points out the tendency of the western representations to exaggerate their warlikeness: "I began to distrust the truth of those reports which ascribed so fierce and belligerent a character to the Typee nation. Surely ... all these terrible stories I have heard about the inveteracy with which they carried on the
feud, their deadly intensity of hatred, and the diabolical malice with which they glutted their revenge upon the inanimate forms of the slain, are nothing more than fables" (128). Later, Melville comes to recognize that misrepresentations are not necessarily intentional, but result from the particular contexts in which they are produced, and thus even admits the partiality of his own account. His distrust of previous accounts including his own, his recognition of the "unintentional humbuggery" (170) that may be involved in any ethnographic account, and his conscientious refusal to extrapolate from cultural data prompt critics to argue that Typee's foremost thematic concern is with the problem of perception, or, as Lee Clark Mitchell says, with "man's imposing of belief upon experience";37 or, more specifically, as T. Walter Herbert claims, with the process by which "factual information is taken up by exponents of various interpretive perspectives and made into a symbolic carrier of the world view they embrace."28 Melville's quarrels both with his contemporary readers and with his precursors, therefore, tell us more about western attitudes than about Typeean culture.

Porter and Melville further agree to take the harmonious social relations the Marquesans enjoy as evidence of their innate moral capabilities. Just as Porter admiringly believes that "an honester or more friendly and better disposed people [than the Marquesan] do not exist
under the sun," so Melville eulogizes the innate goodness and nobility of the supposed savages, declaring that "after passing a few weeks in this valley of the Marquesas, I formed a higher estimate of human nature than I had ever before entertained" (203). Behind these apparent similarities fundamental differences exist, because each has different ideological underpinnings.

A closer look at Porter’s imperialist stance will soon reveal that his eulogy of the Marquesans is motivated by political interests. Porter believed not only that his conquest of the Marquesas islands was important for military and commercial purposes but that it would display to the Old World America’s rising power; so he stressed that his voyage paved the way for America’s claim for full participation in international politics dominated by European powers. However, his claims were premature for a young America, whose settled national territory scarcely extended west of the Appalachians. Porter tried in vain to gain support from policy-makers. In fact, his imperialist maneuverings in the South Seas were not sanctioned by the United States government, nor was his possession of the islands ever officially ratified. In order to promote his imperialist cause to the American public, Porter, on the one hand, stressed the strategic importance of the Pacific route to America’s trade relations with Asia, and argued, on the other, that the Marquesans were not so savage as to be
unqualified to join the American Republic. In his "Declaration" passages in the Journal, Porter, while justifying his conquest of the islands, emphasized the respectable racial qualities of the natives. He insisted that the Marquesans with their innate virtues and skills should be admitted into "the great American family, whose pure republican policy approaches so near their own," adding that admission will bring "speedy civilization to a race of men who enjoy every mental and bodily endowment which nature can bestow, which requires only art to perfect." Porter's rhetoric was certainly intended for those white racists at home who frequently warned in the early stage of American territorial expansion that colonial possessions would corrupt the republic. These white supremacists insisted that annexation should be restricted to sparsely populated areas, while advocating the economic penetration of areas that were heavily populated with "inferior" races. In order to offset this argument, supporters of annexation often exploited the Enlightenment racial view widely accepted by the American intellectuals of the post-Revolutionary generation--the view that the non-whites were innately good and competent, and hence improvable. Melville must have been well aware that Porter's admiration for the Polynesians' intellectual and moral capacities was necessitated by the imperialist ideology he embraced, an ideology which required the natives to be Noble Savages, so
that taking possession of them would not demean and spoil civilized America."

The whites visiting the South Seas self-righteously claimed that they came to aid the progress of civilization, imparting increasing knowledge to "the less enlightened part of our species," as George Vancouver put it. However, such high-sounding claims of civilization and Christianity were often, to borrow Gorman Beauchamp’s words, "only the camouflage for cultural imperialism and economic exploitation." Melville’s insight into this political unconscious underlying the missionary discourse is the basis of his strident attack on missionary activities in the South Seas. From the perspective of the missionaries, primitive societies appear only as the land of spiritual darkness where the benighted followers of Satan reside. To scatter this spiritual misery is to bring civilization into being. "Christianization" is not just an ornament of civilization, they insist, but the central factor in the progress of civilization. This link between Christian mission and civilization, however, often results in a reduction of God’s agents to the vanguard of imperialism primed to preach the supremacy of white religion, white civilization, and the white race.

Nowhere is Melville’s reaction to this Christian theory of civilization more poignantly articulated than in his
subversive refashioning of Charles Stewart’s account of his first contact with the Marquesans. The Reverend Charles Stewart visited the islands about sixteen years after David Porter and fourteen years before Melville. As chaplain aboard the American naval vessel, the USS Vincennes, where Melville’s cousin Thomas Melville was a midshipman, on its first tour around the globe, Stewart stopped and stayed about two weeks at the islands, observing its “original heathenish state.”

In A Visit to the South Seas, Stewart writes:

We were about to bear away for Nukuhiva ... when a high bluff of rocks directly abreast of the ship became suddenly crowned with islanders, whose light skins and naked figures were perfectly distinguishable, while the shore rang with wild shouts, as they waved streamers of white cloth high on their spears, and tossed their mantles above their heads in the air ... The scene was one of the wildest imaginable: and such as few have it in their power ever to behold. The picturesque beauty of the wooded hills and glen brightly gleaming in the setting sun, the naked figures of the islanders, and their rude and extravagant gestures and vociferations—exhibiting man in the simplest state of his fallen nature, still the unclothed tenant of the forest, and the inhabitant of the cave—could scarce fail in producing a most powerful sensation among those who had never before witnessed anything of the kind.

Stewart’s picture is drawn within a preframed scheme of the Manichean contrast between God-inspiring nature and fallen man without the grace of the Christian God and civilization, a contrast intended to foreground the depraved savageness of the natives which awaits the evangelist’s hand of regeneration. Melville appropriates this passage into, as
Charles Anderson puts it, his "brief against civilization":

When the inhabitants of some sequestered island first descry the "big canoe" of the European rolling through the blue waters towards their shores, they rush down to the beach in crowds, and with open arms stand ready to embrace the strangers. Fatal embrace! They fold to their bosoms the vipers whose sting is destined to poison all their joys; and the instinctive feeling of love within their breasts is soon converted into bitterest hate. (26)

Melville translates what Stewart has taken as an index of the indigenous barbarity and depravity--"their rude and extravagant gestures and vociferations"--into an expression of hearty welcome betokening their innocence and generosity. Melville also subverts the traditional missionary perspective of the racial Other. He suggests that the civilizers, not the natives, are "the vipers," the disciples of Satan, because it is they who take advantage of the natives' guileless cordiality and spontaneous attachment. Melville's irony becomes more corrosive as it comes to yet another reversal of the western normative thinking on the Christian mission; what the self-important emissaries of civilization have done is "converting" instinctive feeling of love and joy into hatred and bitterness, rather than propagating God's blessings. "Fatal embrace!" In this lament Melville sums up all the disasters, shams and hypocrisies entailed in the "noble" enterprise of Christianization.
The egalitarian social structure of Typee also drew Stewart's attention. Like Porter before him, Stewart was struck by the fact that the Marquesans had little in the way of formal institutions of government, presenting a contrast to the Hawaiians and Tahitians, who had "the well-organized form of monarchy." Observing that the residents, even though under the leadership of a chieftain, enjoy an unusual degree of freedom and equality, Stewart became bewildered and worried: I am at a loss to determine under what form of government this should be classed ... and I have been more than half tempted, with all deference to the dignity of our own happy government, to style it--will you forgive me?--a republic *en sauvage*, in which every man is the representative of his own rights, and the only lawgiver, with liberty in all cases, promptly to wield the power of the executive, after having discharged, to his own satisfaction, the functions of the judge! Where Melville found an enviable social equality accompanied by "a harmony and smoothness unparalleled" (200) in the absence of an apparent hierarchical governing structure in Typee, Stewart saw potential anarchy--a revelation of the conservative streak of evangelical revivalism in the era of Jacksonian democracy. Stewart's suggestion of the need for the machinery of social control also stemmed from his Calvinistic outlook whose key tenet assumed man's innate unruliness which hence made it necessary that society be regulated by firm legal control. Yet his careful description of the Marquesan political structure as "a republic *en sauvage*" suggests that his worry is also tinged
with racism that non-white races are not qualified for a republican regime. At another point, Stewart claimed that the Marquesans were preserved from anarchy by the "tyranny of superstition" administered by the priests.  

By contrast, Melville admires the democratic egalitarianism that he sees pervading Typeean society: "No one appeared to assume any arrogant pretensions. There was a little more than a slight difference in costume to distinguish the chiefs from the other natives. All appeared to mix together freely, and without any reserve; although I noticed that the wishes of a chief, even when delivered in the mildest tone, received the same immediate obedience which elsewhere would have been only accorded to a peremptory command" (185). Later, Melville argues, by way of exemplifying the situation of the Sandwich Islands, that contact with Christian civilization, contrary to the conventional accounts reported by the missionaries, causes a disruption in the egalitarian social structure of Polynesia, thus widening the gap between the ruling class and the common people: "the chiefs are daily becoming more luxurious and extravagant in their style of their living, and the common people more and more destitute of the necessaries and decencies of life" (188).  

Underlying Melville's indictment of the missionaries in Polynesia is his reaction to messianic nationalism boosted by the myth of Manifest Destiny. According to John L.
O’Sullivan, who coined and popularized the phrase in the 1840s, America had a unique destiny as a leader of nations to "manifest to mankind the excellence of divine principles; to establish the noblest temple ever dedicated to the worship of the Most High--the Sacred and the True." During the decade, this sense of national mission was taken up by expansionists and used to justify their political agenda of annexing or conquering adjacent territories. In obedience to a divine mandate, they claimed, America had the moral responsibility to occupy the continent so that it might share the blessings of Christian liberty and republican equality with others. Advocates of Manifest Destiny like O’Sullivan initially emphasized its idealistic, missionary aspect, insisting that territorial annexation was recommended with a humanitarian motive to provide less fortunate neighbors with the opportunity to share democratic freedom, not to erect an empire. In an editorial in the New York Morning News in November, 1845, O’Sullivan said: "There are some things this nation will never do. It will never be the forcible subjugator of other countries; it will never despoil surrounding territories; it will never march through the blood of their unoffending inhabitants; it will never admit within its own Union those who do not freely desire the boon." However, the practitioners of Manifest Destiny, whose messianic task of conquest glaringly manifests the arrogance of white superiority and unbounded
cupidity, belies O'Sullivan’s claim to selflessness. For this reason, criticism of expansionist conquest and war often took the form of the American jeremiad that points to a discrepancy between principles and practice. Melville must have detected the racial and religious chauvinism involved in the notion of Manifest Destiny, no matter how humanitarian and well-meant it claimed its motives to be. The interpretation of American political, moral, and racial superiority did not appear to him the less presumptuous or the less self-righteous.

Melville keenly recognized that both the Marquesan encounter and the American frontier encounter between whites and native peoples were dictated by the same chauvinistic, self-serving national ideologies. He compares the degradation of Polynesian life by the contact with Christian civilization to the doomed fate of the North American Indians: "The Anglo-Saxon hive have extirpated Paganism from the greater part of the North American continent; but with it they have likewise extirpated the greater portion of the Red race. Civilization is gradually sweeping from the earth the lingering vestiges of Paganism, and at the same time the shrinking forms of its unhappy worshippers" (195). It should come as no surprise, therefore, that Tommo increasingly tends to perceive his stay with the Typees as an Indian captivity, as it becomes longer. Even before he arrives at Typee, he imagines a Pocahontas figure on whom
"his beauteous nymph Fayaway" (85) is certainly modelled, and retells the story of the master of the Katherine, originally told by Francis Olmsted, according to the stereotyped pattern of the captivity narrative; thus, he is saved, after his seizure by the natives, "from a cruel death by the intervention of a young girl" (25).45

Beneath the rhetoric of benevolence, Melville thought, Europeans and Americans hide an unconscionable sense of racial and moral superiority and an insatiable self-interest. The congeries of falsehood enfolded in the missionary cause are most penetratingly expressed in the following passage:

Among the islands of Polynesia, no sooner are the images overturned, the temples demolished, and the idolaters converted into nominal Christians, than disease, vice, and premature death make their appearance. The depopulated land is then recruited from the rapacious hordes of enlightened individuals who settle themselves within its borders, and clamorously announce the progress of the Truth. Neat villas, trim gardens, shaven lawns, spires, and cupolas arise, while the poor savage soon finds himself an interloper in the country of his fathers, and that too on the very site of the hut where he was born. The spontaneous fruits of the earth, which God in his wisdom had ordained for the support of the indolent natives, remorselessly seized upon and appropriated by the stranger, are devoured before the eyes of the starving inhabitants, or sent on board the numerous vessels which now touch at their shores (195-6).

Indeed, the passage summarizes Melville’s view of the civilizing mission as a whole in Polynesia. For him, evangelism and civilization serve as nothing more than the vanguard force of imperialist greed, justifying and facilitating a system of economic exploitation and
possession. Arbitrarily designating Polynesian native religion as heathenism and superstition, the evangelical missionaries destroy its rich tradition of rituals and symbols under the cause of conversion. Their social programs advance the "denationalizing" (Omoo, 183) of the native tribes, consequently helping to transform them into "mere interlopers" or at best a labor force to be mobilized for the impoverishment of their own lands. Because the end result of their sacred missions "has almost invariably been to accomplish their [the natives'] temporal destruction" (Typee, 195), Tommo says that "it would seem perhaps better for what we call the barbarous part of the world to remain unchanged" (17). And because of the evil effects, the missions appeared to the natives as mere rhetoric of deception: "Lies, lies!" yell the natives in Omoo, "you tell us of salvation; and, behold, we are dying. We want no other salvation, than to live in this world. Where are any saved through your speech?" (191)

In Omoo, one of whose objects is to provide "a familiar account of the present condition of the converted Polynesians, as affected by their promiscuous intercourse with foreigners, and the teachings of the missionaries, combined" (xiii), Melville brings further charges against civilization's sanctimonious emissaries; against their hypocrisy, their arrogance, and their destruction of various cultural practices; against their insistent apartheid and
pretensions to white supremacy. Significantly, Melville's barbs become particularly sharper when they are directed at hypocrisy and prudery. His description of the hypocrisy of the missionaries of the Sandwich Islands is exemplary: "Not until I visited Honolulu was I aware of the fact that the small remnants of the natives had been civilized into draught horses, and evangelized into beasts of burden ... They have been literally broken into the traces, and are harnessed to the vehicles of their spiritual instructors like so many dumb brutes!" (Typee, 196) Because of such injustices, Melville regards the missionaries' redemptive crusades as a confidence game.46

As Melville suggests here and in Omoo, racial chauvinism underlies the missionaries' double-edged behavior based on a dual moral code, one for whites and another for non-whites conceived as inferior, less than human.47 Unwarrantedly identifying the white skin with moral superiority, the missionaries stigmatized peoples with different skin colors as bondaged to sin. The natives, according to Stewart, for example, are shrouded with spiritual darkness, suffering from "the iron-handed tyranny" of "superstition," war, and cannibalism; "their minds and hearts [are] lost in ignorance and sin."48 In short, they are savages to be civilized and reconstructed by the guiding light of the superior Christian civilization. Blinded by the dogma of white supremacy, the missionaries, with all
their rhetoric of redemption, love, and equality, acquiesced in the mistreatment, exploitation, or destruction of the natives, or even justified these enormities as part of the civilizing process.

Observing naked islanders shouting and waving with their hands and arms, while his ship was passing one of the islands, Stewart immediately associates them with "ignorance, degradation, and thousand miseries." Stewart then concludes that "nothing more is needed ... than the dawning of the 'light of life,'" in order to make their abode "morally and spiritually the happy valley." Melville answers and parodies Stewart's appeal to Christianize the natives by allowing Tommo to become the reluctant object of the uncanny Polynesian practice of tattooing. Tommo believes that the whole system of tattooing ... [is] connected with their religion; and it was evident, therefore, that they were resolved to make a convert of me" (220). As later ethnographers tell us, tattooing entails much more complex, social, religious, and cultural dimensions in Polynesian life. Although Tommo's association of tattooing with religious conversion is too simplistic and factually erroneous, Melville's emphasis on that connection foregrounds how cruel and presumptuous one culture's effort to impose its religious customs upon another can be. Melville later demonstrates in Omoo that missionary efforts at conversion are tantamount to the
corruption of the natives' innate virtues, to the
destruction of their harmonious social relations, and even
to genocide. By insisting that the Typeean valley as an
Edenic society is already more Christian than the cultivated
West, Melville makes visible the self-righteousness and
arrogance hidden in the very premise of the missions--the
idea that Christianity is the only legitimate religion in
the world and therefore that the whites are specially chosen
by God and hence a superior race.

Stewart's exaggeration of the evils of paganism also
suggests that his perspective is decidedly governed by the
Calvinist doctrine which emphasizes the innate depravity of
man. As we have already seen, his mind is also
concomitantly framed by a redemptive moralism linked to the
ideology of Manifest Destiny. The two principles guiding
Stewart's journey through pagan islands, as Rowland A.
Sherill suggests, represent, in fact, two strands of
theological thinking which constituted the essential tenets
of antebellum evangelical revivalism. The emphasis on
man's innate depravity, originally advocated by the orthodox
Calvinists of New England, developed in Melville's age into
a strict legalism which seeks true virtue in conformity to
the moral law of God as revealed to Moses. On the other
hand, a more liberal brand of Calvinism, which emerged in
the early nineteenth century under the influence of the
Enlightenment spirit, turned its attention to social life,
seeking religious morality in identification with civic virtues, upon which the redemptive destiny of the American people ultimately hinged. Melville refused to embrace any of these, although his overall perception and understanding of reality was deeply grounded in the conceptual framework provided by Christian theology. 52

Melville’s quarrel with God, as Hawthorne informs us, continued throughout his writing life. 53 His persistent refusal to accept any given belief system, however, seems to tell us that its influence is all the more powerful. His struggle with Providence in Typee proves to be already fierce. A glance at the Typee manuscript discovered in upstate New York in 1983 reveals how forcefully religious ideologies gripped his imagination and how fiercely he resisted them. In this apparently earliest draft of the novel appears a deleted passage which treats Kory-Kory’s insistence upon carrying Tommo morning and evening to the stream for his bath. It reads:

Oftentimes when borne by him [Kory-Kory] through the shady paths of the valley I have thought of the picture of "Little Henry & his Bearer" which usually decorates the title page of that pleasing and popular religious tract. 54

The "Little Henry & his Bearer" mentioned here was a popular Sunday School pamphlet written in 1814 by Mary Martha Sherwood, appearing in more than one hundred editions by 1884. 55 It is a typical piece of missionary propaganda in which the hero Little Henry, an English lad orphaned in
India, devotes his short life to converting his Indian servant to Christianity. That Melville, while composing a stridently anti-missionary work, automatically turned, apparently without irony, to a pro-missionary tract for depicting the relations of his central characters bespeaks the extent of the pervasive influence of Christian theology upon his otherwise highly independent mind. Melville’s final rejection of the passage signals his resistance to the ideological interpellation levied by messianic nationalism and imperial expansionism which the dominant classes in antebellum America embraced as their leading principles.

One source of Melville’s religious perplexities is his embarrassing recognition of what he terms the "startling solecism" in Pierre--a discrepancy between the teachings of the Gospels, which wells up "an inexhaustible soul-melting stream of tenderness and loving-kindness" in the minds of "all earnest-loving youths" (Pierre, 207) and a reality "saturated and soaking with lies" (208). He was brought up in a religious family in the era of America’s second Great Awakening; yet, the period also witnessed unprecedentedly violent infighting among the Unitarian, the more orthodox, and the Revivalist sects over the issue of the moral relation between God and man, a drastic increase of Christian profiteers with the advancement of commercial capitalism, and above all, the helpless disarray or silence of the Christian community before the heartless Indian
removal and the increasing brutality of Southern slavery. In Mardi Melville satirizes the ossified formalism and ruthless exploitation of the religious institution by caricaturing a Pontiff of the sacerdotal island of Maramma whose ordination winds up with the salutation from three "ravenous sharks" with teeth turned up (Mardi, 334). It may not be unfair to say that Melville lived the agony and dilemma of his age when his culture’s normative systems of beliefs and values fell apart, an age when, to borrow Bainard Cowan’s expression, "a text central to a people’s identity can neither command belief any longer nor be entirely abandoned."

In the preface to Typee, Melville somewhat ironically expresses his "desire to speak the unvarnished truth," and he has Tommo reiterate his doubts about reaching the truth. Tommo earlier reminds Toby that "it was impossible for either of us to know anything with certainty" (51). He thinks that the taboo system in the Typee valley is all-encompassing—all meaning relates ultimately to it—but confesses that this system "always appeared inexplicable" (221) to himself. Tommo’s attitude is indeed a far cry from that of those Christian civilizers, who, as Tommo puts it, "clamorously announce the progress of the Truth" (195). While the missionaries insist that mere ethnocentric convictions are absolutely true, Melville talks of the ultimate incomprehensibility of the world or the essential
limitations of one’s knowledge particularly with respect to alien cultures. Melville lays claim to truth, not necessarily because he believes that his words are absolutely true to things, but because he thinks that he himself struggles hard to unvarnish the given language of the ideologies sedimented in it. Recognizing these limitations of knowledge and language, Melville seems to argue, is of vital importance, because the blind conviction of a given frame of thinking governing previous travel narratives is, to borrow John Samson’s phrase, "a stumbling block to a truer perception of the natives." Most significantly, Melville allows Babbalanja the skeptic in Mardi to be finally converted as he realizes the ultimate limitation of human lore, a realization he achieves in the island of Serenia, which can be said to be Melville’s democratic-Christian Utopia. Babbalanja is moved to see that its people actually live out the principles of love, brotherhood, and equality that they profess, and that they attempt to convert others to their way of life by example rather than by precept or by conquest or expansion of any kind.

The intertextual dynamics upon which Typee is built thus encompass more than an appropriation of source to the narrative. Through its dialogical gesture of imitation and disruption, recapitulation and repudiation, continuity and rupture, Typee brings to the fore such problems as "truth,"
representation, reality vs. textuality, and particularly ideological intervention in literary production, issues which any serious form of writing eventually comes to face. By writing upon and against his sources, Melville uncovers the ideological terrains imbricated in antebellum American travel writing, punctuated notably with the ideologies of messianic nationalism and expansionism, and concomitantly shows that different attitudes toward the Polynesians would reflect different ideological stances.
Notes


5. T. Walter Herbert, Marquesan Encounters: Melville and the Meaning of Civilization (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1980), provides an eminently sane analysis of these three texts, as he examines the changing notion of "civilization" in them; however, he shows little interest in the way Melville consciously uses and critiques the other two works as his sources--a central concern of my study.


10. Larzer Ziff, for instance, finds "a particularly American aspect of Typee's appeal" in the presence of America's savages, "Indian tribes, that had been decimated or forcibly removed from their lands as Europeans advanced westward from the Atlantic seaboard" (Literary Democracy: The Declaration of Cultural Independence in America [New York: Viking, 1981], p. 30; also, see Wai-chee Dimock, "Typee: Melville's Critique of Community," p. 27, and Mitchell Breitwieser, "False Sympathy in Melville's Typee," *American Quarterly* 34 (Fall 1982), pp. 396-417.


12. I owe this reading of the passage especially to John Samson. He goes further than I do to argue that Tommo's conflicting visions of the Marquesas can be understood in the context of the eighteenth-century philosophical dispute about human nature between those who follow Locke and Rousseau and those who support Calvin and Hobbes (*White Lies*, pp. 24-6).


16. Ibid., p. 7.


19. Ibid., p. 62.


23. For a more detailed analysis of "the primitive" in various western discursive fields, see Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive*, pp. 3-41.


25. According to Brook Thomas, Americans inherited "the faith in rule by law" from the British bourgeois class, especially the agrarian and mercantile bourgeoisie, that struggled to limit the arbitrary power of the aristocracy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; see Cross-*Examination of Law and Literature: Cooper, Hawthorne, Stowe and Melville* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), p. 17.


30. Ibid., p. 84.

32. T. Walter Herbert, Marquesan Encounters, p. 90.

33. Quoted in John Samson, White Lies, p. 35.


36. Ibid., pp. 218-19.

37. Charles Anderson, Melville in the South Seas, p. 132.

38. Charles Stewart, A Visit, p. 263.


41. Charles Stewart, A Visit, p. 266.


46. For a more detailed discussion, see James Duban, *Melville’s Major Fiction: Politics, Theology, and Imagination*, pp. 3-5.

47. In her recent speech, novelist Toni Morrison has remarked that "Melville’s ‘truth’ was his recognition of the moment in America when whiteness became ideology," adding that "he was overwhelmed by the philosophical and metaphysical inconsistencies of an extraordinary and unprecedented idea that had its fullest manifestation in his own time in his own country, and that idea was the successful assertion of whiteness as ideology"; see "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 28 (1989), pp. 15, 16.


53. Hawthorne’s famous journal entry on November 13, 1956, describing his dialogue with Melville on his tour, in which he reports "Melville, as he always does, began to reason of Providence and futurity, and of everything that lies beyond human ken, and informed me that he had ‘pretty much made up his mind to be annihilated’; but still he does not seem to rest in that anticipation; and, I think, will never rest until he gets hold of a definite belief," is found in Jay Leda, *The Melville Log: A Documentary Life of Herman Melville, 1819-1891*, 2 vols. (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1951), II, p. 529.

55. Ibid. p. 2.


CHAPTER III

REFASHIONING AMERICAN AUTOBIOGRAPHY:

ISRAEL POTTER, OR REENVISIONING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Israel Potter is Melville's first full-length exemplification of text production centrally geared to the intertextual practice of subversive dialogue. Here Melville produces his text as he opens up and maintains an intertextual dialogue with an autobiographical account of a Revolutionary soldier throughout the course of his writing. By reinterpreting and refashioning his primary source into a historical novel, Melville demystifies the continuing myth of the American Revolution and problematizes the distinctive tendency of contemplating it as a central paradigm of America's self-definition.

Presented in the form of autobiography, Israel Potter's primary source, Life and Remarkable Adventures of Israel R. Potter (1824), was written by Henry Trumbull, not Potter himself. Little is known about Trumbull except that he was a printer, bookseller, and a writer of some penny thrillers in Providence, Rhode Island. The book was advertized as the authentic record of a Revolutionary War veteran Israel R. Potter, whose career as a patriotic soldier was thwarted by captivity, poverty, and prolonged exile in England. Offered to "the public" primarily as evidence supporting Potter's plea for a government pension, Trumbull's text...
claimed the authenticity of character and facts in it, and strengthened its claim by appending to it a letter written by a former Revolutionary soldier who had met Potter during the war—a textual gesture similar to what Melville earlier did to offset the reader’s skepticism about the veracity of Typee. Potter’s autobiography was thus presented as a factual document of Revolutionary times, and was so considered by most of Melville’s contemporary readers. In discussing the relationship between Israel Potter and its source, a reviewer in the May 1855 Putnam’s Monthly Magazine, for example, referred to Trumbull’s Life as "an authentic narrative."²

In stating Israel Potter’s service to his country during the Revolution and explaining his failure to return to America, Trumbull’s Life leans heavily on the typical nationalistic rhetoric which began to be popularized in the 1820s, the decade including the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence—a rhetoric that affirmed the realization of Revolutionary ideals and celebrated the young nation as a land of freedom and prosperity. Melville detects this rhetorical maneuvering and its ideological implications beneath the apparently humble-toned narrative of "facts," and problematizes them as he proceeds to rewrite it. In his London diary of December 18, 1849, Melville referred to Trumbull’s chapbook as "the Revolutionary narrative of the beggar"—an oxymoronic expression, at least
in mid-nineteenth-century American nationalistic rhetoric. He must have seen it as an ideal vehicle which, as John Samson succinctly points out, "tends to glorify America and its Revolution but contains as well elements that deny and subvert that glorification." Through the recasting of an authentic document of the Revolutionary past as a fictional discourse on history, Melville repeats and inflates the grand nationalistic rhetoric embedded in his source, while exposing both its mesmerizing power which works to foreclose a proper sense of reality and the consequentially growing gap between the Revolutionary ideals and the actual practice of democratic American society. Thus, Trumbull's *Life* comes to Melville as an account culturally mediated, codified by the continuing myth of the American Revolution, rather than a mere chronological arrangement of a set of recollected "facts." What ultimately makes the *Life and Remarkable Adventures of Israel R. Potter* a true intertext of Melville's historical novel is not so much the "factual" events recorded in it as the ideological fantasy which precludes Israel Potter from perceiving the incongruity between the celebration of the Revolutionary ideals and the actual outcome embodied in the individual life of a commoner like himself. In other words, a dialogical gesture of both recuperating and satirizing such a collective fantasy concerning American history activates Melville's rewriting of Trumbull's *Life.*
In the ironic dedication to the "prematurely gray" Bunker Hill Monument with which he opens the text, Melville promises that his novel "preserves, almost as in a reprint, Israel Potter's autobiographical story," but admits to "a change in the grammatical person" (vii). Melville's enterprise of subversive dialogue is launched, thus, with a change from the source's first-person narration into a third-person account, a small, but quite significant departure from the source. This change grants Melville a temporal and critical distance, guaranteeing the right to reinterpret and manipulate, from his own point of view, the ostensibly unstructured raw material of Potter's experience and the Revolutionary past in which it is implicated. More specifically, it serves to resituate Potter's Revolutionary narrative in a larger historical process, enabling a perspective from which to assess its connection with the Puritan experience of the colonial period as well as post-Revolutionary American development. The third-person point of view, of course, meets Melville's immediate aim of transforming an autobiographical account into a biography, as he emphasizes in the dedication to the novel. Melville characterizes biography as a form of writing processed "in entire disinterestedness" (vii), incidentally casting doubt on Potter's claim to authenticity and by extension, the factual value of the first-person narrative in general. Melville's aligning his historical novel within the
discursive genre of biography characterized by "disinterestedness," however, does not seem to be necessarily meant to follow one of its cherished conventional claims to the "real life." Rather, it paves the way for his parodying of the contemporary biographical tendency of eulogizing the subjects it portrays. Melville’s emphasis on the disinterestedness of his biographical pen, therefore, serves more to justify his own practice of subversive rewriting, which, although keeping the "general fidelity to the main drift of the original narrative" (viii), entails "expansions, and additions of historic and personal details, and one or two shiftings of scene" (vii).

The larger perception and expansiveness inherent in the third-person point of view is much in evidence in the first chapter of Melville’s text, entitled "The Birthplace of Israel." Israel Potter, like Pierre, begins with a description of the landscape of the home country of its hero. Melville changes Potter’s birthplace from Cranston, Rhode Island to the Berkshires of Western Massachusetts, where traces hinting at "the temper of the men of the Revolutionary era" (5) abound, and provides a prelude of "poetic reflection" on it. The introduction of the "poetic" landscape description, which has no parallel in Potter’s own treatment of his native Cranston, functions as a kind of genre signal establishing Melville’s text as a literary discourse on history different from an "authentic"
historical document which the *Life* purports to be. Unlike the pastoral world of Pierre’s Saddle Meadows, Israel’s Berkshires present a landscape of decay and "singular abandonment" that only serves to remind the traveler of the shadowy grandeurs of the past. Houses of "extraordinary size," built with frameworks strong enough "to resist the encroachments of decay," the "immense" chimney, and walls of "uncommon neatness and strength" (4) suggest that it had been a gigantic, heroic, and sublime world where "the very Titans seemed to have been at work" (4). Although the mountain townships "have never known aught but peace and health, they, in one lesser aspect at least, look like countries depopulated by plague and war" (4). It is a scene of historical decline, enhanced by the coexistence of the past and the present, history and nature, and realism and mythic imagination.

This temporal telescoping of Israel’s birthplace prepares the reader to perceive the hero’s life history from a wider perspective, and then invites an anticipation of his future doom, as Melville’s narrator shifts the focus from the landscape to the character:

Nor could a fitter country be found for the birthplace of the devoted patriot Israel Potter...

Such, at this day, is the country which gave birth to our hero: prophetically styled Israel by the good Puritans, his parents, since for more than forty years, poor Potter wandered in the wild wilderness of the world’s extremest hardships and ills. (5, 6)
Now the description of the Berkshire landscape turns out to be a way of portraying the title-hero as a mythic type whose life parallels the historical change of the land that produces him. The forlorn landscape with traces of a heroic past also functions to provide a proleptic summary of the tale to come—a tale of a long exile, poverty, and isolation following a flurry of Revolutionary heroism.

As this opening description of Israel’s birthplace forcefully exemplifies, one of the most striking and fundamental departures from the source is Melville’s typological recasting of the whole story. "Israel" Potter, as his Biblical name receives renewed attention, claims his status as a type whose destiny is prophesied by the landscape of his birthplace, which is the mythologized embodiment of historical decline. According to Ursula Brumm, who finds that Melville’s perception of the world and people is essentially based on Puritan typology, Melville seeks "a certain significance" in everything, showing a persistent tendency of presenting individual experience in the form of types. This is true of Israel Potter, where not only characters but also events and landscapes are epitomized as culturally recognizable figures and symbols, which add new dimensions to them.

Israel, for example, is first characterized as a descendant of the Titans occupying a world that recalls Mount Olympus, and then associated with mythic figures like
Sisyphus and Samson. Besides continually recalling his biblical namesake, Israel is also related to the Prodigal Son, to Daniel, to Jonah, to Christ, to the Wandering Jew, and to the incorruptible Italian general, Sicinius Dentatus, and in war, he is again compared with the Greek God of destruction, Apollyon. Similarly, Franklin is associated with the "patriarch Jacob," then likened to "a Machiavelli in tents," and then to the "labyrinth-minded" Hobbes (46). John Paul Jones is called "young David of old" and also "the Coriolanus of the sea" (95). The captured Ethan Allen is a Yankee Samson among the philistines, generously allowing an "adorable Delilah" to shear a lock of his hair for a kiss. Events are also linked to other events. Most saliently, Israel’s wandering life is connected to the forty-year exile of the Hebrew tribes; Israel’s impressment in the English navy, where he is forced to serve for a while against his own people, recalls the story of David who was almost forced to engage in war against his own people during Saul’s forty-year reign; and the sinking of the Serapis and the Bon Homme Richard is associated with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Bible. Even landscapes epitomizes others. Israel’s birthplace, the Berkshires, suggests Mount Olympus, and London is figured as Egypt, as the Wilderness, as the land of Philistines, and finally as Dante’s City of Dis. 9

Indeed, the range and variety of allusions and rich symbolism weaving Israel Potter is startling. One type is
not allowed exclusively to represent the subject under consideration. Layers of connection are projected one over the other to yield a multiple effect. This prevents Melville's typological construction from being a mere allegorical retelling. For example, Israel is predominantly figured as the Biblical analogues, but he is suddenly linked to Appolyon, the Greek god of destruction, at a crucial moment in the novel. This undercuts the accreted image of Israel as a victimized America/Israel to be providentially delivered from England/Egypt, calling for reassessment of his supposed identity. Thus, Melville's typological configuration does not function simply to transpose a character onto a mythic model, as has often been assumed.10 Rather, it invites a dismantling of idées reçues by allowing the text to resonate with alternative paradigms, while, as Brian Rosenberg puts it, questioning "the belief that there ever can be a single 'type' that defines a complex era or diverse culture."11

Melville himself provides a more specific explanation of how this typological configuration works in the novel. At the beginning of the dramatic description of the battle between the Bon Homme Richard and the Serapis, Melville ascribes a "singularly indicatory" significance to this first naval battle between America and England, and says:

It may involve at once a type, a parallel and a prophecy. Sharing the same blood with England, and yet her proved foe in two wars; not wholly inclined at bottom to forget an old grudge: intrepid, unprincipled,
reckless, predatory, with boundless ambition, civilized in externals but a savage at heart, America is, or may yet be, the Paul Jones of nations" (120)

From the perspective of this statement, the destructive engagement between the two ships can be taken as a "type" of all senseless carnage in war, while the American victory won under the commandship of the reckless gentleman captain John Paul Jones serves as a "prophecy" of the America to come. The passage also suggests its "parallel" to the conflict between Jacob and Esau in the Bible, and more immediately, to America’s sectional strife between the North and the South, which "share the same blood." Thus Melville suggests that an event should be understood not only as a parallel to a previous event but also as a prefiguration of something to come, while its own particular significance is not necessarily abandoned. Thus, Melville’s novel proceeds in the present as the collective legacy of the past is reconfigured within the anticipation of an uncertain future. The figural organization of the present experience at once retrospectively and proleptically is, of course, as Sacvan Bercovitch has shown, characteristic of the Puritan conception of American history within which the Great Migration providentially dictates America’s Mission into the wilderness.12

Posited within this figural device appropriated from the American Calvinist typological tradition, Melville’s Israel becomes a much more typical American self invested
with the country’s cultural values and premises than the counterpart of his source. Whereas Potter in the Life remains an anonymous soldier, though proud of being an American, entrapped within the limits of private experience, Melville’s Israel is the representative American self whose actions are motivated by distinctively American values and assumptions proudly embraced by his compatriots. In Melville’s account, Israel is insistently styled as a "type" of his tribe, one who never loses his faith in the democratic principles and God-approved teleological vision. During his exile of "more than forty years ... wander[ing] in the wild wilderness of the world’s extremest hardships and ills," Melville’s Israel, as a descendant of "good Puritans," consistently projects the vision of America as the New Israel, an epitome of White-Jacket’s declaration, "we Americans are the peculiar, chosen people--the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world" (White-Jacket, 506). Even a casual look at the table of contents reveals the extent to which Melville employs a typological scheme in reworking his source: "Israel in the Lion’s Den," "Samson among the Philistines," "Israel’s Flight Towards the Wilderness," "Israel in Egypt." Such chapter headings absent in the source and Melville’s constant omission of Israel’s surname are telling signs which indicate that the novel is organized in essentially different terms.
In Trumbull’s account, young Potter is impetuous, erratic, somewhat foolish (cheated several times), and lacking high ideals, whereas Melville’s Israel, from his youth, imbibed "fearless self-reliance and independence which conducted our forefathers to national freedom" (9). Melville highlights Israel’s leaving home as an expression of such a distinctively American spirit: "ere, on just principles throwing off the yoke of his king, Israel, on equally excusable grounds, emancipated himself from his sire" (7). Signalizing the overlapping of the personal and the public in Melville’s typological retelling, the sire/king analogy also sets the stage for looking at Israel’s tale in the context of the Revolution. Melville’s heightening of the discord between father and son with such phrases as "oppressed by his father," "the desperate boy," and "the tyranny of his father," reflects the same intent.

In this light, Melville’s specific placing of Israel’s initial action in July, the month of the Declaration of Independence, is significant—a beguiling play with the dates anticipating the beginning of *The Confidence-Man* where the story starts on April 1, All Fools’ Day. In *Israel Potter*, as Arnold Rampersad notes, July is never far away.13 Israel leaves home in July, watches Washington take command "on the third of July" (as a result of Melville’s shortening of Potter’s six-week stay in the hospital into two weeks), daydreams of his life at home on the slopes of
the Housatonic on "one fair half-day in the July of 1800," and returns to Boston after his fifty years of exile on the Fourth of July, 1826, the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, (in the source, New York on May 17, 1823). Melville's focalization of the Fourth of July in the story of "Israel" points up the link between the Puritan idea of the American Mission and the Revolution, a link repeatedly figured in American historical discourse, while transforming Israel into the type of both the Puritan descendant and Revolutionary Father.

Unlike Potter in his autobiography, Melville's Israel is always recognized as, in Squire Woodstock's phrase, "a Yankee of the true blue stamp" (34). In Melville's text, his "Americanness" is repeated, emphasized, and inflated even to the point of absurdity. Nowhere is Israel's ingrained Americanness more vividly demonstrated than in his meetings with Sir John Millet and King George III. In a long conversation Melville adds to the source, Sir John Millet, Israel's first benefactor in England, tries to persuade Israel to call him by his title, but Israel's egalitarian spirit will not allow him even to say "Sir John," but only "Mr. Millet" (26). Similarly when accosted by King George in the Royal Garden at Kew, Israel "touched his hat--but did not remove it" (30). In the Life, on the other hand, to the King's question of his nationality, Potter replies, "taking off [his] hat": "an American born,
may it please your majesty." Melville inflates Israel's devotion to the Revolutionary cause to the highest point in the ensuing scene he improvises:

"Were you at Bunker Hill?--that bloody Bunker Hill...? "Yes, sir."
"Fought like a devil--like a very devil, I suppose?" "Yes, sir."
"Helped flog--helped flog my soldiers?" "Yes, sir; but very sorry to do it."
"Eh?--eh--how's that?"
"Very much mistaken ... Why do ye sir me? ... I'm your king--your king?"
"Sir," said Israel firmly, but with deep respect, "I have no king." (31-2)

Echoing President John Quincy Adams's widely circulated remark that "Democracy has no monuments ... Its very essence is iconoclastic," Israel's announcement of having "no king" reaffirms himself as a representative American and further anticipates Melville's, if not his, iconoclastic treatment of monumental heroes.

In his brief commentary following this scene, Melville points up Israel's unreflecting faith that man is born equal as the very cause of his long wandering, while simultaneously calling attention to the king's magnanimity. Without "the peculiar disinterested fidelity of our adventurer's patriotism," Melville suggests, he would have complied with the King's advice to join the British army. "[I]n that case," Melville concludes, we would not "have had to follow him, as at last we shall, through long, long years of obscure and penurious wandering" (32). A comment of this kind of course can hardly be found in the myopic first-
person perspective of Potter’s autobiography. However, it cannot be missed that the real Potter’s life, particularly after being inspired by the Revolutionary causes, is also guided and governed by the same spirit. The difference is that it is submerged and less visible.

The kindness and sympathy with which King George and Sir John Millet treat Israel in spite of his challenging attitude toward England present a sharp contrast to the attitude of American Revolutionary heroes like Franklin and John Paul Jones, who exploit him as an errand boy for the Revolutionary cause and casually discard him. Melville’s favorable depiction of the King and Sir John also departs from the customary representation of the British in most of the Revolutionary narratives, wherein the British were usually depicted as cruel and callous and their society as oppressive and burdened with social injustice and penury. Potter in the *Life* records that he has heard "much of the tyrannical and domineering disposition of the rich and purse-proud of England" (322), and his cataloguing of urban crimes and miseries in the London ghettos in the latter half of his account certainly reflects the influence of the propagandistic rhetoric with which the contemporary American discourse about England is saturated.

Here and elsewhere Melville exposes the habitual exaggeration of the difference between the New and the Old World, which is also a crucial trope deployed in Trumbull’s
Life, as a source of the ideology of American exceptionalism. In Melville’s ironic treatment of the famous naval battle scene, for example, America is not very different from its warring enemy, the "wicked England" (56): "the belligerents [seem] ... a co-partnership and joint-stock combustion-company" (126). Dropping his dandyish humanitarian mask, John Paul Jones, the key player on the American side, shows a feral and fanatical face in this engagement; while brandishing his tattooed arm-sword "cabalistically terrific as the charmed standard of Satan" (126), Jones "inspirits and maddens his men" to mete out brutal violence. Here, even Israel appears as a personification of destruction ("like Apollyon," 127), throwing a grenade into a hatchway "with such faultless precision" that "more than twenty men were instantly killed" (127). Melville implies that America, the figural Israel, is just one more warring tribe, and the implication consequentially debunks the myth of America’s divine selection as not only self-serving but also self-delusive.

The battle of Bunker Hill for the historic Israel remains ever vivid not only in the present in which the Life is written but in the intervening years as well. The battle, he writes, is "still fresh in my memory, and cannot be forgotten by me while the scars of the wounds which I then received, remain to remind me of it" (302). In fact, the continuity between the Revolutionary past and the
present to be guaranteed by Potter’s infallible recollection of his war experience is of vital importance to the vindication of his case for a pension. Not surprisingly, Israel the autobiographer renders in detail the general situations, the beginning, and the process of the war, and also his patriotic role in it including his serious wound, his capture, and the abortive attempt of escape engineered by himself. In Melville’s version, on the other hand, the battle is contracted into fragments of the collective memory of it: "Everyone knows all about the battle," he says, "Suffice it, that Israel was one of those marksmen whom Putnam harangued as touching the enemy’s eyes" (13). Later, Melville makes a similar remark about the necessity of truncating details in representing the Revolution before proceeding to render the naval battle between the *Bon Homme Richard* and the *Serapis*:

Elsewhere than here the reader must go who seeks an elaborate version of the fight, or, indeed, much of any regular account of it whatever. The writer is but brought to mention this battle, because he must needs follow, in all events, the fortunes of the humble adventurer whose life he records. Yet this necessarily involves some general view of each conspicuous incident in which he shares. (120-21)

As this passage suggests, history as a series of events chronologically arranged and experienced through the individual consciousness is of little concern to Melville. This seems natural if one remembers that Melville’s task of rewriting a text of history entails a transition from literality to figurality, from history to parallel and type.
Selection of "conspicuous" events seems inevitable; however, one is nevertheless tempted to ask what makes an event of the past "conspicuous" in Melville’s discourse on history.

The answer to this question is suggested in Melville’s representation of the battle itself, and also, indirectly, in his characterizations of Ben Franklin, John Paul Jones, and Ethan Allen, all established as national heroes of the Revolution by the 1850s. As has already been pointed out, Melville pays particular attention to the savage atrocities committed by the Americans during this battle, a perspective quite different from the one in which the "regular" textbook accounts present it. In the same spirit, Melville turns inside out the glamorous public masks those Revolutionary heroes wear in American tradition, and exposes their duplicities, hypocrisies, or contradictions. In Melville’s account, Franklin appears as an embodiment of materialist pragmatism, Jones as that of recklessness and personal vainglory, and Allen as that of heroic barbarism. They all share a concern for securing reputation for themselves, and as a consequence, show, as Alexander Keyssar puts it, "an irremediable inability to understand the problems and desires of the common man." They all contribute, in varying degrees, to leading Israel Potter, the epitome of native American virtues, to no "final destination" (140).
Indeed, the progress of Melville’s narrative is halted over the "conspicuous" moments and heroes in American history; however, it is not to join in eulogizing and sanctifying them, but to disclose and ironize the contradictions within them. *Israel Potter* marks Melville’s renewed concern with what he calls "the prospective precedents of the Future" in *White-Jacket* (150) at a critical juncture clouded by prophecies of Civil War. For Melville, however, such precedents should not exclude the disturbing, and hence repressed, moments of history, such as the victimization of the common people like Israel Potter, African-American slaves, and the dispossessed Indians.

As Alide Cagidemetrio notes, false memory of history cannot speak for the future, primarily because it is a betrayal of the moral vision that inspired American history since its beginning. It is also because the abridgment of disturbing events from national memory, Melville seems to assert, eventually contributes to perpetuating social contradictions and inequalities.

The truncated image of the Revolution in *Israel Potter* means more than the narrative distance from its source. It signifies a disruption in American history from the Puritan past through the Revolution to the present of Melville’s time, a disruption more clearly recognized by the perspective that revolutionary expectations have yet to be realized. The discrepancy is also ascertained by the
epistemological distance between the character and the reader. In *Israel Potter*, as in "Benito Cereno," the reader is expected to see what the character does not see. For example, Potter’s destiny of exile is already mentioned in the first chapter of the novel, information which its "hero" does not share; Israel makes some vague projection about his uncertain future only near the end of the book where he has wandered about the London streets for five days after his return to it: "Israel’s heart was prophetically heavy, foreknowing, that being of this race, felicity could never be his lot" (160). Most remarkable is his blindness to the contradiction that his own life, which has been "forlorn in the coal-fogs of London" (6), embodies the betrayal of the values he desperately tries to vindicate.

This kind of misrecognition is equally, though less obviously, shared by the Israel of the *Life*. The real Potter never questions the legitimacy of the Revolution, nor suspects that his long exile is triggered by his unrewarded adherence to the Revolutionary causes. He observes class conflicts, unfair practices, and social dislocations in British society, but it never comes to his mind that American society may be entrapped in the same problems. His belief in America’s exceptionality and her potential goodness never abandons him in the war years, nor when he is forced to go begging in London. Even when the country he helped to create rejects his request to share "a few of the
blessings produced by American valour" (289-90), Potter does not complain; instead, he suggests that this "strange" denial must be a momentary injustice in the national system, praying that it "never be told in Europe" (392).

This powerful ideological fantasy is revealed most expressively in Potter’s representation of his miserable life in Britain which he contrasts with the current America imagined as the haven of democratic equality and prosperity:

Let those of my country men who thus imagine themselves miserable amid plenty, cross the Atlantic and visit the miserable habitations of real and unaffected woe—if their hearts are not destitute of feeling, they will return satisfied to their own peaceful and happy shores, and pour forth the ejaculation of gratitude to that universal parent, who has given them abundance and exempted them from the thousand ills ... Britain, imperious Britain, who once boasted the freedom of her government and the invincible power of her arms—now finds herself reduced to the humiliating necessity of receiving lessons from those whom till late she disposed [sic] as slaves!—while our own country on the other hand, like a phenix [sic] from her ashes, having emerged from a long, expensive and bloody war, and established a constitution upon the broad and immovable basis of national equality, now promises to become the permanent residence of peace, liberty, science, and national felicity. (362-63)

The kind of mentality which Potter shows in this exaggeration of the difference between America and Britain is of course grounded in America’s most fundamental myth of divine Election. Another evidence is his unswerving belief that a divine hand is guiding his life. Despite the increasing hardships in his London exile, Potter almost pathetically clings to the faith, until, "by the kind interposition of Providence, I was enabled to obtain a
passage to my native country" (80). Although he gets nothing tangible at the end of the passage, Potter ends his narrative with an acknowledgment of Providential responsibility for his life and vow to keep "devoting myself sincerely to the duties of religion" (106).

The formation of Potter’s self and particularly its misrecognition of its own ideological interpellation are so typical that modern theorists of ideology like Louis Althusser would surely cite his case as a good example. His ideas and actions are utterly dictated by his culture’s premises that insist on its destined superiority and historical uniqueness, so much so that there seems to be almost nothing to him which he can claim as particularly his own, or as pertaining uniquely to his private sphere, except perhaps for his last claim to a pension. He appears to be the very embodiment of Melville’s dictum that "no one is his own sire" (Correspondence, 121). What seems to have drawn Melville’s attention to "the Revolutionary beggar" is, I think, primarily this absence of a private space, a mode of existence as something like a cultural automaton whose life is swallowed up by collective and historical forces. Melville’s rewriting of the Life as a whole and his characterization of the post-Revolutionary Israel as a drifter who "has no final destination" in particular are sustained by the challenging parody of the American biographical tradition to promote this utterly communized
form of existence, a tradition which, as Michael Shapiro notes, performs "legitimating functions for existing systems of power and authority." 

Melville’s recasting of his source in Biblical terms, then, is meant to lay bare America’s collective fantasy that its history and destiny postfigured that of the Biblical Israel. The distinctively American tendency of contemplating the Revolution as a paradigm of self-definition is another target of his satire. And both cultural orientations are ironically figured in Israel as the "type," who also appears increasingly as a cultural anti-hero, as the novel proceeds. It is a great irony that this particular form of intertextual reconfiguration of a historical text may have been chosen as a strategy for enhancing the book’s cultural appeal, as is confirmed by his promise to Putnam in his June 7, 1854 letter: "I engage that the story shall contain nothing of any sort to shock the fastidious. There will be very little reflective writing in it" (Correspondence, 265). Melville’s strategy seems to work. As Bezanson reports, only one among the book’s contemporary reviewers noticed its political criticism. 

Melville’s criticism of his culture’s tendency of mythologizing the American Revolution becomes increasingly evident as Israel Potter diverges further from the Life.
As Israel is sent as a secret courier carrying documents to Benjamin Franklin in Paris, he is led to the central arena of Revolutionary politics and military valor outside the American continent. Melville's Israel makes but one trip to Paris, while Potter the autobiographer claims to have made two, with a third aborted by the prohibition of intercourse between France and England. Potter summarizes his visit to Franklin in just one paragraph which includes his "most agreeable and instructive" conversation with Dr. Franklin, "that great and good man," whose "humanity and generosity have been the theme of infinitely abler pens than mine" (336, 337). Melville elaborates this one-hour interview into four chapters (Chapters 7-10), certainly not for the purpose of joining in celebrating the great man's legendary "humanity and generosity."

In Melville's portrait, Franklin is marked particularly by his duplicities: he is "a practical magian in linsey woolsey," a "politician and philosopher," "the apostolic serpent and dove," a "Machiavelli in tents," in whom "a polished Italian tact gleam[s] under an air of Arcadian unselfishness," and most strikingly, "the patriarch Jacob," (46, 47) who in the Bible cheats his brother Esau of his birthright and blessing. Franklin, like his biblical progenitor, systematically deprives Israel of wine and pastry and other amenities, inviting Israel's doleful soliloquy: "Ovariotomy he comes in he robs me" ... "with an
As many scholars and critics have already noted, Israel in Melville’s novel is Franklin’s Esau, an Ishmael-like outcast and loser of the inheritance which rightfully belongs to himself. Melville mockingly speaks of Franklin as "the type and genius of his land" (48), while, as Michael Rogin notes, echoing Daniel Webster’s mandate in his Bunker Hill speech that America should be a nation of Franklins, dedicated to American improvement. Melville also implies that the American public’s appreciation of Franklin as such, as Michael T. Gilmore puts it, "makes a mockery of the covenant." Melville’s satirical scripting of "the venerable Doctor" also exposes his proclivity for promoting his reputation. Although his tastes and thoughts are shown to be clearly aristocratic, Franklin does not reside in the aristocratic faubourgs of Paris but in the Latin Quarter, the haunt of "erudition and economy" (47); he wears "a rich dressing gown," the gift of an "admiring Marchesa," with "a scull-cap of black satin" (38) at home, but disguises himself in his public appearances with his native garments of "linsey woolsey," making himself the more famous for his "sublime thoughts and tattered wardrobe" (47) throughout Europe.

Melville’s satirical hand is extended further to his rendering of another legendary hero of the Revolution, John Paul Jones, whom Israel meets through Franklin’s
introduction in his chambers. While Potter in the *Life* makes only a passing reference to John Paul Jones's exploits, Melville expands Potter's treatment into a seven-chapter naval sequence (Chapters 14-20), which includes one of the most dramatic representations in the novel, the scene of the naval engagement between the *Bon Homme Richard* and the *Serapis*. Throughout the sequence, Melville's Jones also presents a paradox of double-sidedness. In a more pronounced way than his Franklin, he is a gentleman and savage, a poet and outlaw, a rake and ruler, carrying most tellingly a tattooed arm, decorated with "large, intertwined cyphers ... such as [are] seen only on thoroughbred savages" (62), which he conceals beneath the lace and ruffles of his Parisian coat-sleeve. Like Franklin, he is also a fame-seeker, who "live[s] but for honor and glory," always pursuing "something famous to do it with" (57). He demands "a separate, supreme command" (57), revels in the idea of kidnapping kings and taking royalty captive, and proudly boasts of being the first to raise the American flag in the Irish channel, while saying that "if I perish this night, the name of Paul Jones shall live" (113). He voices egalitarian slogans--"I'm a democratic sort of sea king," he tells Israel (90)--while cursing his misfortune at not having been born a Czar (57). In short, John Paul Jones has fought in the Revolutionary War, not necessarily under the inspiration of patriotism and political ideals, but for
reasons of glory and personal vendetta against the fatherland that he feels has slandered him. Jones’s desire for personal reputation and its trappings, however, can be gratified only at the expense of those common soldiers and sailors like Israel. After a series of dashing sea adventures, Melville asks: "this cruise made loud fame for Paul ... But poor Israel ... what had he?" (113)

John Paul Jones wins the triumph in the fiery naval engagement with the Serapis after Israel leaps onto the ship. Months later, Israel again jumps onto a British man-of-war in another engagement, but he is deserted by his master this time, and taken back to England. There he sees the caged hero, Ethan Allen, who is not mentioned in Trumbull’s Life. Melville’s portrait of Allen is also touched with double tinctures, a curious mixture of refinement and savagery. He looks like "some wild beast" (144) in a half-savage costume, but talks like "a beau in a parlor" (145) in the presence of ladies. Allen’s legendary venting of exasperations, threats, and demand for honorable treatment while in captivity in England, Melville suggests, are a calculated gesture for survival: "his experience must have taught him, that by assuming the part of a jocular, reckless, and even braggart barbarian, he would better sustain himself against bullying turnkeys than by submissive quietude" (150). In Melville’s view, all three heroes are thus poseurs, images quite different from those embedded in
the national memory, and so ultimately undermining the glory
and values of the Revolution they represent.

Israel the autobiographer dilates upon his miserable
life in London in the various occupations of brick builder,
gardener, and chair-mender for almost half of his narrative.
On the other hand, Melville compresses this into three brief
chapters with the following apologia for doing so:

For just as extreme suffering, without hope, is
intolerable to the victim, so, to others, is its
depiction without some corresponding delusive
mitigation. The gloomiest and truthfulest dramatist
seldom chooses for his themes the calamities, however
extraordinary, of inferior and private persons; least
of all, the pauper's; admonished by the fact, that to
the craped palace of the king 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. (161)

In the simplest sense, this passage marks Melville's
sensitivity to the tastes of his potential readership and
his willingness to cater to them, an attitude slightly
different from that which he held, at least, as the author
of Moby-Dick or Pierre. Melville's employment of the
typological framework in rewriting the story of "poor"
Israel is meant to accommodate this changed authorial
stance, because his Israel, though clad "in beggar's garb"
(153), is not reduced to a beggar but remains a
representative American, a national character; "here it may
be noted, as a fact nationally characteristic, that however
desperately reduced at times, even to the sewers, Israel,
the American, never sunk below the mud, to actual beggary"
Melville’s departure from his source, which exploits beggary to extract the public’s pity and support for its hero’s claim for reward, suggests, incidentally, that "the Revolutionary narrative of the beggar" in his Journal entry refers not to his novel to be written but to its source. And yet, on a deeper level, the passage also displays his anxiety that there would be no communication without borrowing conventions, whatever they may be. Here, as in other works, Melville takes advantage of conventions as a crucial means of bringing "delusive mitigation" to the otherwise "intolerable" world of his text. In his subversive refashioning of a Revolutionary autobiography, Melville’s strategy is not necessarily repudiation but hyperbole. He is not using the conventions informing his source text merely to underscore their absurdity. He picks up the conventions and accompanying rhetoric, and most often carries them to their extreme, so that they collapse under the pressure of their own excess.

So Melville reinvokes the Biblical paradigm in a further attempt to justify his compression and selection of events: "For the most part, what befell Israel during his forty years’ wanderings in the London deserts, surpassed the forty years in the natural wilderness of the outcast Hebrews under Moses" (161). With this signal resumes the parodic figuralism appropriating the American Puritan tradition of typology which has faded during the battle sequences: Israel
Potter’s luckless exile in London is figured, for example, as "Israel in Egypt," the smoky "desert," in which Potter, "our Wandering Jew," is blessed, eventually, with a son, "the spared Benjamin of his old age," before repatriating to "the Promised Land, ... far Canaan beyond the sea" (165-66). The biblical typology Melville reasserts in these closing chapters, however, is more attuned to the fate of Israel as the common man than as the representative American. Israel appears increasingly as a helpless worker dislocated and alienated in an industrialized metropolis. There is no more dashing vivacity in "our Wandering Jew," much less the aggressive heroism which excited him while cruising with John Paul Jones. As Judith R. Hiltner has shown, rural imagery which associates Israel with America’s agrarian youth is more often superimposed on the grimy urban scene into which he is thrown, only to remind us of his uprooted condition in the historical process.23 The "wilderness" to which Israel flies to escape from impressment or imprisonment is thus "the City of Dis," a Waste Land besmoked and polluted by industrial waste and teeming with "tormented humanity" (159), and Israel is one of those anonymous drifters, or "uninvoked ghosts" (160) in that infernal province.

In contrast to the Israel of the Life, which catalogues horrible tales of London’s poverty and crime as a strategy of appealing to his readers’ nationalism and populist
sympathy, Melville pays particular attention to such problems in social formation as class contention, economic division, and alienated labor. For the real Potter, the social evils and injustices he observes in British society are no more than the symptoms of the decrepitude of the Old World, the very evidence which legitimates the Revolutionary War to create a new country blessed with the divine grace of equality and happiness. Melville, on the other hand, suggests that such problems are not peculiar to England alone. Rather, he treats them as immanent within the general social conditions emerging from the rapid expansion of industrial capitalism. Melville’s social vision is most clearly expressed in the chapter entitled "Israel in Egypt," most of which is, in fact, taken up by his extensive analysis of the social, political, and philosophical aspects of the business of brick-making. Melville’s observation particularly of the differences among the finished bricks contains his penetrating insight into the inequities between economic classes in an industrialized society.

The furnace-bricks are haggard, with the immediate blistering of the fire--the midmost ones were ruddy with a genial and tempered glow--the summit ones were pale with the languor of too exclusive an exemption from the burden of the blaze. (156)

It must be stressed here that the novel’s concern with social problems is no mere interlude for diversion, nor another whimsical Melvillean digression. By directing the reader’s attention to the dismal cityscape, Melville asks
his boastful countrymen to look closely at the grey, prosaic, and inhuman reality beneath the surface of their vaunted free institutions. Melville’s superimposition of social issues on the Revolutionary themes in *Israel Potter* is analogous to the method of juxtaposing the inverted contrasting realities of the New and the Old World which he employs in such diptychs as "Poor Man’s Pudding and Rich man’s Crumbs," "The Two Temples," and "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids"--a method contrived to carry his message that the New World regresses to Old World perversions it proudly claims to be free of. Here Melville is declaring that post-Revolutionary America has failed to meet its promise to be the ideal and just society that purports in its Constitution to guarantee all men the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. He wants to remind us that America has taken the course of forcing the Israel Potters to work, whether as pauperized industrial slaves, or as chattel slaves in the cotton fields, without dignity and without any hope of escaping the "bondage of Egypt."

*Israel Potter* also represents Melville’s attempt to critique the hero-oriented American biographical tradition formulated particularly by Carlyle and Emerson. According to these practitioners of what Kenneth Marc Harris has dubbed "transcendental biography" and their followers like
Jared Sparks, whom Melville mentions in his dedication, biography as the primary genre of history should represent the lives of great men rather than those of common men.²⁵ Although Melville shares their concern with biography as a viable form of historical discourse, he refuses to accept their disregard of the common man as a productive force of history. Melville’s alternative view of biography is suggested in his dedication of the novel "To His Highness the Bunker-Hill Monument." He calls the monument "the Great Biographer: the national commentator of such of the anonymous privates of June 17, 1775, who may never have received other requital" (viii). By debunking the self-serving mask of heroism worn by Franklin, John Paul Jones, and Ethan Allen in the chapters he adds to the Life and also by reconstructing Israel Potter into an Everyman figure whose adventure is, to borrow Hennig Cohen’s phrase, a "plebeian version of the heroic quest," Melville attempts to revise the practice of hero-worship cherished in the American hagiographical writing.²⁶ For Melville, the canonization of historical luminaries to the exclusion of common men like Israel Potter, in Samson’s words, dangerously "fosters separations among social classes and idealization far removed from the actual events," ultimately contributing to aggravating social contradictions.²⁷

At the end of the chapter Melville allows his Israel a dawning moment in which he sees through the providential
drama of the Revolution directed by the Franklins and the Joneses. He comes to a bitter realization that his devotion and heroism, as Carolyn L. Karcher indicates, have served but to consolidate the power of the rising mercantile class that Franklin epitomizes, and to win "loud fame" for Jones, who incarnates the America which is "civilized in externals but a savage at heart" (120)—a moment never shared by the historical Potter:

He whom love of country made a hater of her foes—the foreigners among whom he now was thrown—he who, as soldier and sailor, had joined to kill, burn and destroy both them and theirs—here he was at last, serving that very people as a slave, better succeeding in making their bricks than firing their ships. To think that he should be thus helping, with all his strength, to extend the walls of the Thebes of the oppressor, made him half mad. Poor Israel! well-named—bondsman in the English Egypt. But he drowned the thought by still more recklessly spattering with his ladle: "What signifies who we be, or where we are, or what we do?" Slap-dash! "Kings as clowns are codgers—who ain’t nobody?" Splash! "All is vanity and clay." (154-57)

The bathos informing the closing sentences is indeed striking. It highlights Israel’s self-pity and despair as a victimized outcast with no reward from the American victory. The upsurge of Israel’s nihilistic mood reminds us of the despairing sense of resignation which the narrator of "Bartleby, the Scrivener" feels at the end, or the somewhat defiant sense of "penal hopelessness" (Piazza Tales, 129) with which Melville characterizes the tortoises of "The Encantadas," both written immediately before Israel Potter. If these sentiments, as Rampersad has suggested, stem from
the author's perception of his culture as "an intolerable
and barren travesty of the ideal to which man can only
aspire and never attains," Israel's outcry that "[a]ll is
vanity and clay" can also be taken as a peculiarly
Melvillean mode of critiquing the path America has taken
after the Revolution.29

Melville's critical perception of the American
Revolution is once more ascertained by the final and
bitterest irony effected by his change of the date and place
of Israel's homecoming in the source. While Potter lands in
New York on May 17, 1823, Melville has Israel return to
Boston on July 4, 1826, where the celebration of the
fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence is
proceeded. "[H]ustled by the riotous crowd," Israel
"narrowly escape[s] being run over by a patriotic triumphal
car" whose banner commemorates the heroes of the Bunker Hill
battle, of whom he was one. The irony is compounded by
Israel's choice of his resting place: "It was on Cop's Hill
[a graveyard] ... that our wanderer found his best repose
that day" (167), and its significance is more specifically
articulated, when Melville has Israel discover a moldy
woodpile upon returning to the site of his Berkshire home.
Preserving precisely its original form even though decayed
to powder, it is a "type," Melville says, "of forever
arrested intentions, and a long life still rotting in early
mishap" (168).
In 1824, when Trumbull’s *Life* was published, Boston citizens began raising funds for the building of the Bunker Hill Monument, to which Melville dedicates his novel. One year later at the grand ceremonies for celebrating the starting of its construction, Daniel Webster defined the American Revolution as a "prodigy of modern times," an extraordinary event in the history of human progress, which has produced "human freedom and human happiness" in tranquility and prosperity. Webster’s eulogy of the American Revolution and his evocation of American exceptionalism were repeated not only in numerous biographical accounts of the revolutionary heroes published about that time but also in serious histories written by such eminent historians as Sparks and Bancroft. *Israel Potter*, or rather Melville’s intertextual appropriation of the *Life and Remarkable Adventures of Israel R. Potter*, was his response to the grand rhetoric that still dominated the American social imaginary of the 1850s. Reflecting the contemporary imperative to write the past anew amidst the national anxiety over such explosive issues as union, slavery, and expansionism, *Israel Potter* redefines the American Revolution as an unfulfilled promise for the future, or, in Donald Pease’s more specific terms, "an as yet unrealized vision, with principles awaiting answering deeds." That the American Revolution remains a vision of
"arrested intentions" is more powerfully demonstrated in "Benito Cereno," which we will examine in the next chapter.
Notes


4. Obviously, the question of authenticity is not a central issue for Melville's modern critics. They tend to pay more attention to the narrative conventions and rhetorical gestures the chapbook employs. Walter Bezanson, for example, sees the book as "a prime document of American popular culture" in the 1820s and more specifically points out that it belongs to "a long tradition of personal narratives such as the earlier accounts of Indian captivity narrative and later narratives of escaped slaves" ("Historical Note," pp. 186, 184); for David Reynolds, the book represents the type of popular sensational literature of the period which combines "pious moralizing" and gory "city-mysteries" (Beneath the American Renaissance, p. 176); noting the book's typical national rhetoric for eulogizing America and her Revolutionary Providentiality, David Chacko and Alexander Kulcsar discredit its claim of authenticity. They even contend that Trumbull's Life "so neatly fits the pattern of tall tale and shopworn melodrama" popular at that time that "an attempt to discover in it the truth of Israel Potter's life would seem a futile proposition" ("Israel Potter: Genesis of a Legend," p. 368).

5. Peter Bellis, for example, takes Melville's privileging of the third person perspective in Israel Potter as an expression of his "disillusionment" with first-person narratives, which all of his first six books up to Moby Dick are ("Israel Potter: Autobiography as History as Fiction," American Literary History 2 [Winter 1990], pp. 607-626);
also, see Edgar Dryden, *Melville’s Thematics of Form*, pp. 141-46.

6. William B. Dillingham pays particular attention to this shifting of Israel’s birthplace as "probably the most significant" change in Melville’s use of his source, with the explanation that the change from the lowlands of the Narragansett Basin to the Berkshire’s wild mountainous terrain, which is more in keeping with "the concept of the inner realm," sets the stage for Melville’s depiction of Israel as "a man who in search of liberty moves away from the liberating power of self-knowledge," a position which is quite different from mine; see *Melville’s Later Novels* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1986), p. 249.


10. For example, Ursular Brumm delimits Melville’s typological symbolism as "an instance of the repudiation of historical thought" (*American Thought and Religious Typology*, p. 195), and echoing her, Daniel Reagan mentions "the ahistorical layering of allusions" in *Israel Potter* in his essay, "Melville’s *Israel Potter* and the Nature of Biography," p. 265.


24. Judith Hiltner makes almost the same point in "'A Parallel and a Prophecy': Arrest, Superimposition and Metamorphosis in Melville's *Israel Potter*," pp. 52-3.


CHAPTER IV
MELVILLE'S "BLACK-LETTER" TEXT: "BENITO CERENO,"
OR CRITIQUING THE ANTEBELLUM Racial Ideologies

"Benito Cereno" might be considered a sequel to Israel Potter. In the order of writing, it follows the novel closely. It shares with the historical novel concerns with the themes of balked revolution, American exceptionalism, ideological blindness, and a typological perception of national and racial differences. The two works also rely on a subversive dialogue with a historical document as a pivotal means of textual production. In "Benito Cereno," Melville continues to develop the project he has undertaken in Israel Potter, particularly in relation to what most prominently made the America of the 1850’s a damaged social space--slavery.

In one of the most dramatic and markedly symbolic moments in "Benito Cereno," which is nevertheless absent from the perspective of the narrative proper and only revealed retroactively in the court deposition, the African rebel slaves kill their master, Don Alejandro Aranda, strip his body of its flesh (or cannibalize it), and then substitute the skeleton for "the ship’s proper figure-head, the image of Christopher Colon, the discoverer of the New World" (107). This is also one of the most notable additions Melville makes in rewriting the novella’s primary
source, Chapter 18 of Amasa Delano’s *A Narrative of Voyages and Travels in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres*, published in Boston in 1817. The inscription of this compelling episode discloses a textual context where Melville’s aesthetics of intertextuality is deployed, a context that demonstrates the way he situates his text within history and society, which are textually conceived of by the act of reading his source texts, and into which he inserts himself by rewriting them.¹ The chronotope of Melville’s novella becomes much wider and more complex, comprising a number of discursive fields such as the West’s imperial politics, material greed, and missionary expansionism, which are again compounded by different cultural traditions and values, a context whose contours were initially drawn by Columbus. The display of the skeleton of a modern slave owner in place of the Columbus figure-head thus insistently demands a reading of the slave insurrection on aboard the *San Dominick*, not as a sensationalist tale of rebellion and containment, as the real Delano surely intended his to be, but as a serious reflection on the whole slave experience of the New World upon which layers of historical, cultural, and ideological references and codes are superimposed.

Melville’s intention to frame within a wider historical context the slave revolt recorded in his source is clear in
his changes of the names of the ships and the date of the incident. While retaining the actual names of the sea captains involved, Melville rechristens Benito Cereno’s Spanish slaver from Tryal to San Dominick, and Amasa Delano’s American sealer from Perseverance to Bachelor’s Delight. He also changes the date of the slave rebellion upon which his novella is based from the year of 1805 to 1799. By these nominal and temporal changes we are reminded of the black revolution that occurred in San Domingo under the leadership of Toussaint L’Ouverture in the wake of the French Revolution, a lightning rod for most of the later black revolts in the Americas, including the 1831 Nat Turner’s revolt.

The name of the Spanish craft San Dominick also suggests the Dominican order, and by extension, the Catholic Church in general, which played a central role in initiating New World slavery. Melville’s perspective that the Christian church had been implicated in the slave trade and colonization of the New World becomes especially apparent, as he continually associates the debilitated Benito Cereno, the Spanish captain of the San Dominick, with Charles V, who, as successor to Columbus’s patrons Isabella and Ferdinand, authorized the first official transport of African slaves to San Domingo in 1517 in response to pleas of the Dominican friars, led by Bartholomew de Las Casas. The monastic symbolism that animates Melville’s tale also
includes the comparisons of the slaver San Dominick, a former treasure-ship or "retired" frigate of war, to a "whitewashed monastery," and the black rebels now commanding the ship to "Black Friars pacing the cloisters" (48). The ironic association of the previous treasure-ship which must have been employed for despoiling newly conquered lands of their riches with a monastery echoes Melville's attack on the sanctimonious missionaries and their greed for material comfort in Typee and Omoo. Melville's remarkably adroit intertextual exploitation of the history of San Domingo thus brings into play various discourses centered on the slave trade and slavery in the New World.

Delano's American sealer, the Bachelor's Delight, also has historical references. Its name is derived from the ship of the seventeenth-century buccaneers William Dampier and William Ambrose Cowley, who helped Britain sap Spanish hegemony in the New World by pirating Spanish treasure-ships like the San Dominick in its prime, and who are both cited in Sketch Six of "The Encantadas." This connection, along with the aura of ruin and decay surrounding the Spanish slaver San Dominick and her enfeebled captain, points forward to the contemporary demise of Spanish power in the New World and the ensuing ascendancy of America's expansionist desire for Latin America. At the same time, Melville suggests his moral and political stances toward the historical realities in which Delano's narrative is
implicated. By associating Delano with the notorious British pirates in the West Indies, Melville reminds us that the real Benito Cereno accused Delano of piracy in his source. Melville implies that both Cereno’s African slave trade and Delano’s commercial activities heavily relying on wage slavery are tantamount to piracy. This involuted snarl of social and historical allusions and ironies bespeaks the intricacy and complexity of Melville’s intertextual maneuverings in "Benito Cereno." Harold H. Scudder, who first identified Delano’s Narrative as the novella’s primary source, noted the discrepancy in date but dismissed it as "perhaps accidental rather than intentional." Numerous readings of "Benito Cereno" since then, however, have proved his judgment hasty.

The African slaves’ awesome boldness and ingenuity accompanying the idea of replacing the troubled ship’s figure-head also presents a radical challenge to the antebellum white racist perception which, despite some different orientations, invariably defines blacks as the inferior Other, consigned by nature to a subordinate status. "Benito Cereno" is, as Carolyn L. Karcher has argued, primarily "an exploration of the white racist mind and how it reacts in the face of a slave insurrection" rather than a thrilling dramatization of a slave revolt. Melville’s rewriting is keyed to exposing the comprehensive ideology of white supremacy pervading Delano’s ostensibly factual
report, an ideology which was the very crux of the long maintenance of America's peculiar institution of slavery. Consequentially, articulating the blacks' intelligent will to freedom becomes a central component of his rewriting project, which takes the course of juxtaposing Delano's whitewashed mind against a bold and remarkably well-devised plan for the pursuit of freedom. So, Melville's narrative oscillates between the disrupting demonstration of African intellect and ingenuity and Delano's abortive attempt to comprehend the unconventional happenings aboard the San Dominick. This narrative trajectory is an intriguing process of yielding tension and suspense, and especially to Delano, a series of bewildering "enchantments," as Melville's narrator puts it: "Trying to break one charm, he was becharmed anew" (74).

In setting up Aranda's bleached head as an emblem of a newly won freedom, Babo, the leader of the rebellion, cannily poses the question to each Spaniard, including the enslaved Don Benito, "whose skeleton that was, and whether, from its whiteness, he should not think it a white's" (107). Babo here graphically debunks the dominant racial ideology as culturally constructed and politically exploited, by suggesting that racial difference is only superficial. As Dana Nelson points out, this is a lesson, however, that Delano simply does not comprehend and Don Benito refuses to countenance. Benito Cereno testifies in
his deposition that he "covered his face" (107) like every other Spaniard aboard the San Dominick when forced to look on his friend's skeleton. Cereno also reports that Babo every day repeated to the Spanish crew assembled a warning that "they should, soul and body, go the way of Don Alexandro if he saw them (the Spaniards) speak or plot anything against them (the negroes)" (108). Cereno's remark, intended to establish Babo's viciousness and cunning, only bespeaks his perceptiveness about human nature and his insight into the mechanism of the oppressive ruling system which resorts to ideological indoctrination, repeated threats, and deliberate terror for its maintenance. The whole novella is indeed a testament to Babo's superior intellectual powers and his perfect understanding of how the hierarchical social system based on master-slave binarism is managed, because Babo is the author of all "juggling play" aboard the San Dominick, which is also the plot of "Benito Cereno."

For the Yankee captain Amasa Delano, all things are gray; gray fowl skim overhead "as swallows over meadows before storms," and everywhere are "Shadows present, foreshadowing deeper shadows to come" (46). On the other hand, for Babo the artist-rebel, everything is clearly arranged, devised, and well thought out--at least until Benito leaps into Delano's boat. With supreme self-confidence and determination, the slave leader creates an
intricate and complex world of illusion to dispirit and overcome the opposition. It is Babo who designates four elderly oakum-pickers as disciplinarians, positions six Ashantee hatchet-polishers for strategic purposes, and above all, presents Atufal, "his right hand-man, as chained, though in a moment the chains could be dropped" (109). Babo improvises the shaving scene on the spot, which is a superb masquerade of artistry and control in itself, just as Cereno is on the point of giving himself away by contradicting his story. Babo forces Benito Cereno to carry an "artificially stiffened," but empty, scabbard that deceptively betokens his "despotic command" (116). Babo also penetrates the mask of smug paternalism combined with condescending moralism that Amasa Delano wears and turns them to his purpose of keeping control of the overturned power structure. In his own narrative, Delano boasts that he successfully keeps social order on his ship "in a worse situation to effect any important enterprize" by doling out paternalistic care and "good wholesome floggings" alternatively. Babo shows his clear understanding of this policing skill for domination when he wounds himself on the cheek after the famous shaving episode in the cuddy. By disguising the self-inflicted cut as Don Benito’s punishment for his carelessness during the shaving, Babo successfully dispels the aroused suspicion of Delano, who always regains his common-sense confidence with the appearance of conventional gestures and practices. By
significant contrast, it is Benito Cereno who proposes to the African rebels what he will say and do to the American captain in Delano’s Narrative. After finding that they became "uneasy," the real Cereno testifies in his "Declaration," he suggested the whole masquerade in order to "appease and quiet them" (337).

Reversing the contemporary racist idea of African Americans’ intellectual inferiority, which was embraced by most northern liberalists as well as southern apologists for slavery, Melville more specifically represents Babo as the disembodied emblem of intellectual prowess in the coda of his story: "the black--whose brain, not body, had schemed and led the revolt, with the plot--his slight frame, inadequate to that which it held" (116). Melville’s emphasis on Babo’s "slight" stature, which his source text does not contain at all, is indisputably meant to counteract the conventional racist stereotype of the Negro as all brawn and no brain. Whereas Babo stands out as by far the most intelligent character in Melville’s novella, he is nothing but a name in Delano’s Narrative. Babo is mentioned merely as a ringleader of the brutal and barbarous rebels and is killed in the engagement with the recapturing party from Delano’s ship Perseverance. It is not Babo, but his son Mure, who watches over Benito Cereno, while directing most of the course of the rebellion, in Melville’s source. In his testimony, the real Cereno describes Mure as "a man of
capacity and talents, performing the office of an officious servant, with all the appearance of submission of the humble servant," particularly noting his flawless command of Spanish (338). Mure is "a man of capacity and talents," but for Delano and Cereno, captains from the New and Old World, nevertheless nothing more than part of the "cargo," an object for profit, for which they will eventually fall out. In the course of rewriting, Melville merges Babo and Mure into one heroic figure, who evokes such black revolutionary leaders as Toussaint and Nat Turner. Melville's Babo is the Representative Man of his race in Emerson's sense of the word. At the same time, he is a symbol of America's destiny under the shadow of slavery, a personification of "a black Angel of Doom," warning America of "the blackness of darkness" (Moby-Dick, 10-11) and her doomed fate.

Chapter 18 of Delano's Narrative furnishes Melville with "a skeleton of actual reality" upon which to build a powerfully original story about the America of the 1850s jolted by the debates over slavery. In "Benito Cereno," if Melville transforms Babo into a shrewd black Jacobin, he enlarges Amasa Delano into a typical white male middle-class American of his age. Amasa Delano of Duxbury, Massachusetts, the captain of the Bachelor's Delight, is self-reliant, inquisitive, compassionate, and naive. He self-righteously expounds the doctrine of work, officiously
plans to manage affairs on the San Dominick, and is curiously quick to forget the uncomfortable past experience. He is "unwilling to appear uncivil even to incivility itself" (67) and yet in no way averse, after helping the plighted Spaniard, to collecting the sum he expects to be paid for his trouble. Like the real Israel Potter, he smugly believes himself guided and protected by the hand of divine Providence. Delano's "Americanness" is compounded by his stereotypical views of black people, which make him incapable of cutting the "Gordian knot" of the complex realities on the San Dominick.\textsuperscript{11}

In his own narrative, Delano introduces himself as a man of "kindness," "sympathy," and "unusually pleasant" temperament:

At noon the large boat came with the water, which I was obliged to serve out to them myself, to keep them from drinking so much as to do themselves injury. I gave them at first one gill each, an hour after, half a pint, and the third hour, a pint. Afterward, I permitted them to drink as they pleased. They all looked up to me as a benefactor; and as I was deceived in them, I did them every possible kindness. Had it been otherwise there is no doubt I should have fallen a victim to their power. It was to my great advantage, that, on this occasion, the temperament of my mind was unusually pleasant. The apparent sufferings of those about me had softened my feelings into sympathy; or doubtless my interference with some of their transactions would have cost me my life. (323)

Given that Delano's account of himself and his activities aboard the Tryal was presented as part of the vindication of his claim for the rights to the salvage dues, it is undeniably tinged with self-serving rhetoric. The
historical Delano alleged that he had been hurt by the "misery and ingratitude" of "the very persons to whom [he] had rendered the greatest services"—particularly the real Céron, who, by treacherously accusing him of being a pirate, had tried to avoid recompensing him for saving the Spanish ship. In order to vindicate himself, Delano repeatedly asserted that his services had been motivated by nothing other than disinterested sympathy and benevolence and also included a number of testimonies to his rectitude. Melville reads between the lines of Delano's self-serving account to show that it is also suffused with the rhetoric and tropes characteristic of the prevailing American political, cultural, and racial discourses.\textsuperscript{12}

Delano's self-proclaimed benevolence becomes the first target of Melville's satiric attack. In "Benito Céron," Melville exposes Delano's continual gesture toward paternalistic care and benevolence as well grounded in the peculiarly American social habitus nurtured by slavery:

> When at ease with respect to exterior things, Captain Delano's nature was not only benign, but familiarly and humorously so. At home, he had often taken rare satisfaction in sitting in his door, watching some free man of color at his work or play. If on a voyage he chanced to have a black sailor, invariably he was on chatty, and half-gamesome terms with him. In fact, like most men of a good, blithe heart, Captain Delano took to negroes, not philanthropically, but genially, just as other men to Newfoundland dogs. (84)

This passage, pregnant with trenchant irony, suggests that Delano's concern about the troubled slaves' health is not far from the typical attitude of the aristocratic master
toward his favorite slaves, an attitude essential to the upkeep of a slave economy. Not surprisingly, Delano proposes to buy Babo for himself, because he is so impressed by the ostensible display of the "beauty" of the patriarchal bond between Babo and Cereno. Melville’s suggestion that Delano’s paternalistic humanitarianism is a thin cover for the racial ideology of white superiority is made when he has Delano praise a slumbering negress with her boy at her breasts as an epitome of "pure tenderness and love," while simultaneously comparing her to "a doe in the shade of a woodland rock" and her son to a "wide-awake fawn" (73). His consistent employment of animal imagery in perceiving the black people, and, above all, his insensitivity to it, make him a representative of his culture, where slavery and claims to the Rights of Man coexist.

As Joyce Sparer Adler suggests, the fatally close relationship between Don Benito and Babo represents "the reciprocal enchainment of master and slave." They are locked together in the prison of slavery, whose final course is the death sentence for both master and slave. It is a great irony, and also Melville’s great achievement, in "Benito Cereno" that the relationship between Benito and Babo crucially influences Amasa Delano’s recovery from uneasiness and suspicions, and his continuing unenlightenment. What most annoys Delano after boarding the San Dominick is the unruliness and "noisy indocility of the
blacks in general" (52). The Spanish captain's seeming acquiescence in this unusual situation repeatedly perplexes him, leading him even to conclude that Benito may be either an "innocent lunacy, or [a] wicked imposture" (64). It is the "steady good conduct of Babo" (62) that raises him from the swamp of dismay and doubt. Delano takes "humane satisfaction" in Babo's "affectionate zeal" in waiting on his master--a devotion which "transmutes into something filial or fraternal acts in themselves but menial" (52). At one point, Delano even revels in "the beauty of that relationship which could present such a spectacle of fidelity on the one hand and confidence on the other" (57). The shaving scene in the cuddy, which is not present in Melville's source, is one such spectacle where the faked drama of "fidelity" and "confidence" culminates.

This compressed ritual with all its symbolic trappings, which represents, in effect, the actual occurrences on aboard the San Dominick as closely as possible, also offers an occasion for Delano to fantasize about black people and slavery. This glaringly reveals Delano's mindset. Observing the "body-servant"'s selfless devotion to his "duty" of caring for the effete master with somewhat envious eyes, the enchanted Delano is led into musings about the Negro's "peculiar" fitness for "avocations about one's person":

Most negroes are natural valets and hair-dressers; taking to the comb and brush congenially as to the
castinets, and flourishing them apparently with almost equal satisfaction. There is, too, a smooth tact about them in this employment, with a marvelous, noiseless, gliding briskness, not ungraceful in its way, singularly pleasing to behold, and still more so to be the manipulated subject of. And above all is the great gift of good-humor. Not the mere grin or laugh is here meant. Those were unsuitable. But a certain cheerfulness, harmonious in every glance and gesture; as though God had set the whole negro to some pleasant tune. (83)

This characteristically Melvillean double-talk which, as Carolyn Karcher notes, alternates between cliché and burlesque lays bare Delano’s mind molded by the sentimental racism pervading Melville’s culture. Melville’s ironic tone twisting the offensive racial platitudes allows us to see him play on the trope of African American docility and gaiety conventionalized not only by southern pro-slavery apologists and plantation novelists but also by northern liberal abolitionists. Delano’s indulgence in racial stereotyping is so culture-specific that one may surmise that an anonymous article in the January 1855 number of Putnam’s Monthly Magazine (where Melville was still serializing Israel Potter), entitled "Negro-Minstrelsy--Ancients and Modern," made an intertextual contribution to "Benito Cereno." In praising the black minstrelsy as an art form, the writer remarked upon "the lightness and prevailing good humor of the negro songs," and argued that "a true southern melody is seldom sentimental, and never melancholy. And this," he added, "results directly from the character and habits of the colored race. No hardships or troubles
can destroy, or even check their happiness and levity."\textsuperscript{16}

It was Harriet Beecher Stowe who showed that such a sentimental interpretation of the black character was also energized by sympathetic liberalism. In \textit{Uncle Tom's Cabin} (1852), Stowe wrote: "[one day] the negro-race, no longer despised and trodden down, will, perhaps, show forth some of the ... most magnificent revelations for human life. Certainly they will, in their gentleness, their lowly docility of heart, their aptitude to repose on a superior mind and rest on a higher power, their childish simplicity of affection, and facility of forgiveness."\textsuperscript{17}

The essentialist view of the enslaved African American Stowe projects here is immediately combined, in Delano's mind, with another stereotype that black people are Sambos, opening the way for their political exploitation:

> When to all this is added the docility arising from the unaspiring contentment of a limited mind, and that susceptibility of blind attachment sometimes inhering in indisputable inferiors, one readily perceives why those hypochondriacs, Johnson and Byron ... took to their hearts, almost to the exclusion of the entire white race, their serving men, the negroes, Barber and Fletcher. (84)

Indeed, it is Babo who plays upon Delano's simplistic, black-and-white preconceptions of his race to consolidate his usurped power. In shaving his enslaved master, Babo chooses the Spanish flag as a bib for him with a chilling boldness. Delano implicitly acknowledges the seditious meaning of this calculated, "antic conceit"; however, unable to credit the Negro with having intended such a political
intention, Delano soon attributes Babo’s daring gesture to his love of color. Earlier, disturbed by Cerenos’s incomprehensible attitudes and his loose management of the ship, Delano has entertained a suspicion of the Spaniard’s "complicity with the blacks" (75). At the next moment, however, he dismisses the idea of collusion on the grounds that the blacks "were too stupid." "Besides," Delano adds, "who ever heard of a white so far a renegade as to apostatize from his very species almost, by leaguing in against it with negroes" (75). In spite of all his apparent warmth and generosity toward black people, Delano never abandons the idea that they are essentially different "species," who are inferior by nature.

In his Narrative, the real Delano thought that the unruly conduct of negroes he had observed on the Tyral should have been immediately punished and resisted, while at the same time somewhat sympathetically ascribing it to "fatigue and long suffering" (324). In "Benito Cerenos," such a common-sense perception is nearly always compounded by distinctive cultural assumptions and values. And they function to screen Delano’s vision, making him incapable of seeing beyond the familiar versions of social reality. As Laurie Lorant has pointed out, the only symbols Delano can read are those whose meanings are dictated by tradition (the sword, the flag, the stern-piece, the chains).28 Because the events aboard the San Dominick have subverted the
traditional meanings, Delano fails to perceive the real situation. Symbols created by events are meaningless to him (the knot, the cymballing of hatchet polishers, figure-head with its ambiguous legend, the flawed bell).

"Benito Cereno" not only rewrites its primary source but also metafictionally depicts its own process. For instance, at the beginning of the coda of the novella, the narrator comes forward to explain the course his story has taken: "Hitherto the nature of this narrative, besides rendering the intricacies in the beginning unavoidable, has more or less required that many things, instead of being set down in the order of occurrence, should be retrospectively, or irregularly given (114). As is exemplified here, such metatextual moments in the novella often serve to force the reader to question the established cultural conventions and values which Delano accepts. A good example is found at the beginning of the story. In describing Delano's surprise at the approaching strange ship with no colors, the narrator comments: "Captain Delano's surprise might have deepened into some uneasiness had he not been a person of a singularly undistrustful good nature, not liable, except on extraordinary and repeated incentives, and hardly then, to indulge in personal alarms, anyway involving the imputation of malign evil in man." Right after this passage follows the narrator's voice which ironically editorializes on Delano's trusting good nature: "Whether, in view of what
humanity is capable, such a trait implies, along with a benevolent heart, more than ordinary quickness and accuracy of intellectual perception, may be left to the wise to determine" (47). "Benito Cereno" as a whole and its skeptical narrating voice in particular warn the reader that the world may be much more complex than Captain Delano's mind encoded by benevolent optimism envisions it to be.

The real Delano believed that "[v]irtue and vice, happiness and misery, are much more equally distributed to nations than those are permitted to suppose who have never been from home" (256). In rewriting the historical document, Melville turns this kind of naive optimism Delano entertains on its head, problematizing it as a central cause of misreading or distorting reality. As the narrator's summary of the "four curious points" aboard the San Dominick that riddle Delano's mind (78) patently suggests, the American captain is well aware, at least on the subliminal level, that there is something very wrong. However, he tends to strive, "by ignoring symptoms, to get rid of the malady" (76-7). His credulous good nature is constantly "too ready to furnish excuses for reasonable fears" (96). As Theodore Gaillard pinpoints, Delano pushes aside unpleasant truths, subjectively fashioning a threatening external reality into a version of it with which he feels comfortable.19 Here and elsewhere, Melville castigates this mentality as characteristic of the American mind disposed to
idealize its country as the land of promise, which is in reality turmoiled by institutionalized injustice and inequality like slavery and massacre of indigenous people.

At one point, Melville's Delano observes: "Had Benito Cereno been a man of greater energy, misrule would hardly have come to the present pass" (52). After hearing the fabricated history of the ship's voyage from Cereno, Delano imputes its long drifting on the seas to the former's incompetence, "clumsy seamanship and faulty navigation" (58). At another point, the American captain suspects that Cereno is "one of those captains ... who by policy wink at what by power they cannot put down" (59). Taken together, all these perspectives represent Delano's baffled attempt to unravel the Gordian knot of the mystery aboard the San Dominick. From another perspective, these, too, illustrate Delano's racist attitude toward "the Spaniard," the epithet which the former, unlike his original, frequently employs in calling his "brother captain," while slyly invoking the country's tainted national characteristics promoted especially by America's expansionist politics of Melville's times. Throughout the story, Delano tries to understand the strange attitude of the Spanish captain in sympathetic terms, but nevertheless constantly marks differences between himself and the Spaniard. He keeps contrasting Cereno's debility, hesitation, and incompetence to his superior energy, his decisiveness, and his ability to maintain
authority as the top manager of the ship. While promoting himself as an epitome of progressive and enlightened American culture, Delano stereotypes Cereno as a representative of his nation in decline, in its "faded grandeur" (49). For example, upon boarding the San Dominick, Delano is quick to note Cereno's "national formality" (51) in his singularly ceremonious, yet stiff and apathetic, attitude laden with stylish regalia, and later thinks him afflicted with "Spanish spite" (88) when he appears to have mistreated Babo. Delano's typological imagination becomes animated whenever his distrust of Cereno is disturbingly aroused: "as a nation ... these Spaniards are all an odd set; the very word Spaniard has a curious, conspirator, Guy-Fawkish twang to it" (79).

As has already been suggested, Delano's stereotyping of Cereno in biased terms evokes the American expansionist attitudes toward Latin America in Melville's era. From the time of the Louisiana purchase onward, many Americans advocated expansion through a conscious policy of America's Manifest Destiny to spread Anglo-Saxon free institutions not only across the continent but eventually over the whole hemisphere. With the 1845 annexation of Texas and with the 1850 admission of California to the Union extending the national border to the Pacific, expansionist fervor got redirected southward to the Caribbean and South America, which began to be recognized as enormously valuable, not
only politically but also economically, to America's 
interests. Especially as the supposed conspiracy between 
Spain and Britain to end slavery and the slave trade in Cuba 
and set up a black military republic--the so-called 
"Africanization" of Cuba--was widely publicized in 1853, the 
imperialist campaign to seize control of the Gulf of Mexico 
reached its height. Exciting the long-standing fears of the 
growth of the black power in the Caribbean which had been 
perceived as a Babo's razor aimed at the throat of the 
United States and its southern slave economy, expansionists 
called for American intervention, which was spurred on by 
the arrival of Franklin Pierce's overtly expansionist 
administration. 20 Arguments for American annexation of Cuba 
appeared in a number of American periodicals, including 
Putnam's, in which "Benito Cereno" was to be serialized. In 
an article entitled "Annexation" in the February 1854 issue 
of Putnam's, the author, for instance, noted that the "weak 
Mexican and Spanish races" of Latin America were "a prey to 
anarchy and misrule," and suggested that America, "as the 
inheritors of whatever is best in modern civilization," 
should offer to these "stationary" tribes "the living seeds 
of freedom, of intelligence, of religion." 21 The notorious 
Ostend Manifesto of October of 1854, with which Melville 
would surely have been familiar, showed the highest pitch of 
such imperialist rhetoric. It declared that Cuba belonged 
"naturally to that great family of States of which the Union
is the providential nursery" and that the United States would be justified "in wresting it from Spain ... upon the very same principle that would justify an individual in tearing down the burning house of his neighbor if there were no other means of preventing the flames from destroying his own home."\textsuperscript{32}

Melville's intertextual exploitation of the contemporary expansionist rhetoric for the making of "Benito Cereno" is also ascertained in his invention of the scene where Delano entertains a presumptuous idea to withdraw the command from Cereno under the excuse of helping him restore his health (69). At another moment, again straying from his source, Melville has Delano "urge his host to remain quietly where he was, since he (Captain Delano) would with pleasure take upon himself the responsibility of making the best use of the wind" (92). These threats Delano constantly feels but cannot locate aboard the San Dominick, the Spanish misrule and deterioration he perceives, and his readiness to take control of the Spanish ship--all can be seen as textualized symptoms of the political turmoil sweeping through Melville's America. Melville's novella also bears witness to the intricate connection between imperialist politics and slavery, particularly by encoding the political realities through the familiar rhetoric of racism that ruled over the debates about slavery.
Delano’s trademark of benevolence and sympathy, then, is nothing other than a component of the pernicious racial ideology which promotes his race as superior, while relegating other tribes than his to the status of the inferior Other. By tracing the thought process of Amasa Delano, Melville shows how easily the Delano-like sense of superiority can be transferred to the aggressive ideology of imperialism which in turn serves to rationalize the subordination and exploitation of the disempowered neighbor tribes. More importantly, Melville suggests that such a vainglorious chauvinism works as an obstacle to achieving a clear perception of reality. In "Benito Cereno," Melville, as Sandra A. Zagarell notes, "presents slavery and the rationalizations that justified it not simply as discrete phenomena but as powerful synecdoches for economic activities and cultural disjunctions that threatened the country’s stability at every level."23

In spite of his assertion that "slavery breeds ugly passions in man" (88), and after his first-hand experience of the ugly explosion of the suppressed energies of the enslaved, Melville’s Delano remains surprisingly the same. Again beaming with the incurable naivete, Delano declares to the brooding Cereno the uselessness of moralizing upon the past: "the past is passed; why moralize upon it? Forget it. See yon bright sun has forgotten it all, and the blue sea, and the blue sky" (116). Again the all-too-confident
captain speaks more than he knows. Delano’s advice to live like nature which has seen all and has forgotten all just as quickly makes one realize how inhuman a Delano has been, is, and will be. This is confirmed by Cereno’s reply: "Because they have no memory ... because they are not human" (116). Delano lives in the present, above time, with no memory. Like Delano, most white Americans of his age closed their eyes to the catastrophe which history was demonstrating would come if slavery continued. Like Delano, they would not draw lessons from the past experiences. For most of the whites, outbreaks like the 1822 Denmark Vesey or the 1831 Nat Turner revolts were just aberrations or "malign machinations" of some monstrous fanatics. They habitually minimized or refused to consider the significance of such struggles for liberty.

Delano’s is a world of surfaces. The world he envisions is not very different from the one Pierre faces, one that consists of "nothing but surface stratified on surface" (Pierre, 285). Surface comes after surface to him, without being replaced by deeper understanding. Even at the climactic moment when the riddle of the San Dominick reveals itself "in unanticipated clearness" to Delano, "with the scales dropped from his eyes" (99), his vision remains superficial; he simply replaces one stereotyped image of the blacks by another. Before he finds that the blacks are mutineers, Delano views them as people of "pure tenderness
and love," "unsophisticated as leopardesses; loving as doves" (73). Upon his recognition of the mutiny, they are now imaged as ferocious pirates and "delirious black dervishes" (99). In a moment, the blacks are transformed from happy Sambos to brutal, subhuman savages in Delano’s mind. Delano’s effortless embrace of the dualistic conception of the blacks, which was originally developed in the South as part of pro-slavery propaganda, bears witness to the wide co-sharing, rather than polarization, of various views of slavery and the black character in Melville’s America.²⁴

If Amasa Delano is a historical amnesiac untroubled by the past, Benito Cereno appears as a paralyzed victim of the traumatic experience in the emblematic coda of the story, which is absent from the source text. "The shadow of the Negro" cast upon his life aboard the San Dominick stays, after his testimony before the court, even darker with him. He confides to Delano that the shadow wafts him to his tomb. We are not clearly given what kind of lessons he has learned from his misfortune, but we do know that the agonizing experience of enslavement haunts his mind as a ceaseless nightmare. The two words--"The negro," or el negro in Spanish--Benito Cereno speaks as he tells Delano the cause of his dejection once again call forth all the complex imagery associating "the black" with an overwhelming force,
while undercutting whatever vision the reader might get after reading the deposition referred to as the "true history of the San Dominick’s voyage" (103).

Melville’s narrator adds that Don Benito retreats more and more into silence, never speaking on some topics at all, and counterpoints his and Babo’s steadfast silence after his remarking that "since I cannot do deeds, I will not speak words" (116). The narrator also recalls: "During the passage, Don Benito did not visit [Babo]. Nor then, nor at any time after, would he look at him. Before the tribunal he refused. When pressed by the judges he fainted" (116). Cereno’s refusal to look at his ex-slave, and ex-master as well, has been construed in as various ways as has his nightmarish vision itself that has fractured his mind and body: for some readers like Carolyn Karcher, it proves his ultimate incapacity of "facing the murderous rage that seethes beneath the Negro’s apparent submission to enslavement," while for others like Theodore Gaillard, it signifies his sense of Kurtz-like horror from the recognition of "his past injustices toward his alter ego."25 Whatever it means, Benito Cereno’s paralyzed anguish, especially toward the severed head of Babo, which "fixed on a pole in the Plaza, met, unabashed, the gaze of whites" (116), presents a sharp contrast to the Yankee captain’s carefree preaching of faith, hope, and confidence, and this contrast itself is, I think, a crucial message Melville
wanted to impart--a warning to the America of the 1850s which, despite her claims of freedom and equality as her founding principles, still institutionalized slavery, over which the debates frequently plunged into the quagmire of factional and sectional politics, after most European and South American countries had abolished it.\textsuperscript{26}

Melville’s Benito Cereno, especially his portrait presented before he dies after three months’ withdrawal into the monastery on Mount Agonia, is radically different from the Spanish captain appearing in Delano’s Narrative. The real Delano did not mention Cereno’s weak and sickly appearance and his distempered spirit, nor his singularly colorful dress, only describing his behavior as having “evidently lost much of its authority over the slaves, whom he appeared to fear and whom he was unwilling in any case to oppose” (323). Delano’s Cereno cooperated with the blacks to devise the scheme to deceive the American captain and cowardly jumped from his ship, leaving his crew behind to suffer their fate. (Saving Delano’s life by informing him of the rebels’ plot to seize his ship that night, Melville’s Cereno later says, was an important motive for his leap.) Moreover, he would not join the boarding party to recover his ship, and after its recapture, he attempted to stab one of the slaves with a hidden dirk, whose cruel act was barely checked by Delano. At the end of Delano’s self-serving account, Don Benito turned out to be a malicious ingrate.
After promising Delano half of the worth of the ship and the cargo as rightful salvage dues, he attempted to cheat his rescuer of payment or reward, and, furthermore, went around to the jailed Botany convicts who had deserted Delano’s ship and persuaded them to give affidavits that Delano was a pirate. In contrast to the "two captains" who enjoy the "fraternal unreserve" (114) in Melville’s novella, Delano and Benito in the Narrative became enemies in the end, who fought with all the means available for more material profit.

Indeed, drive for material wealth turns out to be one of the most important social codes inscribed in Delano’s Narrative. More than anything else, this makes the Don Benito of the Narrative different from the title character of Melville’s novella, who calls himself "not only an innocent man, but the most pitiable of all men" (115), exiles himself into a world of anguished silence, and meets his death at twenty-nine in a monastery. The social space both captains inhabit is basically made up of the realities of acquisitive capitalism where money plays a central role in securing power and social authority. As Delano reports both in his narrative and in his own deposition included in it, he encourages his crew to retake the Spanish ship by telling them that they could claim one half of the value of the ship amounting to "more than one hundred thousand dollars" (327). This gives the lie to Delano’s later claim
that "[t]he services rendered off the island of St. Maria were from pure motives of humanity" (352). Delano’s appeal to philanthropy and his stress on disinterestedness are mere means for gaining his material wealth. If Delano’s strategy is to mobilize cultural capital for securing his economic interests, Benito’s is to deconstruct the very structure of conflating culture and economy. In order to defend his material interest, the real Benito turns inside out the humanitarian net cast by Delano, showing that it is besmirched with self-interest. In Delano’s Narrative, where material profit is a central concern, the categories of race and nation are subsumed under that of the capital. Melville’s rewriting reverses this order. He foregrounds the racial and national boundaries as the dominant coordinates of the social realities that determine and shape his text. Material interest still remains a visible variant in informing Melville’s text, but it is always entwined with more prominent social codes. This shift of course reflects the differences of the socio-historical contexts in which the two texts are embedded.

The real Delano uses the legal depositions for attesting and confirming the truth of occurrences. Appealing to the court, according to Delano, is "the most correct course, as it would give the reader a better view of the subject than any other method that could be adopted"
The system of law, for Delano, represents not only legal justice, but also consistency, clearness, and order, which he thinks are all indispensable to garnering material wealth. The historical Delano as captain of a commercial ship regards as one of his duties maintaining order in a profitable way as defined by the insurers of the ship:

The law has wisely restrained the powers of the insured, that the insurer should not be subject to imposition or abuse. All bad consequences may be avoided by one who has a knowledge of his duty and is disposed faithfully to obey its dictates. (326)

However, just as the self-serving nature of his account undermines his credibility, so his readiness to manipulate the official documentation validated by the court of law to his advantage compromises his belief in legal authority.

Melville’s intertextual sensibility catches this gap in Delano and connects it to the problems of legal discourse in general in nineteenth-century America. The most prominent among the problems was the disjunction between law and justice particularly opened up by the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 and rapidly becoming a topical issue with the return of Thomas Sims from Massachusetts to slavery in 1851, ordered by the Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw, Melville’s father-in-law, of the Supreme Judicial Court of the state. This theme Melville would deal with more dramatically and more subtly in Billy Budd. In reworking the story of rebellion and its violent suppression, Melville poses a question of the nature of legal justice in a society where racism is authorized,
while more directly showing his doubt about the value of legal evidence in particular and the notion of rule by law in general.

The real Delano believes that things can be seen to be "perfectly consistent" (331) by having recourse to the authority of the court. On the other hand, Melville suggests that the law’s apparent consistency is an illusion, because, as Susan Weiner puts it, "the facts that determine its shape are not objective but instead represent dominant ideological interests." In presenting the documentary record, Melville’s narrator cites the "officialness" of the legal documents and immediately undercuts its status with his qualified language. The narrator says: "The following extracts, translated from one of the official Spanish documents, will it is hoped, shed light on the preceding narrative, as well as, in the first place, reveal the true port of departure and true history of the San Dominick’s voyage" (103). Although presented as the "true" history of the preceding events that happened aboard the Spanish ship, the official document is "selected, from among many others, for partial translation" (103); besides, the selected document contains Don Benito’s deposition, including testimony originally "held dubious" because of his "not undisturbed" state of mind (103). As Brook Thomas points out, because the final decision based on somewhat dubious evidence is made by a tribunal none of whose members
witnessed any of the events under litigation, and especially because no opportunity is given the Africans to speak in their own behalf, the legal verdict undermines its own validity.  

The official document Melville includes from the proceedings is suggestively fragmented, elliptical, repetitive, and riddled with obscurant legal jargon. The reader becomes more befuddled and more uncertain as to the significance of the material that is provided as he reads through it. Presented "as the key to fit into the lock of the complications which precede it" (114), the legal account turns out to be not very different from the preceding tangle of events. Nowhere are found, for example, explanations about such fundamental questions as why the blacks rose in revolt against the whites and why they insisted on going to Senegal despite the bad conditions. While Delano is always "generous Captain Delano," the blacks are described as preternaturally cruel and diabolically depraved. For example, the Negresses--one of whom Delano had regarded as an image of "pure tenderness and love"--were not only "satisfied at the death of their master, Don Alexandro" but also that "had the negroes not restrained them, they would have tortured to death, instead of simply killing, the Spaniards" (112). Thus, with its legalistic pretensions of objectivity, the deposition selectively supplies what is needed to convict the rebel slaves. The narrator obliquely
hints that the deposition functions in such a way to supply the official grounds for a preconceived verdict:

The deposition then proceeds with recapitulatory remarks, and a partial renumeration of the negroes, making record of their individual part in the past events, with a view to furnishing, according to command of the court, the data whereon to found the criminal sentences to be pronounced. (111)

In recounting the revolt selectively and retrospectively, the deposition restores the reversed relationship between master and slave, reinforcing the already established fact of slavery, and yet, exposing, too, its supposedly "natural" relations of mastery and racial supremacy as conventions of power.

So the court legitimates the whites' violent suppression of the revolt aboard the San Dominick, but denies the Africans any rights to freedom. Their leader, Babo, is redefined as a slave, sentenced, and emblematized by the empowered whites: "Dragged to the gibbet at the tail of a mule, the black met his voiceless end. The body was burned to ashes; but for many days, the head, that hive of subtlety, fixed on a pole in the Plaza, met, unabashed, the gaze of the whites" (116). Babo's skull, like the bleached head of Don Alexandro Aranda, has been put on display to ensure obedience. His defiantly "voiceless end," however, bears witness to the cruelty and rigidity of the mid-nineteenth-century American social structure propped up by slavery, which did not allow the enslaved class to speak at all except through violence. This gruesome final scene
laced with ritualized violence also brings to mind the
inextricable link between the exercise of political power
and theatricality which Melville so adroitly exploits in
"Benito Cereno" and other works, and at the same time
suggests that black violence in fact mirrors the
institutionalized violence of the whites. This can be more
clearly ascertained by the real Delano’s more graphically
detailed report of the execution. The court sentences to
death the nine leaders of the insurrection including Mure:

[It] shall be executed, by taking them out and dragging
them from the prison, at the tail of a beast of a
burden, as far as the gibbet, where they shall be hung
until they are dead, and to the forfeiture of all their
property, if they should have any, to be applied to the
Royal Treasury; that the heads of the five first be cut
off after they are dead, and be fixed on a pole, in the
square of the port of Talcahuano, and the corpses of
all be burnt to ashes. The negresses and young negroes
of the same gang shall be present at the execution.
(347)

This bloodcurdling indictment, which would well exemplify
one of Melville’s recurrent themes--civilization as "an
advanced stage of barbarism" (Israel Potter, 130)--forces
one to question the nature of legal justice, which here
appears to be decisively divorced from moral justice. If
violence is justified when backed by the authority of the
law, condemned as brutal and satanic when not, then rule by
law, the only safeguard against the irrationality of
violence, is reduced to a "juggling play" of political
power--a situation which Babo demonstrates in the shaving
scene. "Benito Cereno" not only registers the incapacity of
the law to clarify events and to enact justice but also warns that America's legal system under the pressure of slavery has become a pawn of political games.

One may reasonably argue that the Thomas Sims's case of 1851 served as one of the social coordinates of the novella's intertextual dynamic. Despite his personal abhorrence of slavery, Massachusetts Supreme Court Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw upheld the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act and ordered the return of the fugitive slave Sims to slavery. Radical abolitionists blamed Shaw's decision for violating the nation's sacred mission. But Shaw felt, as his friend Daniel Wester did, that unless the union was saved its sacred mission could never be fulfilled. As Brook Thomas notes, to obey the Act, which was part of Webster's effort to maintain the union before the South's threat of secession, would not only reaffirm the principle of rule by law, but would help the union stay alive.29 Shaw's decision is comparable to Judge Joseph Story's ruling of the case of the Amistad, a Spanish slave-carrying ship, whose slaves revolted in 1839 and were eventually captured off Long Island by the American Navy after an abortive attempt to sail to Africa—a case a number of critics have cited as a source for "Benito Cereno."30 Story had granted the African rebels their freedom on the grounds that under the Spanish law the slave trade was illegal and hence they had been unlawfully enslaved. But Story also was careful to suggest
that if it had happened within the United States, not on the
high seas, the legal decision would have been different. In
fact, one year later, Story ruled in Prigg vs. The State of
Pennsylvania that the state laws conflicting with the
Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 was unconstitutional. The two
judges made apparently contrasting decisions, but they
shared the same adherence to the principle of rule by law,
which was taken up more for political reasons than
otherwise.

The existence of slavery was a great burden on
Melville's America. It cast a shadow over every aspect of
American life; it put to test America's moral consciousness;
it put to trial America's legal system and its claim of
justice; it belied the nation's founding ideals that all men
are created equal and entitled to life, liberty, and the
pursuit of happiness; it taxed the white man's mind to
invent numerous mystifying ideologies to rationalize its
maintenance. On the deepest level, as David S. Reynolds
notes, it "brought into question the veracity of the Bible,
the applicability of the American Constitution, and indeed
the very existence of God." The knotty problems of black
bondage had weighed down the whole social fabric of
Melville's America so heavily that, as Delano imagines, it
became, by the time "Benito Cereno" was written, "like a
slumbering volcano" which might at any time "let loose
energies now hid" (68). The particular power of "Benito
Cereno" comes in part from the fact that it makes the reader not only feel keenly the America burdened with slavery as "a slumbering volcano" but also see vividly its complex intersection of racial, political, and ideological contradictions through the prism of history. The intertextual dialogue Melville engages in producing "Benito Cereno" enables him to expose the various dimensions of the slave system in a historical continuum in which "past, present, and future seemed one" (98).
Notes

1. "Benito Cereno" was written probably during the winter of 1854-55, while Israel Potter is serialized in the Putnam's Monthly Magazine, and published, six months after the latter's conclusion, in successive issues of the same magazine in October, November, and December of 1855.


3. Here I am paraphrasing one of Julia Kristeva's notions of intertextuality. According to her, intertextuality "situates the text within history and society, which are then seen as texts read by the writer, and into which he inserts himself by rewriting them" (Desire in Language, p. 65).


6. The first scholar to point out the derivation of the name Melville replaced by Delano's ship was Harold Beaver in his edition of Billy Budd, Sailor, and Other Stories (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1970), pp. 435, 449. See also


9. Joyce Sparer Adler, War in Melville's Imagination, points out that Melville shares with Babo "his own kind of poetic imagination, his own way of seeing the implications beneath the surface of a situation, and his own way of creating a scene on different levels" (p. 109); Dana D. Nelson, The Word in Black and White, also notes that "Babo's 'plot' has, in effect, been the narrator's plot" (p. 128); and Carolyn L. Karcher, "The Riddle of Sphinx: Melville's 'Benito Cereno' and the Amistad Case," makes a similar remark (p. 220).

10. Amasa Delano, A Narrative of Voyages and Travels, in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres: Comprising Three Voyages Round the World; Together With a Voyage of Survey and Discovery, in the Pacific Ocean and Oriental Islands (Boston: E.G. House, 1817), p. 320; subsequent page references will be given parenthetically in the text.
11. Notable among the analyses of Delano’s misrecognition as tied to the typical American mind is Jean Fagan Yellin, The Intricate Knot: Black Figures in American Literature, 1776-1863 (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1972), p. 218, where she sees Delano as "representative New World Man: democratic, compassionate, generous, capable of decisive action, although blind to evil and unable to learn from his experience ... Nowhere is Amasa Delano more typically American than in his views of the Negro"; see also Joseph Schiffman, "Critical Problems in 'Benito Cereno,'" in Critical Essays on Herman Melville’s "Benito Cereno," pp. 29-36.

12. There are a number of discussions of "Benito Cereno" in the context of the contemporary cultural and political climate, among which I find the following particularly useful; Allan Moor Emery, "'Benito Cereno' and Manifest Destiny," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 39.1 (June 1984), pp. 48-68, sees Delano as Melville’s exemplification of American expansionist attitudes toward Latin America; Sandra A. Zagarell, "Reenvisioning America: Melville’s 'Benito Cereno,'" pp. 245-259, shows that "Benito Cereno" contains Melville’s critical analysis of American exceptionalism; David D. Galloway, "Herman Melville’s 'Benito Cereno': An Anatomy," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, IX (Summer 1967), pp. 239-252, says of Delano’s as "the same narcissistic vision of America’s destiny that planted missionaries and flags in the South Seas and that Melville himself so roundly condemned" (p. 243); and Eric J. Sundquist, To Wake the Nations, pp. 135-82.


16. Putnam’s Monthly Magazine, January 1855, p. 74; the passage is quoted by Emery ("Topicality," p. 321) and Sundquist, To Wake the Nations (p. 152).

17. Uncle Tom’s Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly (Boston: John P. Jewett, 1852), I, p. 259.


20. For more detailed analysis, see David M. Potter, The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861 (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), pp. 177-98; and Robert E. May, The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire, 1854-1861 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 21-75. For discussions of "Benito Cereno" in conjunction with American expansionism of the period, see Allan Moore Emery, "'Benito Cereno' and Manifest Destiny," pp. 48-68; Sandra A. Zagarell, "Reenvisioning America," p. 254; and Eric Sundquist, To Wake the Nations, pp. 163-75.


22. Quoted in Eric Sundquist's To Wake the Nations, p. 183.


25. Carolyn L. Karcher, Shadow over the Promised Land, p. 137; Theodore L. Gaillard, Jr., "Melville's Riddle for Our Time: 'Benito Cereno,'" p. 487; see, also, Sandra A. Zagarell, who interprets Cereno's swoon as "a double avoidance: fainting in fear, he is also fainting to escape having to explain 'the negro' institutionally or historically, as 'Benito Cereno' itself does" ("Reenvisioning America," p. 250).

26. Slavery legally ended in Mexico, Uruguay, Chile, Argentina, and Bolivia in the 1820s, in the British West Indies in 1833, in the Dutch and French islands in 1848, and in Venezuela and Peru in the 1850s.


28. Brook Thomas, "The Legal Fictions of Herman Melville and Lemuel Shaw," in Critical Essays on Herman Melville's "Benito Cereno," p. 120.


31. See Brook Thomas, "The Legal Fictions of Herman Melville and Lemuel Shaw," pp. 121-22.

32. David S. Reynolds, Beneath the American Renaissance, p. 73.
Melville's last long prose work, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*, describes a world of "strange costumes, gestures, and faces," to borrow the words from "Benito Cereno." More specifically, it presents a world of masquerade, where characters wear "pasteboard masks" (*Moby-Dick*, 164), revolving around, as one character puts it, the "crafty process of sociable chat" (130). Many characters in the novel are self-conscious "characters," who are perfectly aware that they are actors playing certain roles, assuming voices other than their own, and transmitting messages whose origin is often not easy to locate. This manifestation of fictional identity is also shared by the narrator who openly intrudes into the action of the novel. Dialogues are exchanged, but they are often maintained without being attributed to any one in particular just like those in a Beckett drama. Through these floating dialogues, radically different opinions, perspectives, stories, and social concerns rambling along the American frontier of the 1850s are channeled and juxtaposed. The setting of the novel is unfolded as a dreamlike wilderness of shifting forms. Melville's narration is often elliptical and parabolaic. The outcome is a pretty bizarre form of fiction, a hybrid text
in which varied verbal modes and discourses interweave and clash, eventually undermining each other, something comparable to White Jacket's "well-patched, padded, and porous" jacket (White-Jacket, 5). The Confidence-Man, or Melville's "problem" novel, which has baffled even its author's avid readers, illustrates more clearly than any other work his view of the text as an intertextual construct, a verbal formation woven with cultural signs, codes, and presuppositions cited from the larger social "text," constituted by varied signifying systems, and at the same time, contained and concentrated within the text.¹

Noting the dialectical relationship between the literary text and the socio-historical context construed textually, Mikhail Bakhtin claims that "the internal social dialogism of novelistic discourse requires the concrete social context of discourse to be exposed, to be revealed as the force that determines its entire structure ... from within."² Thus, the novel's textual density, which derives mainly from an encompassing and intricate web of varied verbal units such as signs, pronouncements, arguments, stories, and histories, reflects and corresponds to the complexity of the social formations of the period that produced it. In the process of reading the book, the social terrains which enabled its production are constituted and organized by an array of discursive fields such as commerce, medicine, philanthropy, theology, and higher education.

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Each of these discourses is represented by the operators who emerge and vanish in the wake of the deaf-mute, the first avatar who appears simultaneously with the embarkation of the steamer Fidèle upon its emblematic journey down the Mississippi on April Fool’s Day. Just as the Mississippi, the symbol of "the dashing and all fusing spirit of the West" (9), unites its incoming tributaries "of the most distant and opposite zones, pours them along, helter-skelter in one cosmopolitan and confident tide" (9), the text absorbs and transforms, transposes and interweaves, widely different discourses and intertexts, while registering antebellum American society as ever-expanding and ebullient. The Confidence-Man presents a darker and a more beguiling picture than ever of mid-nineteenth century American society. The fronts of the frontier depicted in it are diversified, fluid, and embellished with specious rhetoric and skewed logic. Having recourse to an intertextual dynamic once again, Melville exposes and inscribes the layers of his cultural realities transposed onto the deck of the steamer Fidèle rolling down the Mississippi, the geopolitical nexus of nineteenth-century America’s racial politics.

Attention to the text’s suggested reading of the West as a symbol for the America of the 1850s jolted by gamesmanship foregrounds the centrality of its Indian-hating
section, itself a tissue of varied quotations. This text- 
within-a-text exemplifies not only the novel’s entire 
textual strategies and thematic concerns but also the 
ideological structures governing the infinitely subsumptive 
social text which includes it. Since Elizabeth S. Foster 
identified the source of the section, Sketches of History, 
Life, and Manners, in the West (1835) by James Hall, in her 
1942 Yale dissertation, it has drawn much critical 
attention. Many scholars agree in looking upon the 
refashioned story as central to the book, as something like 
a mise en abyme which illustrates what the whole book is 
about, while the significance of its centrality itself has 
become the subject of debate. John W. Shroeder, one of the 
earliest modern commentators, suggests a close link between 
the section and the rest of the book by noting "a running 
system of Indian images related to concepts, situations, and 
persons connected with the theological doctrines of human 
guilt" throughout the book. While recalling the Puritans’ 
habitual designation of the Indian as "a descendant of 
Satan," Shroeder concludes that Melville, despite his 
usually favorable views of Indians, uses them as symbols of 
evil in this book.³ For Hershel Parker, the novel is a 
satirical allegory of "the impracticability of 
Christianity," whose theme is repeated in miniature form in 
the Indian-hating section; for him, as for Shroeder, the 
Indians personify "Devils," while the Indian-haters are
"dedicated Christians." Elizabeth S. Foster, in her 1954 Hendricks House edition of the book, argues that "the Indian embodies allegorically a primitive, a primal, malign, treacherous force in the universe," while at the same time suggesting that the Indian-hater shows the idea of "no trust" that Melville satirizes: "This is the alternative if we jettison charity--a world of solitary, dehumanized Indian-haters."

Their conclusions are different, but are nevertheless built upon the same critical assumptions. They tend to read the episode as well as the novel itself within the frame of abstract, psychological, or moral values in which the individual plays out eternal conflicts that transcend immediate social concerns. On the other hand, scholars like Roy Harvey Pearce, Edwin Fussell, and Joyce Sparer Adler explore the socio-historical implications of the episode, condemning the act of Indian-hating and considering the Indian the victim both in the novel and historically. What escapes these otherwise compelling critical perspectives is Melville's persistent concern with the way that languages and literary forms mediate dominant ideologies.

Melville's refashioning of Hall's narrative has often been taken as just another instance of his habitual cannibalizing of lesser-known texts, or as no more than a stylistic enlivening of the source text by infusing, as Elizabeth Foster says, "the breath of life and drama" into
its monochrome texture. Even critics like Pearce and Fussell who have detected Melville’s indictment of his culture’s blind jubilation of westward expansion fail to extend their critical shrewdness to Melville’s own underlying insight that it is the same conventions and general assumptions governing the production and interpretation of a frontier narrative like Hall’s that bring about such blindness. This kind of blindness is typically found in James P. Kaetz’s recent discussion of the text. Kaetz calls attention to Melville’s elimination of the following passage from Hall’s narrative which he thinks points to Hall’s "enlightened" view of the plight of Native Americans:

> America was settled in an age when certain rights, called those of "discovery" and "conquest," were universally acknowledged ... When more accurate notions of moral right began, with the spread of knowledge, and the dissemination of religious truth, to prevail in public opinion, and regulate the public acts of our government, the pioneers were but slightly affected by the wholesome contagion of such opinions.

Pointing further to Hall’s "intelligent" analysis of the antagonism between the Indian and the backwoodsman, Kaetz concludes that it is difficult to determine Melville’s opinions on Indian-hating. What Kaetz fails to consider, however, is that expressing sympathy with the pitiable conditions of the Native Americans including an acknowledgment of Indian rapine as revenge for white injustice was becoming a built-in component of the narrative tradition to which Hall’s *Sketches* belongs. As Homi Bhabha
notes, allegiance to mimesis, claim to "the accuracy of reflection," is central to "a perspective of essential order, coherence, culmination and Culture." With the receding of the frontier far beyond the Rockies which happened at the time when Hall’s *Sketches* was written, recognizing white violence as a product of the less civilized regime of civilization became a crucial item for generating the effect of the real.

James Hall was, as one of his biographers has put it, "a popular writer self-devoted to the task of interpreting the West." Originally from Maryland, Hall served as a district judge in Illinois, later became a journalist and magazine editor while writing about the West, and ended his versatile career as a rich banker in Cincinnati. Besides *Sketches*, he wrote a half-dozen books about frontier life, particularly of the Ohio Valley. One of the most engaging claims he repeats in each of these narratives is his dedication to "fidelity" to frontier reality. In his preface to *Legends of the West* (1832), a two-volume collection of short stories, for example, Hall states that his sole intention was to "convey accurate descriptions of the scenery and population of the country in which the author resides." To strengthen his claim, Hall adds that his narratives are based on "personal observation" rather than book information. His claim to adherence to facts
notwithstanding, Hall was attacked by some contemporary reviewers for committing plagiarism and factual inaccuracy. Melville was to join the party of these accusers through his rewriting, but he viewed the problem from a different angle. His focus is more on the ideological intervention into both perception and writing, which is not necessarily a matter of personal choice.

It is correct to say that Melville’s tightened style makes his rewriting more than an infinite regress into textuality. Elizabeth Foster explains the notable stylistic changes Melville makes in his adapting of Hall’s material: “he varies the tempo; he sharpens and telescopes the narrative in its less important stretches; at the dramatic moment he expands it into a memorable close-up of the hero.” However, one must add that the irony Melville renders palpable through his intertextual transaction particularizes his intention to expose the ideological structures embedded in his source. Hall’s narrative of John Moredock the Indian-hater unfolds itself as it continually employs a particular discursive practice or a convention, subsuming the complex realities of racial conflicts under it. In explaining the phenomenon of Indian hating, for example, Hall places it in the context of America’s westward expansionism at one moment, enframes it within the Puritan idea of seeing the New World as the vacuum domicilium at another moment, and sees it in the light of the traditional
notion of the "errand into the wilderness" at still another moment. Melville's intertextual sleight of hand pauses over where Hall appeals, openly or covertly, to the established authority of tradition and discourse to displace the issue onto a different plane and to elevate his subject beyond his time and society, while calling our attention to the ideological operations underlying that act of appealing. Melville's subversive dialogue in The Confidence-Man, in other words, aims to de-naturalize and de-familiarize the social practices whose ideological origins are now faded from memory. As a consequence, it poses an open challenge to the reader's preconceived ideas about what historical "truth" actually is. The target of Melville's satire is, then, the various conventions and presuppositions, signifying practices, and ideological operations inscribed in Hall's text rather than the writer himself. For Melville, James Hall is a representative author of all the possible frontier narratives built upon a combination of these same discursive codes. Melville goes beyond his source text into the domain of discursive activities which have structured it.

The differences between Melville's narrative of Indian-hating and its source are clear even in his choosing of a particular form of authorial distancing. Hall's Sketches adopts the common third-person stance, giving an impression
that its accounts are objective and even scientific.
Melville, on the other hand, floats his story in the grey zone of ambiguity from the outset by inserting it into the extended dialogue between Charlie Noble and Frank Goodman, both of whom turn out to be con men with dubious motivations. The feeling of uncertainty may be doubled when Melville has Charlie Noble qualify himself, very much like Egbert, as a mere conduit for the transmission of Judge Hall’s story. So tangled with the emblematic textual concerns is Noble’s introductory remark that it deserves quoting at length:

“Well: though, as you may gather, I never fully saw the man, yet, have I, one way and another, heard about as much of him as any other; in particular, have I heard his history again and again from my father’s friend, James Hall, the judge, you know. In every company being called upon to give this history, which none could better do, the judge at last fell into a style so methodic, you would have thought he spoke less to mere auditors than to an invisible amanuensis; seemed talking for the press; very impressive way with him indeed. And I, having an equally impressible memory, think that, upon a pinch, I can render you the judge upon the colonel almost word for word.” (142)

Of course, Noble does not repeat James Hall "word for word," as he promises. Strictly speaking, events or stories, even though repeated verbatim, can never be exactly the same, primarily because the context in which they are rendered cannot be the same. What is foregrounded here is that the story of John Moredock has been numerously repeated to the extent that it comes to gain a "methodic" style of its own, much like a folk tale whose currency relies upon its
formulaic structure. Not only James Hall, the original narrator, but Charlie Noble, one of his auditors, is now able to tell the story in exactly the same manner, as if they spoke to "an invisible amanuensis," or "talked for the press." That the story of John Moredock turns into a popular legend which everybody tells and hears everywhere, rather than an authentic, "factual" account, as Hall would claim, forms the main thrust of Melville’s intertextual dialogue with Hall, a point which he turns to again and again.

In fact, textual orphanage, orality, and ventriloquism which Noble focalizes here are stock-in-trade elements of frontier storytelling, devices usually employed to strengthen the claim of the historical veracity of what is told. The issue of realism was no less central to nineteenth-century American frontier writing than to travel narratives to which Melville’s earlier works are linked. Virtually every narrative about the West stresses its fidelity to frontier experience; its accounts of wild life, the manners and customs of frontiersmen, of Indians, and their relations are advertized as truer than previous ones. For example, in his 1784 biography of Daniel Boone, The Discovery, Settlement and Present State of Kentucke, John Filson casts himself as an amanuensis of Boone’s first-person narration: Boone "was earlier acquainted with the subject of this performance [the settlement of Kentucky]
than any other now living, as appears by the account of his adventures, which I esteemed curious and interesting, and therefore have published from his own mouth."\(^{15}\) The whole narrative of course Filson himself wrote, as the same rhetorical maneuvering crossing his prefatory section and the autobiography proper alleged to be dictated by Boone eloquently indicate.\(^{16}\)

Melville's interest in the theatrical guise frontier story tellers and narrators wear derives from his sharpening recognition that theatricality is tied to control and manipulation. Already in *Moby-Dick* Melville has shown that Ahab's theatrical gesture on the quarter-deck is a primary means of mobilizing his authority over seamen with diverse backgrounds; in "Benito Cereno" he suggests that the maintenance of power depends on how effectively one theatricalizes oneself according to the dicta which society prescribes. The latter also marks Melville's increasing interest in the problem of ideological blindness which entails a failure to recognize, as in the case of Amasa Delano, one's participation and implication in the theatrical design one is in.\(^{17}\) *The Confidence-Man* is a more encompassing study of the problem with a focus on theatricality as a means of ideological assimilation. Through his subversive refashioning of a popular frontier narrative, a genre whose prosperity depends heavily upon theatrical tricks, Melville demonstrates that literature in
general, and frontier narrative in particular, may be used as an effective weapon on behalf of ideological assimilation—"effective" because ideological coercion here is very likely to be effected unknowingly.

Sloughing off an authorial tag is also a way to turn a story into a history. Most frontier narratives are based initially on personal experience, as John Moredock's is; however, the accounts eventually pass for part of the land's "true" history as they are stylized through periodic retellings into a cliched tradition of folk legend. Through the process of depersonalizing and decontextualizing, they are integrated into frontier savoir, a Barthesian "circular memory," a knowledge considered so manifestly true as to need no verification. Melville later redefines these stories-turned-histories as "forest histories and traditions" (147) and problematizes the discursive practice that enables the transformation. In his prefatory remark cited above, Noble has already called Judge Hall's story about John Moredock a "history," not a story. Given that the other interpolated narratives in The Confidence-Man are all referred to as stories, Noble's reclassification of a personal story into a communal (hi)story is quite revealing. In short, Melville seems to parody at least three discursive practices which concern the representation and interpretation of the American West; first, the practice of arrogating the voice of truth (on the part of the writer);
second, the chronic tendency to read frontier narratives (including historical narratives like Parkman’s Oregon Trail, which Melville reviewed) as factual (on the part of the reader); third, the practice of allegorizing the personal affair into the communal pattern, the most typical enactment of which is found in the American biographical tradition. All these practices are deployed in Hall’s explication of the "peculiar" phenomenon of Indian-hating and in his portrait of John Moredock, working to displace, conceal, and sublimate the grim drama of dispossession and extermination enacted on the frontier. Melville stays close to Hall’s Sketches, but punctures the discursive terrains it crosses, disclosing the ideological maneuverings underlying each narrative move.

Jean François Lyotard has argued that a basic function of traditional narrative is to facilitate the storage and transmission of customs, of cultural knowledge or savoir. At the same time, "the information that is circulated by such narratives, far from being attached solely to the enunciatory function, determines at once what one must say in order to be understood, what one must hear in order to be capable of speaking, and what one must enact ... in order to become the object of a tale." For Lyotard, therefore, particular narrative modes and languages are always selected and foregrounded by the dominant meaning-making practices of a community, while the latter are in turn reinforced by the
process of selection. Both Melville and Hall attend to the way in which frontier narratives serve to convey knowledge and indoctrinate people, especially the innocent and "impressible" young population. At one point, Hall in Sketches laments that "for persons thus reared, hatred towards an Indian becomes a part of their nature, and revenge an instinctive principle" (505), and expresses his concern that "they have only heard one side [of the story], and that with all the exaggerations of fear, sorrow, indignation and resentment" (506).

Melville's Hall notes that there are also stories, circulated no less widely, which paint the Native Americans "in every evil light"; that is, stories of "Indian lying, Indian theft, Indian double-dealing, Indian fraud and perfidy, Indian want of conscience, Indian blood-thirstiness, [and] Indian diabolism" (146). He goes on to focus on the devastating impact on the impressionable young mind of such a Manichean envisioning of the world, problematizing the too simplistic logic working in it: "In these Indian narratives and traditions the lad is thoroughly grounded. 'As the twig is bent the tree's inclined.' The instinct of antipathy against an Indian grows in the backwoodsman with the sense of good and bad, right and wrong. In one breath he learns that a brother is to be loved, and an Indian to be hated" (146, emphasis added).
Hall in *Sketches*, however, immediately sidesteps, after pointing out the problem in transmitting only the whites’ lopsided opinions of Indians, by labelling such an internalized hatred as understandable in view of "the known principles of human nature" (505). So Hall asks: "Is it to be wondered at, that a man should fear and detest an Indian, who has been always accustomed to hear him described only as an midnight prowler, watching to murder the mother as she bends over her helpless children, and tearing, with hellish malignity, the babe from the maternal breast?" (505) Not surprisingly, at another point in *Sketches*, Hall designates Indians as "yelling fiends in human shape" and never hesitates to accept their "atrocities" living in the backwoodsmen’s memory as "the facts, which operate upon the inhabitants of [the] frontiers" (506). Hall takes for granted Indian "savagery" and Indian moral degeneracy. They are inherent features of "Indian nature," which appears to be fixed, unchanging, always curiously the same to the eyes of Hall and his neighbors.

On the other hand, the Hall of *The Confidence-Man* points up the absurd conceptual link between a red skin and moral degradation, a link that dominates the whites’ view of Indians, while replacing the complex actualities of border culture by the binary structures codified by what Abdul JanMohamed describes as Manichean allegory. So Melville’s Hall asks with a full note of irony: "[Is it] surprising
[that] one should hate a race which he believes to be red from a cause akin to that which makes some tribes of garden insects green?" (146). The Judge further specifies the idea of "Indian evil" by reference to white criminals and outcasts: The Indian is "now an assassin like a New York rowdy; now a treaty-breaker like an Austrian; now a Palmer with poisoned arrows; now a judicial murderer and Jeffries, after a fierce farce of trial condemning his victim to bloody death" (146). Melville seems to imply that the idea of Indian evil is grounded in the discursive tradition which marginalizes the other to maintain a hegemonic social order. Noble even hints that this consistently negative stereotyped image of Indians is not necessarily drawn from backwoodsmen's direct experience but made up by white tellers like Hall: "Not that the backwoodsman ever used those words, you see, but the judge found him expression for his meaning" (149). Melville's point is more clearly revealed where the backwoodsman explicitly rejects individual experience as counter-evidence of Indian evil: "scarce one among us so self-important, or so selfish-minded, as to hold his personal exemption from Indian outrage such a set-off against the contrary experience of so many others" (148-49).

The double-voiced discourses deployed in Melville's text thus reveal that although James Hall occasionally gestures toward sponsoring a liberal, humane reading of the
vanishing Native Americans, he in fact proposes a more insidious apology for imperialist violence. This hidden text more often bobs to the surface in the latter part of his sketch, the biography proper of John Moredock. Melville satirizes Hall's duplicities by recapturing such textual ruptures in hyperbolic terms. For example, where Hall describes the backwoodsman as a pioneer in the country's westward expansion, Melville boisterously compares him with heroic figures in history: "Though held in a sort a barbarian, the backwoodsman would seem to America what Alexander was to Asia--captain in the vanguard of conquering civilization." He is then further compared with Hannibal, Julius Caesar, Moses in the Exodus--a comparison whose deriding tone echoes Melville's indictment of pretentious, pompous civilized men in Typee and Omoo. Melville's hyperbole jeers at his countrymen's indulgence in aggrandizing the exploration of the West, simultaneously suggesting that Indian eradication should be seen in the context of America's political ambition to build a national empire rather than as an issue of biological or moral inadequacy as Hall and his friends would propose. Edwin Fussell is perfectly justified in holding that "[t]hrough the genial façade of Hall's genteel narration, behind the protestations of morality and piety, Melville detected the fundamental barbarism of his eminently respectable views."
Thus Noble’s prefatory remark defines Judge Hall’s story as a kind of myth whose banal enough message actually works to prescribe the reader’s perception and action. Claiming to provide “factual” representations of American frontier experience for the audience back in urban areas, many frontier narratives during the period when Hall’s Sketches was written described the disappearance of the Native Americans not just as natural but as having already happened. In the introduction to the 1831 edition of The Last of the Mohicans, for example, James Fenimore Cooper describes in an elegiac mode the rapid decrease of the red population as inevitable: it was "the seemingly inevitable fate of all [native tribes]" to "disappear before the advances ... of civilization, [just] as the verdure of their native forests falls before the nipping frost." At the beginning of John Moredock’s episode in Sketches, Hall declares that "these atrocious [racial] wars have ceased, and ... no immediate cause of enmity remains; at least upon our side" (502). The Indians’ fate was already sealed in the forest chronicles written by whites in the early 1830s, but in fact, they were still waging a hard battle against the United States government’s policy of removal and extermination in various regions east of the Mississippi as late as the early 1840s; as Melville’s bitter joke about the "Widow and Orphan Asylum recently founded among the Seminoles" in The Confidence-Man reminds us, the military
campaign against the remaining Seminoles in Florida was still going on in 1856 when he wrote the book. Hall’s proclamation of the end of the Indian question is, therefore, another ideological weapon to effect the "inevitable."

As Roland Barthes has argued, the primary function of cultural myth is to transform "culture into nature or ... the social, the cultural, the ideological, the historical into the ‘natural.’" Perhaps nothing was more urgent to democratic America’s self-conception than "naturalizing" the national crime of systematic dispossession and massive killing of Indians. A number of frontier myths were generated, all serving in one way or another to rationalize the destruction of the Indians and to justify (and encourage) the inroads of white settlers upon the West. While some writers like Cooper express their pity at the fate of the vanishing natives, many others portray the racial conflicts pointedly in favor of whites, attributing the extinction of the Indians to their alleged savagery and innate depravity. Not surprisingly, as Dana D. Nelson has shown, frontier novels seldom examine the historical, material circumstances that placed the white settlers on the frontier and invited the violent reactions of the native tribes. Most frontier narratives, despite their claim to realism, romanticize the grim actualities of the American West shot through with fraud, persecution, and mass murder,
and thus ultimately serve, by envisioning "the Bloody Ground" as "a fertile and virgin land" (147), to expedite massive emigration from the already troubled urban centers in the East. 24

One of the strategies frontier narratives employ in seeking ideological assimilation is to project, as Richard Slotkin suggests, "models of good or heroic behavior that reinforce the values of ideology, and affirm as good the distribution of authority and power that ideology rationalizes." 25 This is what James Hall does in Sketches. After defining Indian-hating as an anachronistically persistent phenomenon, Hall goes on to expound the cause and operation of that feeling upon the frontiersman, a feeling which "can neither removed by argument, nor appeased by anything but the destruction of its object" (502). Hall immediately calls our attention to the particular situation in which the backwoodsman places himself, not out of personal whims, but motivated by a sense of mission. As "pioneers," the backwoodsmen "keep continually in the advance of civilization, preceding the dense population of [the] country in its progress westward" (502). Given that they have lived "always upon the frontier," while "despising the luxuries of social life," their "peculiar" attitude and mentality, Hall suggests, are understandable enough. Besides, many of their peculiarities are hereditary, handed down from their ancestors who "met the red men in battle.
upon the shores of the Atlantic." With the same "habits,
prejudices, and modes of life," the backwoodsmen pursue the
footsteps of the retreating red men, forming "a barrier
between savage and civilized men" (503). Here Hall, to
borrow the words of Pitch the Missourian, is punning with
"ideas," rather than with "words": on the one hand, he
glorifies the backwoodsman into an austere, heroic figure of
a Puritan forefather, and on the other, ascribes his habit
of Indian-killing to the savage part within his nature, a
part acquired and internalized by long contact with Indians.

Hall's play with double logic works to relieve the
white intruders of the responsibility for the extermination
of Indians and to displace it onto the victimized Indian--a
subtle, yet by no means uncommon practice among the
discourses of Manifest Destiny and expansionism. In most of
the antebellum ethnographic writings and political tracts,
the Indian is, as Wai-chee Dimock phrases it, "the subject
of a predestined narrative," whose extinction is a function
of "their benighted refusal to quit their savage ways." The
Indian seems to be "responsible for, guilty of, and
committed to a fated course of action, in which he appears
not only as both victim and culprit, but also as a legible
sign of his own inexorable end."26 A very similar
transposition, not on the level of logic, but of discourse,
with the same effect of mystifying the workings of
ideologies, is also in evidence where Hall describes the
backwoodsman as a Thoreauvian saunterer: "It is not from a desire of conquest, or thirst of blood, or with any premeditated hostility against the savage, that the pioneer continues to follow him from forest to forest ... It is simply because he shuns a crowded population, delights to rove uncontrolled in the woods" (504). Hall thus redefines the Indian-hater’s monomaniac "exterminating hatred" as no more than a byproduct of his irrepressible quest for personal freedom, a trait increasingly recognized, roughly from Hall’s time onward, as part of America’s national character. Rather than condemning the Indian-killer, Hall eulogizes him as a national hero whose self-will, sacrifice, and devotion should be emulated.

On the other hand, Melville’s Hall brings up and ridicules the idea of the backwoodsman as a solitary wanderer in pursuit of loneliness:

The backwoodsman is a lonely man. He is a thoughtful man. He is a man strong and unsophisticated. Impulsive, he is what some might call unprincipled. At any rate, he is self-willed; being one who less hearkens to what others may say about things, than looks for himself, to see what are things themselves. If in straits, there are few to help; he must depend upon himself ... Hence self-reliance, to the degree of standing by his own judgment, though it stand alone. Not that he deems himself infallible; too many mistakes in following trails prove the contrary; but he thinks that nature destines such sagacity as she has given him, as she destines it to the 'possum ... Like the 'possum, the backwoodsman presents the spectacle of a creature dwelling exclusively among the works of God, yet there, truth must confess, breed little in him of a godly mind. (144-145)
The passage, which exemplifies a uniquely Melvillean double-voiced talk, enlists statements and ideas familiar to the discursive practices Hall silently invokes and then derides them, or at least gives another angle to them at the next moment: the frontiersman is a "lonely" man with a "strong and unsophisticated" mind, while "some might call" his behavior "impulsive," or "unprincipled"; he is armed with "self-will" and "self-reliance," while his judgment easily leads him astray; he may be regarded as a "thoughtful" man, while he shows no better wisdom than a possum does. Melville's compact prose imbued with gleeful doubleness also brings into play yet another significant intertext, one that emerges more clearly against the background of its source text. Behind Melville's accentuation of such words as "lonely," "self-willed," "self-reliance," "nature," and a "godly mind" lies, if not in a straightforward way, an Emersonian transcendentalist text. While poking fun at Hall's search for an excuse for the imperialist impulse the Indian-hater represents in his tangential desire for nomadism, Melville registers his responses to a more immediate and increasingly popular discourse of the period. The following passage most clearly illustrates Melville's intertextual exploitation of, and his dissension from, the discourse of transcendental individualism:

The sight of smoke ten miles off is provocation to one more remove from man, one step deeper into nature. Is it that he feels that whatever man may be, man is not the universe? that glory, beauty, kindness, are not all
engrossed by him? that as the presence of man frights birds away, so, many bird-like thoughts? Be that how it will, the backwoodsman is not without some fineness to his nature. Hairy Orson as he looks, it may be with him as with the Shetland seal--beneath the bristles lurks the fur. (145)

At the core of Melville's contention with the Emersonian doctrine of self-reliance is, as Frank Goodman makes clearer later, the concealment of self-interest beneath its "moonshiny" rhetoric (223)--a point which connects the nineteenth-century discourse of American imperialism and transcendental philosophy. The piercing irony lurking in the passage's association of the Indian-hater's concealed mind with the "fur" is certainly meant to recall the fur trade of the colonial period which marks the beginning of the white exploitation and subjugation of the Native Americans and the imperialist infiltration into the American wilderness. The irony indeed serves to unmask the ideological aberrations with which frontier narratives are infused, to inform us that more than any other motive, America's material greed, or more specifically, the national craving for what Michael Paul Rogin has termed the "primitive accumulation," is at work behind Indian extermination, and finally to make us realize how persistently America has attempted to sublimate this sadistic underside of her empire building.37

Typically, Hall in Sketches elides the material motivations underlying the wanderlust of the backwoodsman, a hunger for land. At one point, he vaguely suggests that

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"the right to the soil" (504) has been at issue in the deadly conflicts between whites and Indians, but the remark is immediately overwritten by the reigning rhetoric committed to ideological sublimation. Melville brings the issue to the surface in the story of "the little colony of Wrights and Weavers from Virginia--one of the major additions Melville makes to the source--when he has Hall mention that their successive removals are motivated by "the ever-beckoning seductions of a fertile ... land," not by the "love of conflict for conflict's sake," as romantic forest "histories" would often advertize as a central motive of the whites' incursion into the wilderness.

Hall in Sketches portrays John Moredock the Indian-hater as a heroic type, a solitary and self-willed pioneer who suffers misfortune at Indian hands--the massacre of family members--and becomes thereafter a devoted Indian killer. After taking his avowed vengeance upon the perpetrators of the massacre, Moredock becomes "a hunter and a warrior": he is not only a man of "remarkable strength and activity" but a man of "determined courage, and great coolness and steadiness of purpose"; he is "expert in the use of the rifle and other weapons," and also "complete master" of the ways of the wilderness; he has resolved "never to spare an Indian," but "seldom avowed it" (509). It is clear from the language that a mythical cult is at work. Melville inflates this cliché-ridden portrayal in his
adaptation, reminding us that Hall’s Moredock is less a real person than an idealized character thriving in frontier myths. At one point Melville cites Daniel Boone’s warning against Indian wiles. He also associates the Indian-hater with Leatherstocking by calling him "a Leather-stocking Nemesis" (150). He alludes to Nathan Slaughter, a Quaker-turned-Indian-killer in Robert Montgomery Bird’s Nick of the Woods by way of deriding the Quakerish innocence of seeing Indians as the same brethren as whites. All these allusions put Hall’s Sketches into intertextual relationship with a long series of frontier texts—a relation mediated by a frontier paradigm which fits Julia Kristeva’s category of "idéologème."\(^{28}\) In these texts, a rambling Daniel Boone figure is apotheosized as the natural heir of Christian virtues (often shared by some Noble Savages), while the Indian is installed as representative of the savage Otherness, the prosopopeia of Satanic villainy. This paradigm of course has a long history, traced back to the captivity narratives written and printed in New England and told and retold along the frontier.

Melville’s Moredock is more passionate, more devout; in other words, he is a more consistent Indian-killer, who "never let[s] pass an opportunity of quenching an Indian" (154). This kind of absolutism is part of a larger frame of providential history which Melville’s intertextual poetics highlights and parodies by resituating the story of Indian-
killing in it. In the course of his rewriting Melville continually adds details of religious resonance. When the Indian-hater takes leave of his family, he does so with "the solemnity of the Spaniard turned monk" (149), an analogy ironically echoing Benito Cereno. Melville calls the first Indians Moredock pursues a "gang of Cains" (153), where Hall has merely "lawless renegades." Hall has Moredock’s mother widowed by the tomahawk "several times"; it is Melville who specifies "thrice." In Melville she has "nine children," whereas in Hall "large family." Moredock seeks his revenge, leading a party "pledged to serve him for forty days" (153), again adding a biblical touch.

Melville’s allusions to biblical myths heightens John Moredock’s life into a parody of spiritual quest, and his life-long task of racial murder into a heroic adventure, while exposing and parodying the convention of the American hagiographical writing which underlies Hall’s portrait, a convention which celebrates the representative self as the embodiment of a prophetic design in history. This distinct American form of biography, whose classic example is found in Cotton Mather’s reconstruction of John Winthrop as a "Nehemias Americanus," as Rob Wilson explains, "conjoin[s] the vocation of the writing/written self and the project of the community into one hermeneutic adventure."29 This hermeneutic practice of transforming a personal life into a communal history had already become an accepted convention
of American frontier storytelling by the time James Hall wrote actively about the West in the 1830s. Brief as it is, Hall’s account of John Moredock enacts this drama of allegorizing his private affair into a communal mission, while transforming a callous Indian-killer into a cultural hero. Hall’s narrating is a process of realigning and commemorating Moredock’s loss of his family, grief, and self-proclaimed task of revenge as part of the manifest design of national progress. Seen in this light, the Judge’s tribute to the memory of Moredock at the beginning of his story is as pertinent as his highlighting of the latter’s ability as a leader of the newly-established state of Illinois is necessary. In Hall’s Sketches as well as in Melville’s text, Moredock develops into "a moccasined gentleman, admired and loved" (154), and yet in Melville’s final verdict, he remains none other than "a man of questionable morality." Melville does this by pointing out that the central discursive convention Hall uses is tainted with the ersatz grandeur of empire.

Melville’s recasting of Moredock’s life in terms reminiscent of the Christian quest-romance throws into relief the contradictions not only within the economy of his self-making but within the social order which nourishes it. Despite the dedicated seriousness, unexampled self-control, and cool professionalism he evinces in killing Indians, he is, as Hall reports, "cheerful, convivial, and hospitable."
He is a composite of a ferocious killer and a mild-mannered Christian gentleman. Melville foregrounds this schizophrenic duality buried in Moredock's character in saying that "Moredock was an example of something apparently self-contradicting, certainly curious, but, at the same time, undeniable: namely, that nearly all Indian-haters have at bottom loving hearts" (154). This enigmatic doubleness, the internal inconsistency, is not peculiar to the Indian-hater alone, but shared by all who enjoy the fabulous stories of his "strategical, implacable, and lonesome vengeance" (149-50); indeed, not only all the characters in the novel but the novel itself is, in its own term, "grounded" in such contradiction and inconsistency. The same discrepancy is repeatedly played out by the operators in the first half of the novel, from Black Guinea who looks like a "white operator, betwisted and painted up for a decoy" (14) through the "gem'man in a gray coat and white tie" who conjures the worldwide vision of the charity business with "the Wall Street spirit" (40) to the PIO agent who sells slaves to Pitch the Missourian who declares "Machines for me" (116). What is most striking, however, is that the incongruity is not recognized by the American public, at least as represented by Hall. Hall, without showing any qualms, asserts both Moredock's savage ferocities and his "popular manners and benevolent deportments" (510), as if they are not incompatible at all.
By contrast, Melville defamiliarizes this obviously bizarre yet now quite naturalized cohabitation of the opposite terms, a practice snugly installed in both the psychic realm and the cultural terrain of antebellum America, by allowing Frank Goodman to express his final disbelief in the whole story narrated by Charlie Noble: "To me some parts don’t hang together. If the man of hate, how could John Moredock be also the man of love?" (156). Of course, this is an unnervingly dull question unless it is meant to convey his bewilderment at the suddenly revealed irrationalities within the systems accredited with rationality, because the whole story is an answer to it. Melville’s Hall even suggests that Moredock’s good will toward his neighbors and sociability are based on his other life itself: "He could be very convivial; told a good story (though never of his private exploits), and sung a capital song" (154). In other words, the two traits—extreme hatred and geniality—are not mutually exclusive but complementary and interconnected, safeguarding the maintenance of Moredock’s identity. Henry Sussuman has argued that while "teeter[ing] between obsession and schizophrenia," the Indian-hater attempts, through his man-hunt, to "restore consistency, to quell an internal discrepancy." However, it seems safer not to attempt to read Moredock’s story too much in psychoanalytic terms, because his life as Hall depicts it shows no tinge of pathological conflicts, no
internal contestations. The contradiction is simply there almost as a given, and Moredock just lives it. Melville’s rewriting works to bring out the ideological complacency pervading the source text, to borrow Conrad’s words, "only as a glow brings out a haze," not necessarily because it is intended to work that way, but because the mist of ideologies is so thick and pervasive.\footnote{31}

The story of Mocmohoc, another addition Melville makes to the original Hall material, renders the pervasive duplicity in public discourses into a parody of itself. Deemed as "a savage almost perfidious as Caesar Borgia," Chief Mocmohoc suddenly changes his hostile attitude toward the white settlers for no overt reason, and expresses his desire for active friendship. Suspicious of his intention, the whites carefully draft a "covenant," one of whose articles is that "though friendly visits should be exchanged between the wigwams and the cabins, yet the five cousins should never, on any account, be expected to enter the chief’s lodge together." Nevertheless, Mocmohoc gradually wins their confidence, manages to "[bring] them all together to a feast of a bear’s meat, and there, by stratagem, end[s] them" (148). Melville’s Hall quotes Mocmohoc’s story as evidence of heinous Indian treachery. But the chilling irony in his jeering remark only brings to light the discrepancy between the whites’ actions and beliefs, the underside of formalized covenant idealism--a discrepancy
which Melville believes makes his country's social relations into a series of confidence games: "'Treachery? pale face! 'Twas they who broke their covenant first, in coming all together; they that broke it first, in trusting Mocmohoc" (148). The grotesqueness and absurdity of skewed logic, strict legalism, and abstract idealism detached from their social setting, all prominent in antebellum America's racial discourse, cannot be more glaringly revealed.

Intensely devoted to his chosen duty as he is, Moredock is still paler than what Melville calls the Indian-hater par excellence. He is the one who, "having with his mother's milk drank in small love for red men, in youth or early manhood, ere the sensibilities become osseous, receives at their hand some signal outrage, or, which in effect is much the same, some of his kin have, or some friend" (148). The racial hatred which informs the existence of the Indian-hater par excellence is thus bred from the cradle, nurtured by his experience of some misfortune, and enhanced by other outrages his kin and friends have suffered. Melville suggests that the making of the dedicated Indian-hater relies much more upon brainwashing and empathy than upon personal knowledge, involving an alternating process of ideological indoctrination and the vilification of Indians en masse: the Indian-hating develops such attraction for the Indian-hater par excellence that "much as straggling vapors troop from all sides to a storm-cloud, so straggling
thoughts of other outrages [not connected with Indians] troop to the nucleus thought, assimilate with it, and swell it" (149). Again providing a contrast to the original Hall, who hints that the dwindling of the Native Americans is no other responsibility than their own, Melville's Hall claims that the Indian has been exploited and victimized by the whites.

Armed with the furious mind thus molded, the Indian-hater par excellence leaves his kin solemnly for "the forest primeval" after making a vow that his hate will be "a vortex from whose suction scarce the remotest chip of the guilty race may reasonably feel secure" (149). This awesome image, which recalls the all-devouring "concentric circles" at the end of Moby-Dick, transmits the sheer intensity and the extent of the enmity the dedicated exterminator internalizes, and immediately takes us to another equally highly charged, concatenating metaphor which is quite revealing in view of his symbolic function: the "career of the Indian-hater par excellence has the impenetrability of the fate of a lost steamer" (150). The disturbingly mixed metaphor yoking "impenetrability" of the Indian-hater par excellence to "the fate of a lost steamer" includes Melville's critique of America's consistent ideological mystification of Indian subjugation and extermination and his proleptic vision of an American empire whose course has been one of brutal victimization of the racial Other. The
double-barreled analogy, which also calls to mind the Pequod in Moby-Dick, the ill-fated ship steered by a captain from New England who is victimized by his own monomaniac hatred, thus reflects the social and moral contradictions which overshadow antebellum American society, plunging it into the Civil War. In his meditation on Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Gianni Vattimo notes that it is from the point of view of the "history of the victors that history is a unitary process in which there is consequentiality and rationality."

Melville exposes such a persistent "unitary process" underlying the history of the American West along with the message that its consequence is detrimental to the victors as well.

Melville originally intended to dedicate The Confidence-Man to "victims of Auto da Fé," and his self-consuming passion of racial-hatred entitles, if ironically, the Indian-hater par excellence to such an honor. He can exist only as a form of "impenetrability," which requires the destruction of his physical self. His "errand into the wilderness" is essentially self-destructive, can be achieved only through his self-immolation. After a farewell as final as a "death-bed adieu," the true Indian-hater "is good as gone to his long home" (150). Thereafter, "less seen than felt," the Indian-hater par excellence haunts the wilderness as a "Leather-stocking Nemesis," a specter of vengeance, whose epitaph is "Terror" (150).
hater, Melville writes, "there can be no biography, any more than ... one of dead man." His nature can only be
"surmise[d]" or projected from the character of the "diluted Indian-hater" (150). Then, one may ask, what else can the Indian-hater par excellence be but a personification of the "metaphysics" of Indian-killing itself, the living ideology of racism whose presence is most effectively experienced as absence? Then, Melville’s story of the Indian-hater is a story about the "metaphysics" of Indian-hating, a discourse on the ideology of racial hatred--the most fundamental change made in the course of rewriting the original. Melville seems to imply that the Indian-hater himself is, in a sense, a sort of scapegoat immolated on the altar of his country’s imperialism to pray for expediting and smoothing out its enterprise. He serves as a surrogate onto whom the historical culpability of his culture is displaced. To eulogize figures like John Moredock, Melville also suggests, is a form of "sin[ning] by deputy," a sin which he earlier associates with the man who holds "a certain negro body-servant" to do dirty jobs for him and so keeps his hands "spotless." Melville’s irony reaches its peak when he further comments: "how shocking would that [sinning by deputy] be! But it is not permitted to be; and even if it were, no judicious moralist would make proclamation of it" (36).
Setting up a set of double entendres such as the pure and the "diluted," the original and the reflection, and the genuine and the counterfeit, as a means of conceptualizing the human subject is a crucial convention of frontier literature. Melville has also preempted this discursive convention in "The 'Gees," a short fiction published immediately before he completed The Confidence-Man, to expose the underlying ideological assumptions of such dual schemes. The 'Gees, the natives of the Portuguese colony of Fogo, an island off the West African coast, are characterized by American seamen as clumsy, docile, and credulous--traits which make them popular as "green" hands. However, "ripe" 'Gees, to the dismay of Yankee skippers, often turn out to be the opposite, becoming cunning, recalcitrant, and even more ungovernable than white sailors. By foregrounding this discrepancy between the "private nature" and the "public coat" (Piazza Tales, 349) of the 'Gee, Melville satirizes the discursive pretense to formalize a single norm for each race and to dismiss all instances belying that norm as mere aberrations or symptoms of degeneracy.33

To essentialize the racial Other in a timeless present is, as Mary Louise Pratt has argued, a central practice of ethnographic writing, a practice of isolating the Other from the history being made--a history of negotiation and conflict, struggle and dominion.
The initial ethnographic gesture is the one that homogenizes the people to be subjected ... into a collective they, which distills down even further into an iconic he (=the standard adult male specimen). This abstracted he/they is the subject of verbs in a timeless present tense. These characterize anything "he" is or does not as a particular event in time, but as an instance of a pregiven custom or trait ... Particular encounters between people get textualized, then, as enumerations of such traits.34

Through this process of projecting the colonizer’s system of representation onto the "vacant" territory of the Other, the latter is transformed into a set of codes that can be recognized by reference to the former’s systems of signification. This restructuring of what Pratt terms "the contact zone" also entails an ideological process that produces and naturalizes the hierarchical power structures of the imperial enterprise.35 Ethnographic writings including frontier narratives thus codify and perpetuate the Other as an inferior being "out there" beyond the circle, awaiting conquest, appropriation, and "civilization."

Frontier narratives like James Hall’s Sketches make Indians "people without history." Erased from their own systems of cultural recognition, they are instead inserted into the white intruder’s network of textualization as a "lack" or "negation" of that which constitutes the imperial and transcendental self. As Melville’s Hall hints, Indians are not "permitted to testify for themselves, to the exclusion of other testimony" (147). Even when he is allowed to speak, his capacity to signify cannot exceed that which is demarcated for them by the semiotic system of
hegemonic white culture: "when an Indian becomes a genuine proselyte to Christianity," Melville’s Hall argues, "he will not ... conceal his enlightened conviction, that his race’s portion by nature is total depravity" (147). He is permitted to speak only in an act of self-incrimination—an Indian who "advances the notion of the benignity of the red race" can be doing so only as "part and parcel" of a "subtle strategy" of evil (147). Melville’s subversive readaptation of Hall reintroduces the progressivist stance of speaking for Indians that narratives like Hall’s often take as a mere gesture which masks at once the exercise of ideological containment and "the guilt intrinsic to the national errand into the wilderness," as Henry Nash Smith puts it.

The nineteenth-century American discourse of the West worked to rationalize and justify her course of empire which was a process of massive violence by codifying the Native Americans and their cultures into a Manichean hermeneutic which posited them as one pole defined in terms of low intellect, moral depravity, and psychological immaturity. At the other pole of that polarized scheme of interpretation is posited the backwoodsman representing white culture whose superiority is ordained through its self-proclaimed mission of civilizing and Christianizing the "inferior" races. Within the frame of this binary polarization, all actions, whether of Indians or of whites, are repetitions of the
already prescribed habits, enactments of inherent features of culturally fixed racial nature. In consequence, as Melville states in Pierre, "the countless tribe[s] of common dramas do but repeat the same" (Pierre, 141), while historical consciousness of any cultural dialectic is elided.

At one point in The Confidence-Man Melville has Frank Goodman, the novel's master of confidence men, claim that "the voice of the people is the voice of truth" (163). The whole of Melville's intertextual dialogue with James Hall is, I think, about the validity of this proposition. Melville raises questions about this common belief that Hall must endorse and base his narratives about frontier life on: Must we take as true the beliefs and values current among people for the very reason that they are widely shared by them? Must we believe what frontier (hi)stories give as established historical facts? Throughout his parodic refashioning of Hall, Melville seems to pose these questions directly to Hall himself and indirectly to his readers. The primary assertion he wants to make of course is that, as the man with the wooden leg cries out, "looks are one thing, and facts are another" (14). One effort Melville makes to drive home this point is to show that Hall's portrait of John Moredock is not necessarily based on a real Moredock but an idealized one fashioned after already heroized figures like Moses or John Winthrop. Melville reminds us that frontier
(hi)stories alternately invoke established discursive traditions and enframe contemporary situations within those grids, and thus function to homogenize discrete experiences and perceptions. By preempting the very narrative conventions on which James Hall counts in sublimating his subject into a mythical religious hero, Melville's subversive dialogue with his source effects the disclosure of ideologies lurking in them.
Notes

1. In defining The Confidence-Man as a "problem" novel, John Bryant summarizes reasons for making it least accessible: "so strained is its humor, so generalized its allegorical and satiric sources, so distant its narrator and indefinable its characters, so convoluted its style and inviolated its ironies, so illusive its normative values--indeed, so complex is this work that it is even difficult to render a reasonable plot summary without in some sense betraying one's interpretative biases"; see "The Confidence-Man: Melville's Problem Novel" in A Companion to Melville Studies, pp. 315-350. Many critics connect the novel's apparent ambiguities and irregularities to Melville's bitter state of mind during the period of writing it, implying that part of the problem stems from his failure to place his language under full control, while some others take the opposite stance; for example, Elizabeth S. Foster argues that "there is not a listless, nerveless sentence in the novel ("Introduction" to The Confidence-Man [New York: Hendricks House, 1954], p. xciii); for H. Bruce Franklin, The Confidence-Man is "Melville's most nearly perfect book," where "not a word is wasted or misplaced" (The Wake of the Gods: Melville's Mythology [Stanford: Sanford Univ. Press, 1963], p. 153); and Merlin Bowen claims that Melville reveals no mental blocks or confusion in the style, which is "poised, precise, and at all times under easy control" ("Tactics of Indirection in Melville's The Confidence-Man," Studies in the Novel 1 [Winter 1969], p. 401).


14. Cf. Jonathan Culler states that "Meaning is context-bound but context is boundless"; *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1982), p. 128. Mieke Bal's discussion of repetition is suggestive: "The phenomenon of repetition ... has always had a dubious side. Two events are never exactly the same. The first event of a series differs from the one that follows it, if only because it is the first and the other is not. Strictly speaking, the same goes for verbal repetition in a text: Only one can be the first ... Obviously, it is the onlooker ... who remembers the similarities between the events of a series and ignores the differences"; *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1985), p. 7.


21. For a sweeping discussion of United States' Indian Policy during the period from the late 1830s to the late 1840s, see Thomas R. Hietala's Manifest Design: Anxious Aggrandizement in Late Jacksonian America (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985), pp. 132-72; according to Reginald Horseman, the Enlightenment view of the Indian as an innately equal, improvable being rapidly disappeared from American thinking at the time of the 1830 Indian Removal Act, and by 1850 the American public and American politicians "had for the most part abandoned any belief in potential Indian equality" (see Race and Manifest Destiny, p. 207; for a discussion of the Seminole War, see James W. Covington, The Seminoles of Florida (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 1993), pp. 50-144.


23. In his discussion of three frontier novels--Fenimore Cooper's The Last of the Mohicans, Robert Montgomery Bird's Nick of the Woods, and William Simms's The Yemassee, all of which Melville must have been familiar with--Dana D. Nelson argues that all share an elision of the historical, material circumstances that placed the whites on the frontier and pitted the Indians against them, while advancing "an acceptance of a historical and ongoing policy toward living Native Americans, as though it were 'natural' and already graven in (tomb)stone"; see, The Word in Black and White, pp. 38-64 (the quoted passage is on p. 41).
24. Richard Slotkin has argued that the West was conceived in post-Revolution politics as an antidote to the increasing class conflicts in urban areas with the advancement of industrialization: "The ideological function of the Myth of the Frontier had been to substitute the credible prospect of an infinite reservoir of land and economic resources as an alternative to the intense conflict of a social classes, economic interest groups, or regional groupings of slave and free states. But in the real-world pursuit of expansion, American political leaders discovered that each new advance of 'territory of Freedom' served to provide new occasions for the acting out of inescapable conflicts"; The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890 (New York: Atheneum, 1985), p. 211.


27. Michael Paul Regin, Fathers and Children, pp. 166-169; Regin also points out that Indian removal posed "the difficulties of building from liberal assumptions a structure of legitimate public authority" (169)---a concern Melville shares especially beginning with Israel Potter.

28. Kristeva introduces the notion of "idéologème" as what gives a text "its historical and social coordinates"; more specifically, the idéologème, as an intertextual function, relates the different structures of the (literary) text to the other signifying practices making up culture; Sémiotikè: Recherche pour une sémanalyse (Paris: Seuil, 1969), pp. 113-14.


36. Peter J. Bellis makes a similar point in *No Mysteries Out of Ourselves: Identity and Textual Form in the Novels of Herman Melville* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1900), pp. 175-76.

CHAPTER VI

EPILOGUE: MELVILLE’S LEGACY

No man can quite emancipate himself from his age and country, or produce a model in which the education, the religion, the politics, usages and arts of his times shall have no share.

-----Ralph Waldo Emerson

Balzac and Solzhenitsyn give us a ‘view’ of the ideology to which their work alludes and with which it is constantly fed, a view which presupposes a retreat, an internal distantiation from the very ideology from which their novels emerged. They make us ‘perceive’... in some sense from the inside, by an internal distance, the very ideology in which they are held.

-----Louis Althusser

The Confidence-Man presents Melville’s clearest idea that narrative is not simply a literary form but an ideological apparatus which patterns daily experience and shapes social realities. Facing the almost complete loss of his dwindling audience, Melville comes to realize more keenly than ever that only those fictions which cater to the demands of society can survive. The public looms all-powerful to Melville as an active arbiter and manager, rather than a passive subject, of the ideologically constructed and legitimized regime of truth. People allow only the narratives bodying forth hegemonic beliefs and values to circulate by promoting them as manifestly true and authentic. As Charlie Noble reaffirms, "If Truth don't speak through the people, it never speaks" (163). The
Confidence-Man registers Melville’s defiance against such a view of the vox populi as the only legitimate truth. Melville intentionally deconstructs and contests the narrative form based on mimetic convention and teleological linearity—a form which he finds serves as key vehicles for circulating hegemonic ideologies. The Confidence-Man novelizes itself through Melville’s systematic dismantling of the novelistic codes and his serious doubting of the worth of the genre as "the great Art of Telling the Truth." Interpolating stories into the action of the novel in such a way as to disrupt mimetic illusion is one of such deconstructive gestures.

Much of the attraction of the interpolated stories in The Confidence-Man—not only the narrative of John Moredock but the stories of Goneril, of Charlemont, and of China Aster—lies in their ability to provide a marked contrast to the novel in which they are told. As in Moby-Dick, these interpolated tales are more realistic and more consistent, better organized by familiar conventions than the novel that contains them. However, their meanings are not the more clearly manifested; all are cited by the dubious tellers for the purpose of embellishing their skewed logic, all are told at second or third hand, all are disclaimed or retracted by the tellers, either before or after the telling, and finally their implied meanings do not support their intended purposes. Thus, Melville shows that traditional narratives
accredited as factual or objective accounts can be no less riddled by the boundless, indefinable, and murky contexts, leaving themselves open to endless interpretation. The central message voiced in the three inserted chapters on fiction (Chapters 14, 33, and 44) and demonstrated as well by the novel itself is that inconsistency ought to be looked upon not as the exception but as the norm both in the real and in the fictional world: "while to all fiction is allowed some play of invention, yet, fiction based on fact should never be contradictory to it; and is it not a fact, that, in real life, a consistent character is a *rara avis*?" (69) Significantly, such a view is still repeated in what he says of the form of fiction which deals with "fact" about thirty years later in *Billy Budd*: "The symmetry of form attainable in pure fiction cannot so readily be achieved in a narration essentially having less to do with fable than with fact. Truth uncompromisingly told will always have its ragged edges; hence the conclusions of such a narration is apt to be less finished than an architectural finial" (128).

This ever-more giddy discourse of fictional form inserted in Melville’s later fictions, however, contains a sense of quiet resignation, or more precisely, a sense of the futility of the pursuit of a "severe fidelity to real life" (182) through the order of fiction. Any kind of fiction, including one deliberately dismantling its own generic features like Melville’s, relies in one way or
another on conventionalized forms, codes, or styles, for its being. If any kind of formalization, as the narrator of *Billy Budd* suggests, entails the distortion of truth, there is no room especially for a fiction whose aim is to seek truth. Fiction writing becomes an act of sham, and the writer is nothing more than a confidence man.

In *The Confidence-Man*, Melville seems to become more skeptical than ever of the efficacy of his own poetics even as he asserts its power most triumphantly. His language here thrives in its curiously abandoned freedom and autonomy. At the same time it appears to be radically involuted and self-imprisoned. This is exemplified by one of the titles of the novel’s chapters: "Worth the consideration of those to whom it may prove worth considering" (69). Enclosed in a tautology, words here seem to say something, but in effect, refer to nothing but themselves. Language becomes a self-enclosed universe without imparting any determined meaning. Language is reduced to a meaningless set of material signs, a mere display of letters. The wall of tautology which cuts language off from the material world is much like the repressive walls which confine Bartleby in utter isolation and lethal autonomy. Just as Bartleby’s rebellious gesture indicates his helplessness in the world Wall Street represents, Melville’s fantastic play of language in *The Confidence-Man* marks his deeper skepticism about the
subversive potential of his poetics of intertextuality. Despite his insistence on what I have called subversive dialogue as the central tactic for his textual production, he does not go beyond his ironic critique to posit the counterworking antihegemonic possibilities for active resistance, nor employ it for advocating radical social change. Even at the most satirical moment in his dialogue with James Hall, he seems never to forget the inevitable limits of his interlocutor’s perception nurtured within the ideology of American exceptionalism. One of the implicit assumptions motivating his parody in *The Confidence-Man* is that rather than willfully coopting the imperialist project, Hall sees what he is trained to see, believes what he is taught to believe, and tells what his audience likes to hear.

*The Confidence-Man* suggests that Ishmael’s proclamations of "landlessness" and "the open independence of the sea" (*Moby-Dick*, 107) may be an empty gesture, a mere dream, or a naive fantasy of self-reliant autonomy. Melville seems to endorse with Emerson the idea that nobody can be free from his or her given political, social, and cultural conditions and their conventions. In fact, he has already shown in "Benito Cereno" that even the most radical act of rebellion against the established social order can be reduced to an absurd parody of the cherished conventions and practices it condemns. Exploring this theme further in *The
Confidence-Man, Melville suggests that we are all actors directed, if not pre-narrated, by the insurmountable power of the reigning ideologies of our culture. Melville’s concern about cultural determinism is again dramatized in Billy Budd, where the formal order of Captain Vere’s martial world is slightly disrupted only to be reasserted and strengthened. The narrator of Melville’s last novel concisely states Vere’s metaphysical position: "'With mankind,' he would say, 'forms, measured forms, are everything: and that is the import couched in the story of Orpheus with his lyre spellbinding the wild denizens of the wood.' And this he once applied to the disruption of forms going on across the Channel and the consequences thereof" (128). The French Revolution "going on across the Channel," for Vere, signifies social and political chaos rather than a struggle for social improvement. As his allusion to the Orpheus myth makes clear, Vere recognizes man’s artistic endeavors to be an important part of the "measured forms" which keep out disruption and chaos. Vere’s perception of art as a means of imposing an order of consensus is negated by the novel’s irregular form itself, which includes three short "sequels." But the negation lasts only temporarily. While the "ragged edges" attached to the story proper cast ambiguous shadows over Vere’s well-ordered world, inviting different viewpoints about the account of Billy’s life and death aboard the Bellipotent, the sequels eventually remind
us that only the "authorized" version of the story, however falsified and distorted, can "stand in human record" (131) to attest the past.

The "authorized naval chronicle of the time" ends its report with a statement of the triumph of "measured forms": "The criminal paid the penalty of his crime. The promptitude of the punishment has proved salutary. Nothing amiss is now apprehended aboard H.M.S. Bellipotent" (131). Full of lies as it is, the official account is accepted as true and formally complete, and becomes the source for the public assurance that at last all is right in the martial world. Inscribing the tension between his impulse to disrupt the order of "measured forms" and his sense of futility of such an act, Melville seems once again to raise the question about the social potential or social consequences of his subversive form of writing.

Like his contemporary, the novelist Balzac, whom Althusser highlights in his theoretical meditation on ideology, Melville makes us "perceive," by way of his characteristic textual operation of subversive dialogue, which can be taken as a form of "internal distanitiation," the very ideologies in which he is enmeshed. But what does this exposé of the hegemonic ideologies of his culture really mean? What significance does it have with regard to our real life? Exactly where are we to situate him with
respect to the ideological structures he lets us perceive? How are we to interpret the sense of futility that he increasingly exhibits toward the end of his writing career? Pursuing the answers to these questions leads us to the center of the recent critical debates over the reassessment of the American Renaissance in general and Melville in particular, because the answers hinge on our view of the function of literature and the role of a writer in Melville’s age and also in our time.

The New Historicism critics would argue that Melville's fiction reflects the ideological pressures and constraints he had to deal with as one who was caught in a web of national practices and discourses which constitute American exclusionary culture. Discussing Melville's poetics of individualism in her Empire for Liberty, Wai-chee Dimock, for example, argues that his pursuit of what she terms "authorial sovereignty" followed a discursive logic analogous to that which energized and legitimated the nation's pursuit of geopolitical sovereignty. She contends that "Melville's authorial enterprise can be seen...as a miniature version of Manifest Destiny." In her discussion of Moby-Dick, she notes the discursive kinship between the text's logic which blames Ahab for his fate and antebellum expansionist rhetoric which ascribes the extermination of Indians to their own choice. Like the expansionists' Indian, Dimock argues, Ahab is presented as "both doomed and
free; free, that is, to choose his doom." Thus she concludes that enchanted by the public rhetoric of America's providential expansion, Melville, perhaps unwittingly, participated in the ideological process of ratifying the bloody imperatives and sublime over-reactions of Manifest Destiny. As she remarks: "The constellation of terms that seal Ahab's fate are ... exactly those that sealed the fate of the Indians." In short, for Dimock, Melville is "speaking for ... and with" his contemporaries, "most of all, when he imagines himself to be above them, apart from them, opposed to them."²

Dimock's argument works to undermine the image of Melville as a transcending author who thinks outside the reigning categories of his national culture, an image often advanced by classic Americanists like F.O. Matthiessen and Richard Chase. But her New Historicist portrait of Melville is too overburdened with its own disciplinary ideology, which dictates the quasi-Foucauldian presentation of the individual, especially the author, as overdetermined by dominant sociohistorical forces. Melville in her study is helplessly contained or almost completely disempowered by the cultural and market forces he treats, incapable of thinking separately from the forces of his cultural context. In her insistent effort to implicate Melville in the "social governance of antebellum America," Dimock almost wholly disregards the distance between Melville and his narrators,
his earnest inquiry into the relation between ideology and narration, and his concern with perspectivism. Her interpretation questions Melville's very ability to penetrate and critique the workings of society and minimizes his potential to achieve in actuality as well as in fiction a measure of distance and independence from the constricting discursive practices of his own culture.

Dimock's emphasis on the mesmerizing power of American providential rhetoric echoes Sacvan Bercovitch's influential thesis that American culture and its polity allow, or even privilege, dissent only to relegate its oppositional force to a de facto participation in consensus ideology. In his readings of the "classic" American authors, Bercovitch pays particular attention to "a cultural symbology which not only tolerates but elicits resistance as a staple of social revitalization." He cites as an example Melville, whose "grandest No-in-thunder comes in an essay extolling America's destiny." The main problem with Bercovitch's paradigm is his preemptive elimination of the contexts for contentious dialogue between the emerging dissensus and the old consensus. By defining oppositional moments as part of the established structures and "rites," Bercovitch rejects in advance any possible grounds for transforming dissent into the bases for actual social change. Another problem in Bercovitch's discussion of Melville is, as in Dimock's, his failure to credit him with any authorial distance from his
narrators. This lacuna in Bercovitch’s and Dimock’s theorizations of the American Renaissance writers is being filled in more recent studies by scholar-critics like James Duban and John Samson, both of whom display an attentiveness to Melville’s concern with the power of narration and the problem of cultural inscription, and by "New Americanist" approach represented by Donald Pease.

In his "Chipping with a Chisel: The Ideology of Melville’s Narrators," James Duban argues that the separation of Melville’s point of view from that of his narrators is essential to a proper appreciation of Melville and his relation to his culture. He points out that Melville was fond of "creating personae and narrators whose views ... cannot in every instance profitably be taken as ‘auctorial.’" While expressing his worry about the recent critical tendency to undervalue the aesthetic dimensions of Melville’s work, Duban concludes that "Melville’s perception and artistic capacities were able to rise above the dust of consensus that blinds his narrators." This argument is suggestive for addressing the problem of Melville’s seemingly inconsistent attitude toward the American condition. For example, the Vivenza section of Mardi is extremely critical of American democracy, while Redburn and White-Jacket include moments to praise the nation in extravagant terms. Duban proposes to ascribe the latter’s
nationalistic utterances to the narrators whom their author is lampooning.

Duban’s case for the dissociation of Melville from his narrators is shared by John Samson. Focusing his discussion of Melville’s games with popular narratives which often embody the ideological assumptions of white culture, Samson, in *White Lies: Melville’s Narrative of Facts*, sees Melville’s narrators as naive and self-interested, as unthinking and self-serving, as the authors of Melville’s sources. For Samson, as for Duban, Melville basically thinks outside of the "white lies" of nineteenth-century consensus ideology--white ethnocentrism and Euro-American missionary imperialism, laissez-faire capitalism, aggressive expansionism, and Franklinian pragmatism and filiopietism.

Despite their attention to Melville’s interest in the interrelationships among narrative, genre, and ideology, both of these critics present us with an author who routinely and consistently maintains an ironic distance from his culture’s dominant ideologies. In their schemes, there is little room for irony in the point of view of the narrators themselves, their perspectives and their author’s seldom conflate, and there are no hesitations nor doubts on the part of Melville with regard to his stance toward society and his authorial power. As a result, their Melvilles appear too politically correct, abstract, sometimes too shallow, and even somewhat detached from his
sociohistorical situations they are reconstructing painstakingly.

Criticizing Bercovitch's early "jeremiad" paradigm for dissipating the forces of dissent and thus serving eventually to repress forces for social change, Donald Pease, in his "New Americanists: Revisionist Interventions into the Canon," insists on the urgent need to restore "the relations between political and cultural materials denied by previous Americanists." He goes on to maintain that "these recovered relations enable New Americanists to link repressed sociopolitical contexts within literary works to the sociopolitical issues external to the academic field." By giving representations to "disenfranchised groups previously unrepresentable," such actions will create cultural "counter-hegemonies" that will subvert "the hegemonic self-representation of the United States' culture."

Melville is likely to occupy a prominent place in the revisionist readings by New Americanists, because much of his fictional effort can sensitively respond to Pease's agenda for a new American studies. In Typee, Melville's subversive dialogues with travel narratives reveal to us how the self-proclaimed humanitarian missions of civilization and Christianization work to mistreat and dehumanize native islanders in the South Seas; in Israel Potter, Melville, by way of refashioning a revolutionary narrative, reminds us of the vast gap between the
actualities of the disenfranchised people like Israel Potter and the heightened claims of the American Revolution; in "Benito Cereno," his intertextual transaction shows how deeply the American mind was infiltrated by racial prejudices about the enslaved black people; and in The Confidence-Man, by parodying a frontier narrative, Melville brings to our consciousness how deeply involved in the violence of the Indian removal the rhetoric of Manifest Destiny was.

Throughout his career, Melville showed sympathy for mistreated indigenous peoples and disenfranchised people, although he did not write his novels from their viewpoints. He frequently expressed his anger about the atrocities perpetrated by the ruling whites against these people and classes. Thus Melville would certainly endorse Pease's critical call for political "liaisons between cultural and public realms." However, as his skepticism I have sketched above suggests, Melville seems unlikely to share the power of the letters Pease confidently evokes--a power to move the public and thus transform the world. Melville's despairing statement that "Truth is voiceless" (Mardi, 247) instead prompts us to rethink the social potential of literature and the social role of a writer for our age. Along with his suggestion that intertextuality is more than a condition of textuality, his call for the awareness of the ideological component of aesthetic judgments, and his evocation of the
inevitable convergence of politics and cultural practice, Melville's counsel to reconsider the social role of literature and the function of the author, I think, is one of the most important legacies Melville has left with us.
Notes

1. Here I concur with Gary Lindberg, who argues that in The Confidence-Man, "the problems of fiction making turn out to be the very problems of social experience," in The Confidence-Man in American Literature (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 19; Rebecca J. Kruger Gaudino also stresses the need to address the issue of fiction, as at this point in his writing career, Melville "seriously questioned the worth of fiction, this doubting the corollary of his finding life itself unexplainable, incomprehensible," in "The Riddle of The Confidence-Man," The Journal of Narrative Technique 14 (Spring 1984), p. 125.


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