

## SATIRIZING THE SPHERES

### Refiguring Gender and Authorship in Melville

Like Davis, Melville was among the most astute critics of separate-spheres ideology at the time, tracking its erosion under the economic transformation under way by midcentury. Melville shared Davis's acute awareness of the changes in gender roles the market revolution brought, as women increasingly found new employment in places ranging from factories to newspaper offices. Davis and Melville, with their uncanny capacity to perceive the dark consequences of even the sunniest developments, would consider very seriously in their fiction the liabilities of women's movement into the market. While Davis decries the damage of Emersonian authorship for women, proving her realistic model fitter for the coming Gilded Age, Melville exposes the market revolution's dismantling of separate-spheres ideology in a progressive and sympathetic—yet not always optimistic—vision of women's future in the market.

Melville has not long been associated with any innovative or progressive gender ideology in his writing. For all his sins—conspicuously womanless fiction, swaggering male narratives dominated by male relationships, where homosexual desire wins the spotlight (*Billy Budd*) and women remain mere objects of exotic sexual gratification (*Typee*)—there is ample, yet recently neglected evidence that Melville not only playfully inverted separate-spheres gender codes in *Moby-Dick*, he experimented with domestic adaptations of literary labor in “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids,” “I and My Chimney,” and his own sense of the work of writing. Melville's conception of authorship after 1850 was bitter, tormented, and depressed, crucified between reaching an increasingly indifferent readership and writing the “Gospels in this century” (Melville, *Letters* 129). However accurate this portrait might be, it obscures a persistent strain in Melville's understanding of his occupation that not only transgresses

masculine and feminine boundaries, but actively deconstructs conventional antebellum gender hierarchies in the process.

The wife of Melville's "The Apple Tree Table," for example, aggressively violates the domestic ideals of submission, piety, and antimaterialism; her attitude is best described as executive and dominant, with no pretensions toward creating a harmonious family atmosphere: "She certainly makes no attempt to create such ambience, as she frequently speaks 'indignantly,' 'contemptuously,' with 'high displeasure' and refers to her family as a group of 'fools,'" as Corey Thompson notes (41). Further, the wife's reference to piety/formal religion emerges when she "vigorously opposes" calling in the neighbors about the mysterious ticking in the old table (it's a bug, and not a spirit after all) in order to control the public (not private) rumor mill and thus avoid becoming "the laughing-stock of the whole town" (Melville, *Short Works* 378). To enforce the family's privacy in the matter, she strictly forbids her loose-lipped housemaid "that week to go to confession, lest she should tell the priest" (Melville, *Short Works* 378). Albeit this is a humorous situation in which Melville plays a joke on established conventional religion and superstition, as well as on the wife's controlling of public opinion of what goes on in the private sphere, she is shrewdly aware that rumors of the potentially supernatural table are likely to fan out of control, ironically enough, in a confidential confession within the context of organized religion. Yet another religious reference, tacitly endorsed by the tough-minded realist wife ("a female Democritus"<sup>1</sup>), emerges at the end of the story when their superstitious daughter Julia's pious moral views of the 150-year-old bug's survival as a token of "the glorified resurrection of the spirit of man" are dryly undercut by the narrator in the ensuing line: "it expired the next day" (Melville, *Short Works* 378). So much for immortality.

### Loomings and Iron Rails

The small example of the wife's no-nonsense approach toward religion and superstition in this story only scratches the surface of Melville's refiguring of public and private gender roles that extends to men. The husband narrator of "The Apple Tree Table," for example, plays the more typically female role as depicted in antebellum fiction: he is irrational, driven by emotion, overly sensitive, superstitious—qualities that render him paralyzed with fear and thus passive and powerless. While his wife fulfills more of the patriar-

chal role, he is prone to fits of passion and does not provide his family with a voice of reason. Instead he is virtually driven mad by the ticking sound in the table. She is all business to his superstition. He finds no solace in his pipe, an emblem of male domestic poise, peace, and above all, power.

Deriving satisfaction from a pipe signified that a man's business was in order, his work in the public sphere complete for the time being: the rational productivity of the market yielded to the reflective repose of pipe smoking if, according to the culture, unfinished business did not plague him in the quiet hours of the domestic sphere. Failing to unlock the mystery of the ticking table, the husband functions like a blocked writer figure, overstimulated and unable to proceed rationally or productively, which is precisely what his wife does. Romantic thought is burlesqued in the husband narrator's paralyzed irrationality, while the woman's progressive and pragmatic approach to the problem is admirably grounded in material and cultural realities. (The husband's folly and the wife's success send up the male romantic notion of authorship, which takes on more shrill and bizarre tones in *Pierre*.)

Whereas the husband brings all his powers of mind to focus painfully on the singular ticking table, leading him to no productive ends (besides perhaps by implication the very story itself), Ahab is equally self-absorbed and vexed by his unfinished business of hunting the White Whale. The chapters "The Pipe" and "The Chart" in *Moby-Dick* reveal that Ahab's disease is one suffered by professionals in the 1851 marketplace every day: his life has become dominated by all work and no play, all chart and no pipe.<sup>2</sup> Ishmaelian moments of reflection (his loomings) commonly associated with domestic ease, unlike the iron-rails obsessing that consumes Ahab, are more provisional, contradictory, and momentary. Leisure pervades domestic reflection, and in *Moby-Dick* it is expressed through the capacity to take pleasure in nature. To Ahab, "out of doors all seems a market," as Emerson said (qtd. in Gilmore 114). He has forgotten how to think reflectively much in the way he has forgotten the procedure by which to smoke a pipe on the windy deck of a ship:

[T]his smoking no longer *soothes*. Oh, my pipe! Hard it must go with me if thy *charm* be gone! Here have I been unconsciously *toiling, not pleasuring*,—aye, and ignorantly smoking to windward all the while; to windward and with such *nervous whiffs*. . . . [W]hat *business* have I with this pipe? This thing that is meant for *serenity*. . . . I'll smoke no more. (Melville, *Moby-Dick* 134; emphasis mine)

The chase has robbed Ahab of this domestic pleasure. Significantly, the reflective thinking that eludes Ahab is associated with Ishmael's reveries that lead to his playful inversions of separate-spheres gender ideology. Ishmael's flights of fancy are characterized by broad divergent thinking, rather than the results-oriented, narrowly focused, often self-absorbed, convergent thinking demanded by the market. (Of course, Starbuck's appeal to market imperatives functions as a foil to Ahab's vengeance in "The Quarter Deck," complicating Ahab's alignment with business. Ahab's obsession is nonetheless an exaggerated, imbalanced version of the reasonable, conventional acquisitive objectives for which Starbuck speaks.) Melville makes the connection between the pipe and the domestic sphere even more explicit by associating it with a wife in *Mardi*: "Like a good wife, a pipe is a friend and companion for life. And whoso weds with a pipe, is no longer a bachelor. After many vexations, he may go home to that faithful counselor, and ever find it full of kind consolations and suggestions" (qtd. in Delbanco 117). Associating leisure with the domestic may have been a fantasy for antebellum husbands, but this was obviously not the reality for their wives. The wife, the pipe, and the home are the locus of not only therapeutic counseling to undo the market's damage, but of play and freedom from rigid public codes of behavior.

In *Moby-Dick*, creativity and reflective thinking associated with leisure time on the piazza become decidedly domestic, feminine activities separate from the masculinized sphere of acquisition, competition, and economic productivity. Ishmael is the foil to Ahab due to his capacity for creativity and his distaste for business. In this vein, the novel's narrator makes the neat and tidy, emphatically domestic, state of the ship come off looking different from the messy business of turning whales into merchandise (that is, the process of chasing, killing, and extracting marketable oil and spermaceti). The "business" end of whaling is portrayed in contrasting terms to the cleaning and decorating of the ship (feminine work in the domestic sphere), between kills and extractions (masculine work in the public sphere).

### Of Penis Suits and Decorating Schemes

The work of making money out of the whale is unmistakably male, as the mincer proudly wears the "Cassock," the dried pelt of the whale's penis, while performing his task of cutting blubber for the pots. His work is vital

to the process of extracting capital from the whale. In this sense, the mincer's activity is thoroughly public and male precisely because it is concerned only with monetary success in the marketplace rather than moral success in the spiritual realm of the home. For example, the male concern with markets and money is vividly, if not satirically, depicted in the fact that he performs his work in a penis suit, focusing exclusively on the aspect of his task that affects the price of the final product: he cuts "his work into as thin slices as possible, inasmuch as by so doing the business of boiling out the oil is much accelerated, and its quantity considerably increased, beside perhaps improving it in quality." The mincer's job is also described as an "office," echoing the public nature of the position. Like any wise factory owner, he is concerned with speeding up the process of production, increasing quantity, and improving quality of the oil product for higher revenues. His work is linked to book production by the mates who cry, "Bible Leaves! Bible Leaves!" to encourage him "to cut his work into as thin slices as possible" (Melville, *Moby-Dick* 460).

While the mincer's penis suit is a burlesque<sup>3</sup> of the notion that the public activity of producing merchandise for sale is strictly a male activity (he is literally a phallus working to make money), the ship itself becomes a hellish factory in "The Try-Works." "To oversee the business" of stoking "the works" is to witness the ship's function as "the *material counterpart* of her monomaniac commander's soul" (Melville, *Moby-Dick* 462-3; emphasis mine). Ahab is to the ship as an owner is to his factory in this sense. Ishmael's portrayal does not reflect well on the capitalist system, as he makes the ship out to be an image of a fiery and smoky hell. The scene develops into an image of a satanic ritual, in which the "smoke" that "rolled away in sullen heaps" can issue equally from a factory or hell.

The dark portrayal of how the "ship groaned and dived, and yet steadfastly shot her red hell further and further into the blackness of the sea" in "The Try-Works" gives way to the light of the succeeding chapter, "The Lamp" (Melville, *Moby-Dick* 462). Ishmael makes a transition from the male spheres of the prior two chapters (which centered on the public economic labor of the mincer and the crew's dark smoky business of the tryworks) to the decidedly brighter female sphere of domesticity with the illuminating, indoor subject of "The Lamp." The importance of light is essential to effective domestic activities, for who wants "[t]o dress in the dark, and eat in the dark, and stumble in the darkness" (Melville, *Moby-Dick* 412)?

The domestic topic of the lamp receives a female image that Ishmael uses to reinforce the moral superiority of the feminine sphere over that of the masculine: "In merchantmen, oil for the sailor is more scarce than the milk of queens" (Melville, *Moby-Dick* 466). Without domestic enlightenment, Ishmael implies, men live in the dark, without the nourishment of the mother's milk. But by the same token, without the publicly produced oil to burn lamps in the parlor, the domestic sphere remains in darkness, emphatically *unenlightened*.

The transition from the ridiculous (the mincer) and hellish ("The Try-Works") realm of public production and economic domination to domesticity becomes complete in the succeeding chapter. "Stowing Down and Clearing Up" makes more explicit the fact that we now are entering a feminine, domestic sphere. (Sarah Wilson's study, "Melville and the Architecture of Antebellum Masculinity," puts Melville's gender play in this chapter into perspective, but not within the context of the development of industrial capitalism and its tropes of labor, leisure, and the work of writing as I do here.) Ishmael's point is not to devalue the work of men—on the contrary, he shows it to be essential in producing the oil that fuels the lamp as a vital part of the domestic tool of enlightenment. What he does do is portray the domestic sphere in a brighter, more favorable light than the gloomy, dark world of the masculine, public sphere of acquisition. Ishmael even suggests that public acquisition and merchandising threaten to taint the domestic sphere: he indicts the men atop the mastheads for ruining the ship's domestic order by "spying out more whales, which, if caught, infallibly will again soil the old oaken furniture, and drop at least one small grease-spot somewhere" (Melville, *Moby-Dick* 469). But worrying about "one small grease spot somewhere" on a whaler is nothing short of laughable, as Ishmael seems equally interested in milking the silliness of separate-spheres ideology for its full comic resonance.

On a whaling ship, the sphere of public production and the domestic sphere of private consumption are integrated and mutually dependent. Separating them out in the context of a whaler is the source of Ishmael's playfulness. He makes fun of this rigid dichotomy by transforming the crew from male producers to domestic housewives reigning over their private sphere of consumption. After stowing down and cleaning up, the crew takes pleasure in the domestic bliss of their "scrupulously neat" surroundings, as though "new-leaped from out the daintiest Holland" (Melville,

*Moby-Dick* 469). Their talk moves to decorations and the artistic arrangement of the items on the deck, providing a welcome creative and even spiritual activity. This is a domestic sphere well suited to imaginative activities, like writing, performed at home “in clean tabernacles of the soul.” The private economy of domesticity on a whaler encourages discussion of the artistic arrangement of “parlors, sofas, carpets, and fine cambrics; propose to mat the deck; think of having hangings to the top; object not to taking tea by moonlight on the piazza of the fore-castle” (Melville, *Moby-Dick* 469). (It was Ahab who could not smoke a pipe on “the piazza of the fore-castle.”) Indeed, to Ishmael, the mere mention of public marketplace business seems profane on the freshly cleaned ship: “To hint to such musked mariners of oil, and bone, and blubber, were little short of audacity. Away, and bring us napkins!” (Melville, *Moby-Dick* 469). Of course, the ironic joke in this scene is that these are a bunch of burly sailors (imagine a brutish cuss like Flask demanding napkins!) on a whaling ship, not middle-class American housewives clucking over decorations for a house. Indeed, there is no shortage of mockery and even sarcasm in the image of sailors planning “tea” on the fore-castle deck and clamoring for “napkins” in place of “oil, . . . bone, and blubber.”

Ishmael’s extended satire of separate-spheres ideology goes on as he longs for an antiseptic domestic situation (with buttoned “necks of clean frocks”) free from calls to chase the whale, an activity he believes makes us dirty physically as well as spiritually: “For hardly have we mortals by long toilings extracted from this world’s vast bulk its small but precious sperm; and then . . . cleansed ourselves from its defilements, and learned to live here in clean tabernacles of the soul . . . when—*There she blows!*” (Melville, *Moby-Dick* 469).

Interestingly enough, Ishmael sings praises for a tidy ship in a way that integrates gender boundaries while simultaneously mocking the silliness of their rigid separation: remember, here is an all-male crew discoursing on the joys of decorating. Melville acknowledged the fact that his book did not fit into conventional gender codes.<sup>4</sup> He knew this was no domestic novel, and thus understood that the feminine sensibilities and literary cross-dressing of Ishmael would be lost to the general reader. Despite such lengthy segments devoted to skewing gender lines as the one above, the maternal whale birthing in “The Grand Armada,” and Ahab’s tear drop in “The Symphony,” Melville discouraged a friend of the family, Sarah More-

wood, from reading *Moby-Dick*. In a 12 September 1851 letter, Melville advised the woman,

Don't you buy it—don't you read it, when it does come out, because it is by no means the sort of book for you. It is not a piece of fine Spitalfields silk—but is of the horrible texture of a fabric that should be woven of ships' cables and hausers. A Polar wind blows through it, & birds of prey hover over it. Warn all gentle fastidious people from so much as peeping into the book—on the risk of a lumbago & sciatics. (Melville, *Letters* 138)

Among other things, this warning amounts to more of Melville's epistolary posturing as a literary outlaw—something he especially liked to do in letters to Hawthorne in which he spoke of his novel as a “wicked” book “broiled in hell fire” (Melville, *Correspondence* 212, 196). But more to the point, Melville seems to resist the marketplace premium set on domestic novels of manners read by “fastidious people.” He characterizes the book as a rugged, male, out-of-doors story only for readers as tough as “cables and hausers” able to endure “a polar wind.” No “napkins” and “tea” here.<sup>5</sup>

As much as Melville portrays *Moby-Dick* in this instance as a rough, chafing world in the great outdoors, he persistently was irritated by the intrusion of this male world into the domestic work of writing. He complains of the rugged outdoors burdening his writing in a letter to Evert Duyckinck dated 6 October 1850: after a lengthy pastoral sketch, he exclaims in frustration, “A hammer! Yes a hammer is before me—the very one that so cruelly bruised the very finger that guides my pen. I can sentimentalize it [i.e., the rugged male world of the outdoors] no more” (Melville, *Letters* 114–5). Elsewhere in his letters he whines about the blisters on his hands that make writing so much more uncomfortable than it has to be. In his June 1851 letter to Hawthorne, he gripes about the encroachment of physical labor on his work of writing, allowing, “I'm rather sore, perhaps, in this letter; but see my hand! Four blisters on this palm made by hoes & hammers within the last few days” (Melville, *Log* 412).

Melville would prefer not to have to labor and write, for he considers writing, at least in this case, not to be labor. Indeed, an economically driven day's work for him is an impediment to, rather than a tonic for, good writing. He sees the ideal condition for writing to be leisurely, nonlaboring, and emphatically domestic. Ishmael's complaints about the grubbiness of oil production parallel Melville's complaints about the blisters on



his hands in a way that favors the domestic sphere for reflective thinking on the piazza of the forecandle deck, and at the writing desk. This does not mean that Melville rejects the masculinity of the public sphere of production and acquisition. Quite the contrary, he dislocates masculinity from the sphere of production in the marketplace and tries to lodge it in a domestic setting. The clearest example of this gesture is visible in “I and My Chimney.”

#### Domestic Economy in “I and My Chimney”

The narrator of “I and My Chimney” shuts himself up in his home in order to engage in reflective thought, presumably more appropriate for a domestic situation than the marketplace. In doing so, he does not transform into a female figure simply because he is a domestic creature. Instead, he deliberately endeavors to redefine the gender of the interior space of the home, making the chimney—a phallus—its central icon and even a shrine worthy of worship. This and Melville’s other later stories move away from “the problematic realm of mythic symbol and moral ambiguity to the safer level of social irony,” as Reynolds notes, to which I would add that gender ideology was one of Melville’s favorite social ironies (Reynolds, *Beneath* 162). Melville’s inversion of gender ideology in these stories is no less problematic and “safer” than the subversive elements of *Moby-Dick*.<sup>6</sup>

The tension of “I and My Chimney” revolves around the narrator’s continual efforts to protect this space from two forces that threaten either to commodify or demasculinize his chimney and thus his space.<sup>7</sup> The marketplace figure who comes to assess the number of bricks in the chimney to suggest that he sell it for a profit fails to appeal to the narrator’s unmoving dedication to his object of meditation that stands for his work of writing. His authorship will not be sold. His wife wants to tear down the chimney in order to open up the house more, and tear down walls, creating a more cohesive, communal atmosphere. Her floor plan is unmistakably feminine—the entryway opens onto a wide hallway channeling visitors inward—while the present arrangement features the chimney as a giant phallic symbol protruding through the middle of the house around which rooms are choppily divided and isolated. In clinging to his chimney, the narrator tries desperately to masculinize the domestic sphere in order to masculinize the work of writing.<sup>8</sup> The chimney represents ideal condi-

tions for the work of writing. It is an object of meditation like the whale, unfathomable and incomprehensible from one vantage point within one field of vision.

The aptly named Mr. Scribe is a representative not only of the commercial and business world, but, as his name suggests, of the literary marketplace.<sup>9</sup> He is in the business of profiting from the removal of the chimney, the outward token of the writer figure's (that is, the narrator's) imagination. Removing the chimney means eliminating the narrator's potential for financially disinterested thinking. This phallic chimney is noncommercial in contrast to the all-commercial phallus in *Moby-Dick* because it represents a gesture of male resistance to economic and social pressure to conform to the marketplace. The chimney is a token of masculinity that resists marketplace appropriation and thus neat pigeonholing within separate-spheres ideology that assign men to make their identities, careers, and profits in the public market and women to form theirs through moral teaching at home. In Melville's fiction, "scribe" comes to represent the vulgar commodification of authorship for print capitalism, as seen in the occupation of the spiritually dead marketplace writer figure, "Bartleby the Scrivener." Indeed, Mr. Scribe is an opportunist whose work has the effect of dislodging the amateur writer figure from his cozy surroundings, thereby unceremoniously throwing him into the marketplace of professionals. As a sign of the times in which authorship increasingly became enlisted as a trade and business, Mr. Scribe not only represents the historical inevitability of the marketplace appropriation of the writer's imagination. He also stands to earn a handsome sum from his efforts as an exemplary 1850s capitalist: it was quite evident that "Mr. Scribe, for all his pretended disinterestedness, was not opposed to pocketing five hundred dollars by the operation [of removing the chimney]" (Melville, *Short Works* 347).

Indeed, the sentiment of the narrator of "I and My Chimney" echoes Melville's complaints throughout his letters about the interference of financial responsibilities with his writing. The confluence of Melville's professional frustration with his waning control over the domestic sphere, the site of his authorial labor, is deftly combined with a critique of materialist values in the context of increasingly structured, even corporate schemes of production and consumption at the dawn of industrial capitalism in America—schemes that are so pervasive as to rearrange gender relations in the home. The story satirizes the lazy male narrator who now clings to the

domestic sphere as much as it mocks the acquisitive wife, who threatens to redesign him right out of his own living room in her new role as high-stakes consumer aligned with Mr. Scribe, the figure of public commerce. The joke is not a one-way attack on the wife; it is a more progressive and humorous deconstruction (or unmasking) of the scramble for new gender roles within a changing economic context. The narrator is roundly mocked in his role as the stubborn, curmudgeonly, do-nothing husband,<sup>10</sup> a self-effacing, humorous target for Melville's own literary enterprise as foolish and delusional. In light of the wife's new alarming behavior, the scene and tone do not bear out a conservative ideological import for the story as a whole, as it is closer to the antebellum equivalent of a subversive domestic situation comedy (a smart one nonetheless loaded with social commentary on the changing roles of the sexes).<sup>11</sup>

Melville critiques capitalism by showing that market demands not only inhibit the creation of art by appropriating the author's imagination for mass consumption. Commercial values also potentially see beauty as a liability rather than an asset: "if my chimney was allowed to stand in that invalid condition, my policy of insurance would be void. This was a sort of hint not to be neglected. All the world over, the picturesque yields to the pocketesque. The mortgagor cared not, but the mortgagee did" (Melville, *Short Works* 332). The insurance company, in this case, represents the public sphere of the marketplace, not only as a place, but as a state of mind in every way opposed to what writers do: the implication is that the Scribes of the world would not hesitate to straighten the Leaning Tower of Pisa if there were money in it, eagerly sacrificing the picturesque for profit in service of the new aesthetic Melville mockingly calls "the pocketesque." Interestingly, the narrator's antimaterialism is consonant with women's domestic roles, as Welter notes, which was thought to counterbalance the husband's work in the public sphere through the avoidance of the pleasures and values of "materialistic society" at home (38). Along with his antimaterialism, the narrator shows piety in his pseudoreligious attachment to his totemic chimney and ultimately submits, silent and docile, to his wife's will at the end of the story, echoing the conventional three-part female domestic role (antimaterialism, piety, and submissiveness). "Domesticity" is not merely a safe place for a male writer to forge an identity in a market that has designs on his "head." Nor is it inverted and subverted for its own sake. Instead domesticity functions as a viable, culturally accessible discourse

through which Melville criticizes capitalism, which, interestingly, cannot be said to be embodied by the female in a simple inversion, invoking the Hawthornian resistance to what he called “that damned scribbling mob” of successful women writers at the time. Instead, the market transcends gender, as a man, Mr. Scribe, and a woman, the narrator’s wife, embody it. In short, Melville’s authorial grip on the domestic sphere provided him the best vantage point from which to dismantle and expose the market’s impact on women’s roles and priorities.

In this sense, the wife, though not enlisted among the public economic ranks of Mr. Scribe and the “mortgagee,” is clearly an enemy and not an ally. This is because she stands for change and, albeit domestic, an economic order. Melville insinuates that his narrator’s private sphere of creativity has been infiltrated by female domestic economy, a force subversive to his ironically noneconomic, masculine space. He admits, “I have a little authority” in the domestic sphere. “[Because of] my wife’s ingenious application of the principle that certain things belong of right to female jurisdiction, I find myself, through my easy compliances, insensibly stripped by degrees of one masculine prerogative after another” (Melville, *Short Works* 336). Like Whitman loafing and inviting his soul, Melville’s narrator fantasizes about a life of reflective leisure free from economic necessity, only to find his wife busily planning to build a new barn: “in a dream I go about my field, a sort of lazy, happy-go-lucky, good-for-nothing, loafing, old Lear. Only by some sudden revelation am I reminded of who is over me” as he discovers timber stacked in the yard (Melville, *Short Works* 338). Melville mocks such resistance to the economic historical inevitability, as it were, that the wife represents; if the narrator shares the author’s values, then in this case the author is emphatically jeering at them in all of their pathetic defensiveness.

Interestingly, in “I and My Chimney,” female “domestic economy” is aligned with materialism and against economically disinterested amateur creativity. In the segments of *Moby-Dick* discussed earlier, the domestic is a sphere of *consumption*, while the public aspects of the whale (his commodification) designate the sphere of production. It is not that my reading of Ishmael pegs him as noneconomic and feminine. Rather, I cast Ishmael as a figure aware of the separate-spheres ideology as a rigid cultural construct that gives rise to different roles according to gender, equally ridiculous in the way he portrays them: the “female” of the domestic sphere of

consumption calls for napkins while the male works away industriously in his penis suit! “I and My Chimney” similarly does not define female as “noneconomic,” but indeed as mutually reinforcing to the *public* male sphere of Mr. Scribe. Separate-spheres in this story, as in *Moby-Dick*, are not separate at all; the narrator’s wife and Mr. Scribe work *together* just as publicly produced oil would be worthless were it not for its domestic consumption as the fuel for illuminating the parlor.

The collusion between the two for materialistic ends is Melville’s main criticism in “I and My Chimney.” The wife wants to take down the chimney to increase the capacity for consumption (that is, to open up the house’s design so that it can more easily swallow up or take in people and things from the outside world, including publicly produced commodities), while Mr. Scribe wants to take it down to enhance his stock of production for public sale. The wife wants to develop the domestic sphere’s function as a site of consumption by increasing the house’s capacity to entertain guests with ample room for dancing, for example. Mr. Scribe’s impulse complements hers. He wants to exploit the chimney’s salability for production as bricks, later to become building material. The narrator and his chimney stand in the way of the two spheres’ pressures toward increased production and consumption—a phenomenon designed to boost production and make consumption easier—the economic dynamic that is at the heart of industrialization and capitalistic development.

The wife of the story is a figure akin to the economically driven Dame van Winkle, contrasting with the narrator’s sleepy Rip, a figure of reflection and storytelling totally allergic to work for a material reward:

The maxim, ‘Whatever is, is right,’ is not hers. Her maxim is, Whatever is, is wrong; and what is more, must be altered; and what is more must be altered right away. *Dreadful maxim for the wife of a dozy old dreamer like me, who dote on seventh days as days of rest, and, out of a sabbatical horror of industry, will, on a weekday, go out of my way a quarter of a mile to avoid the sight of a man at work.* (Melville, *Short Works* 336; emphasis mine)

The “sabbatical horror of industry” is the feature that I have drawn out in Melville’s fiction and biography. Because the alternative to work in the marketplace is always reflective thinking—whether Ishmaelian philosophizing, romantic conjuring before the chimney, or gazing from the piazza—Melville shows that he resisted the historical inevitability of the

professionalization of authorship and the commodification of the mind. Such resistance is the subject of his self-parody in "I and My Chimney."

Melville's professional frustrations, in part, came from the fact that he never respected (and always distrusted) what he assumed to be an exclusively monetary measure of "success" in the business world. In addition, Melville's portrait of himself as a woodcutter (a "hack writer" of sorts) suggested a sense of hopelessness in gaining financial prosperity from his writing. He felt trapped in the position of laborer, unable to ascend and reap the rewards of an industry that was making authorship an increasingly lucrative enterprise. Melville undoubtedly desired financial success from his writing, but felt excluded from it by a system that seemed to work to his disadvantage. He expressed these anxieties in an 1849 letter in which he berated "the class of wealthy people, in the aggregate, [as] such a mob of gilded dunces." His philosophy matches Ishmael's, the proud bearer of an empty purse, when he urges that "not to be wealthy carries with it a certain distinction & nobility" (Melville, *Letters* 97).

### The Dark Side of Domesticity

While "I and My Chimney" may have dark domestic inflections beneath its comic surface, gender play and inversion expose exploitation as the point of literature's origin in "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," a diptych written two years after "Bartleby the Scrivener." The process of literary production that eventuates in Bartleby's exploitation as an author in the marketplace has its origins in the production of the paper he writes on. The factory in "the Tartarus of Maids" produces the commodity of paper, the sheets on which Melville inscribes his fiction and the readers read it. As Michael Gilmore observes, "The Massachusetts paper mill is the point of origin for the 'dead letters' of 'Bartleby,' the place where literature begins in an act of exploitation" (Gilmore 144). Melville reveals a strong conviction in the diptych that literature has been corrupted by privilege. Melville exposes how gender produces such privilege by transposing men into a domestic world of blissful consumption and women into a world of market production and factory toil, with resulting images as absurdly asinine as they are crushingly tragic.

The more fortunate bachelors gorge themselves on a delightful dinner and pass their evenings exchanging stories. The privileged and dandified

gentlemen of “the Paradise of Bachelors” fatten themselves upon the women’s labor of the paper factory in “the Tartarus of Maids.” Like the lawyer in “Bartleby,” the bachelors are the economic beneficiaries whose consumption and tale telling are directly linked through literary production to the oppression of the factory workers. Significantly, their “literariness,” as Michael Newbury calls it, is controlled and conditioned by domesticity. That domesticity, I want to emphasize, is absurd and ridiculous: the evening is organized around a codified, ritualized, culturally regulated multicourse dinner that pretends to be more about camaraderie than gluttony and inebriation, with the men refusing to take drinks unless another will join him and toast to his health (Melville, *Short Works* 61). (What sacrifice! What a bond!) They “suffer” great pains to keep their slumbering fellow bachelor’s sleep undisturbed in the room below their gathering; they proudly bear an association with the “Templars” (an order of knights), yet their only physical challenge is descending the stairs tanked on wine, and their only encounter with death is the end of the meal itself, which bears the realization—delivered in maudlin, melodramatic tones—that, like the evening, the bachelors too must die. Melville mocks their superannuation along with their decided lack of real risk or confrontation with death of the sort the *Pequod’s* crew encounters. The joke is that these men haven’t the slightest capacity for the physical bravery and daring of the Templars of old; they are softened and silly as they cluck over each other in an atmosphere of overdetermined safety and insulation from the world’s dangers, particularly economic concern.

Gender inversions further surface as interior decoration is of the highest priority to the gentlemen in an echo of “Stowing Down and Clearing Up”: the “domiciles” and “smug cells” give way to the “dining room” with “furniture” that “was wonderfully unpretending, old . . . snug” and inviting, and not glaring or gaudy. The perfection of domestic taste stands for culture and literature itself; these author figures are consummate consumers, or “Mouths” (to the women’s “hands”), signifying one of the most basic domestic male roles of consuming (usually the wife’s) domestic productions made of food, fabric, and moral counsel (Melville, *Short Works* 205–6). Their cheeks flush with red wine, while the women workers increasingly pale and dye (and thus “die” as the homonym suggests) the paper they seem to produce with their own blood.

The dark import of the playful gender inversion extends to “the Tar-



tarus of Maids,” a potential sexual paradise for Cupid stymied by the machines that metaphorically sterilize the virgins'/maids' capacity for organic human sex and monopolize their maternal powers for synthetic, artificial productivity. The sexual (and economic) powerlessness of the men in the factory who helplessly stand by while machines seem to have taken their places leaves the narrator with a “strange emotion.” Other men who might produce progeny are the bachelors in their paradise. Their sexuality is potent, however, only in a self-indulgent, solipsistic, and decadent way; Melville associates their gluttony with anal sex, as Bruce Franklin and others have shown.<sup>12</sup> However fecund with food and bonding, male erotic power is sterilized by its homosexual exclusivity. While the erotic is redirected through the conventions of an exclusive aesthetic club for the bachelors, sexual power is isolated and technologized for the maids. Progeny becomes paper. The narrator's queasy feeling from witnessing this parasitical bloodletting, this slow death—he blanches from shock—cue the reader to also feel disturbed by the stark social injustice of the contrasting worlds as he does, and reenter social reality “wrapped in . . . meditations” not cozy and domestic, but shocking and stunning, like the “winter air . . . more bitter than elsewhere” that surrounds him as he departs (Melville, *Short Works* 222). The social activism of the story rides metaphorically on the gusts of chill air—of the dehumanizing exploitation that lush domestic, literary life parasitically relies upon—that chill narrator and reader alike. The bizarre and darkly humorous sexual separation accrues from the gentlemen's pious platitudes and their “sublime obliviousness to the suffering on which they fattened. In this way, Melville mercilessly anatomized” his readers not to dismiss them as unchangeable, as Karcher argues, but to wake them to social consciousness by holding a most unpleasant mirror before them, in an almost Brechtian attempt to defamiliarize<sup>13</sup> them from a benign sense of their roles in the capitalist system, exposing their systemic complicity with oppressive, exploitative labor (2404). The subversive import of the story's narrative effect is not precluded by Melville's own personal sense of hopelessness in the condition of professional authorship. The laughable outcome of such exploitative gender relationships conceals the darker truth that the economic inequities of the story are urgent and in need of immediate change.

While not humorless, the diptych is the darker political exposé of the softer, more amiable and humorous call to arms found in “The Apple



Tree Table,” which offers gentle encouragement to women to change their submissive, domestic roles and assume a different kind of power and demeanor in the home. In other words, the conflation of public and private roles for men and women still bears the mark of exploitation as a part of Melville’s assault on emerging industrial capitalism.<sup>14</sup>

Like *Pierre* and *Bartleby*, the women factory workers are significantly both book producers and victims of capitalism. Melville is not just concerned with criticizing market society in some generalized way in these works. Instead, he very specifically attends to the deconstruction of gender within the power structure of literary production and the economics of authorship. In particular, Melville presents the smug prosperity of the class of “gentlemen” in his diptych resting on the extorted labor of the workers they dehumanize. One of the nightmares Melville envisioned was a division of labor so pervasive that it would divide the sexes and sterilize humankind. Indeed, the “theme of bachelor,” as Loren Goldner notes, is “so pervasive” in Melville’s work, along with “the absence of real women characters . . . as to open up a whole perspective that would take [Melville criticism] far afield” (223). The diptych exposes that “the social division of labor” separates and thus sterilizes “the foppish bachelors and the blank factory workers” (Goldner 225).<sup>15</sup> Such alienation has biographical echoes. Indeed, this phase in Melville’s career marked a distinct alienation from his wife and friends, most notably Hawthorne, yet his writing still questioned and challenged materialism and domestic gender roles; he never fully capitulated to the dominant ideology.

If his mind never surrendered, his body did: the labor of producing literature for a wage took its toll, as he physically suffered the consequences of ill health from 1852 to 1858. His failing eyesight prevented him from finding solace through reading, while other symptoms appear to be related to his increasing alienation from his labor, paralleling those ailments suffered by Nippers and Turkey of the 1853 “*Bartleby*” story. He continued to write during this period despite these trying circumstances. We clearly see the turbulence that arose after the failure of *Moby-Dick* inscribed into the pages of *Pierre*. There is no question that professionally, mentally, and physically Melville suffered. Perhaps the most telling catastrophe of this period of financial anxiety occurred in 1853. Harper, his publisher, lost

the plates of his novel and almost all the copies of his book in a fire that completely destroyed their facilities. His books were put out again but had lost what little momentum they originally established. If there had been any hope for the sale of Melville's novels, it was dashed just as certainly as reviewers had advised readers that *Moby-Dick* was "so much trash," and "an absurd book" (qtd. in Parker, *Herman Melville* 19). Melville's revelation of the work of writing as a professional endeavor that would significantly refigure gender codes in an economic condition controlled by exclusive privilege perhaps was apparently too combustible for literary markets to house.



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## DREAMS DEFERRED

### Ambition and the Mass Market in Melville and King

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Artists' fame is the most monstrous of all, for it implies the idea of immortality. And that is a diabolical snare, because the grotesquely megalomaniac ambition to survive one's death is inseparably bound to the artist's probity. . . . [But] to write without that ambition is cynicism: a mediocre novelist who consciously produces books that are ephemeral, commonplace, conventional—thus not useful, thus burdensome, thus noxious—is contemptible. This is the novelist's curse: his honesty is bound to the vile stake of his megalomania.

Milan Kundera, "What Is a Novelist?" (2006)

This book's threefold emphasis on capitalist critiques, transformations of the book market, and commentary about the new role of women pairs three ways in which authors responded to the market revolution. Underlying the larger themes of romanticism in the marketplace and the gender of authorship in all these case studies is the question of popularity versus greatness, of catering to the masses or writing for immortality. Indeed, the market corruption Wilson and Thoreau uncovered was driven, in part, by both authors' frustrations with a market blind to—and thus unwilling to support financially—the higher truths they proclaimed: truths about nothing less than racial injustice; rampant, callow materialism; and soul-killing divided labor. Fern, Whitman, Davis, and even Melville early in his career all courted popular success, yet grappled with the formation of a mass market that seemed to threaten their achievement of literary greatness. Was it possible to write for immortality under economic conditions that increasingly commercialized the world of letters and set moral and financial ambitions at odds? All of the authors in this book wrote for money while openly assailing certain aspects of the market; even Fern frowned upon the uncouth business practice of "gentleman" publishers citing trade courtesy as a method of entrapment of lady writers. Did such moral objectives eclipse professional goals for sales and profits? How was

this paradoxical, often fruitful tension played out in terms of authors' reactions to the menacing tyranny of the mass market then and now? Anne E. Boyd addresses this question in *Writing for Immortality*, on popular women authors of the period. I use a similar approach to Melville and extend the discussion into the present day by applying it to Stephen King, Hanif Kureishi, and Douglas Coupland. These authors straddle such disparate categories of ethnicity, transnational identity, and status, both popular and canonical (Kureishi has recently risen to this status for the post-colonial anti-Thatcher political bent of his 1980s works), and point toward the significance of authorship's definition within and against consumer culture in the global literary market.

In the early 1850s, Herman Melville's "career long conflict with his readers" dramatically escalated, according to William Charvat (*Profession* 204). Likewise, Stephen King issued his harshest attack on his readers in the early 1980s, surfacing a conflict seldom voiced in his career that arose out of his aspirations to serious literary fiction, if not the creation of the Great American Novel itself. While Melville was trying to disassociate himself from his reputation based on his early successful novel, *Typee*, as "the man who lived among the cannibals" in the early 1850s with *Moby-Dick* and *Pierre*, King harbored a strong desire to elevate himself above his popular readership beginning in the early 1980s, a goal he found profoundly difficult to achieve given the sheer force of his audience's demand. This struggle to liberate himself from the clutches of his Constant Reader, ironically enough, is the focal point of his wildly popular 1987 horror novel, *Misery*. Similarly, Melville's animosity toward a market blind to his serious fiction drives the oddest and angriest novel of his career, *Pierre, or The Ambiguities*, written during the nadir of *Moby-Dick's* critical and commercial failure. Compounding *Moby-Dick's* failure was the sheer effort that went into it: Andrew Delbanco calls it "the most ambitious book ever conceived by an American writer" (124).

What we learn by placing Melville and King together in this conclusion is that their worst professional nightmares would be fictionalized in phantasmagoric, sensationalized visions that functioned both to confess their canonical dreams and to rage at themselves and their mass audiences for threatening the realization of those dreams. These two towering figures are known for opposite reasons, King for his commercial success and Melville for his enduring canonical status, yet they share in *Misery* and

*Pierre* an occupational anxiety at two analogous junctures in their careers, a sudden sense that their literary legacies were being cemented before their eyes by economic forces, especially a consumerist ethos that was swallowing up their readership, largely beyond their control. Coupland, a transnational Canadian novelist, currently struggles with canonical dreams in spite of his popular status, which he simultaneously courts and renounces through the anticonsumerist themes of his tales.

In his new biography, Andrew Delbanco's comments on Melville's self-mockery in *Pierre* can equally apply to King's frustration at creating such an obtuse, vile readership as that represented by Annie, his allegorical Constant Reader of *Misery*. King loathes himself for wallowing in the filth of low culture: if he created Annie and Annie likes Liberace and figurines, then he is (at his worst) a producer of kitsch, or so he is confessing, on par with garage-sale velvet portraits of dogs playing pool. On the other hand, in Melville "we have a parody of the Romantic author imagining himself as high priest charged by god to bring forth Truth," as Delbanco says, whose embrace of the hermit artist role only rendered "a blocked and stupendously pretentious writer . . . indifferent to a world that generously returned the indifference" (196). Both men mock themselves in *Pierre* and *Misery* for their failures to achieve high culture's crown of literary status—one for aiming too high and alienating common readers as Melville does with *Moby-Dick* and the other for aiming too low and courting a crowd below himself and humanity in general. The dilemma of being caught between the high and the low, and the very real presence of a mass audience that could at once make an author wealthy and rob him or her of immortality, remains a concern among today's transnational authors, as I conclude with a discussion of Coupland and Kureishi.

King's *Misery* was published during a decade defined by its materialism<sup>1</sup> and widely associated with the film *Wall Street*, which informed viewers that "greed is good"; *Pierre* emerged during the decade in which Melville would pen his own "story of Wall Street." Such times bore profound developments in the mass market hostile to popular authors (Melville was known for *Typee*'s success) with canonical aspirations (Melville achieved such status thirty years after his death): a sharp rise in mass readership, as the introduction shows, transformed authorship into a commercial enterprise in Melville's antebellum America<sup>2</sup> and made genre fiction writers richer than ever during the corporate power surge of King's postmodern

1980s.<sup>3</sup> When placed next to each other, *Pierre* and *Misery*, the writers' most self-reflexive novels—in which they hold their careers up to the closest self-scrutiny of all their fiction—illuminate how their most acute moments of professional crisis arose from the collision of canonical dreams and the realities of consumerist literary markets, the “diabolical snare” of striving for immortality, when the “ephemeral, commonplace, conventional” is demanded (Kundera 42). Such a link prevents them from appearing “reared beyond the commonality of civilization; as if there was no recognizable thread” that could bind them, as Cynthia Ozick laments the current fear in criticism of crossing historical thresholds: “the key is indebtedness, the key is connectedness” (“Literary” 74). Hence, this chapter serves the purpose of expanding the scope of the study.

The fictional origin of that thread is located precisely where Melville's bitterness takes over midway through *Pierre* as he goes on the offensive against those who played a hand in the failure of *Moby-Dick*—publishers, reviewers, and readers. He and King alike mock the literary marketplace as much as their own complicit roles in it. Annie is depicted as subhuman, a kind of murderous pig; contrast this with Melville's villains in *Pierre*, who, while they bear the marks of genteel, privileged snobbery, are at least not painted as beasts or monsters.

Robert Milder's new and important addition to Melville scholarship, *Exiled Royalties: Melville and the Life We Imagine*, also acknowledges such self-mockery but emphasizes the Freudian implications rather than the professional and biographical situation: “Melville turned against himself early in *Pierre* through the mocking self-reference of the Glendinning/Gansevoort parallels and the giddy delight his narrator takes in promising to topple Pierre from his ‘noble pedestal’ and strip him of all inward and outward complacencies” (130). Such evidence can situate Melville as a “Freudian melancholic,” but the “complacencies” he attacks in *Pierre* also speak volumes to Melville's own sense of inadequacy at formulating a notion of authorship that might enable him to write Gospels without dollars damning him. His well known complaint to Hawthorne is relevant here: “What I feel most moved to write, that is banned,—it will not pay. Yet, altogether, write the *other* way I cannot. So the product is a final hash and all my books are botches” (Melville, *Letters* 191).

Like King's Annie, Melville's villains in *Pierre* arise out of his sense of being prevented by an unjust system from producing his very best work.

Pierre's "burning desire to deliver what he thought to be new, or at least miserably neglected Truth to the world; and the prospective menace of being absolutely penniless, unless by the sale of his book he could realize the money" are also Melville's (Melville, *Pierre* 133). Emory Elliot has recently rejected a critical tradition of collapsing Melville and Pierre into one, by claiming that Melville's humor at Pierre's expense distances author from character, and that Pierre never resorts to spiritual or philosophical thought to rescue himself from despair (Elliot 194). Despite differences, the chief anxiety plaguing both was the prospect of writing "the Gospels of this century" only to "die in the gutter" (Melville, *Letters* 129). This is the dark, skeptical underside of Pierre's sunny resolve "to give the world a book, which the world should hail with surprise and delight" (Melville, *Pierre* 333). Melville eerily foreshadows in the pages of the novel itself the rejection of *Pierre* he would receive from his London publisher, Bentley. Pierre's letter, like Bentley's, voices skepticism in the author's capacity to produce a book for mass consumption "[u]pon the pretense of writing a popular novel" (Melville, *Pierre* 420).

Pierre's premature attempt "to write a mature book" is precisely the mistake Melville's British publisher, Richard Bentley, suspected when Melville offered him the proofs of the new novel. Bentley distrusted that *Pierre* would perform any better than *Mardi*, *Redburn*, *White-Jacket*, and *Moby-Dick* for good reason: these novels had brought the publisher a loss of £453. Bentley could therefore not afford to pay a lump sum for the copyright and offered Melville the less-than-desirable deal of publishing his "new work [*Pierre*]" on a joint account with Melville, with payments of half profits as they arose. Even under such a deal Bentley could not hope to reduce his losses by more than £100. Bentley's offer, sent on 4 March 1852, insulted and offended Melville not only because of its stinginess, but because his publisher had clearly lost faith in him as an author: "I fear," Melville's publisher told him, "your books . . . are produced in too rapid succession" (Melville, *Letters* 149).

In April, Melville wrote back to his London publisher to renegotiate the terms. In so doing, he made the appeal to his publisher that *Pierre* was an entirely new work, like nothing he had done before, "treating . . . utterly new scenes & characters; . . . and very much more calculated for popularity than anything you have yet published of mine" (Melville, *Letters* 150). Like the character Pierre, who begins his book with the idea

of reinventing himself both personally and professionally, Melville tells his publisher that the author of poor-selling books can be forgotten: “Let bygones be bygones; let those previous books, for the present, take care of themselves. For here now we have a *new* book, and what shall we say about *this*?” (Melville, *Letters* 150). With all the hopefulness and naiveté of Pierre, he attempts to deny and flee his past of public humiliation and rejection by asking, “If nothing has been made on the old book, may not something be made on the new?” (Melville, *Letters* 150). Melville even goes so far in this appeal to suggest that *Pierre* appear under a pseudonym, “‘By a *Vermont-er*’ say, or ‘By *Guy Winthrop*.’” Such a new work warranted a new authorial persona, Melville reasoned, to disaffiliate *Pierre* from his now tarnished reputation. Pierre’s own escape into the anonymity of New York City is the fictional expression of this professional urge (Melville, *Letters* 151).

Bentley’s reply terminated negotiations with Melville, citing that not only would publication under his imprint require the original half-profits deal he offered, but that the novel would be subject to substantial revisions without Melville’s consent; a policy of “silent editing” that is humbling to any writer, to say the least. *Mardi* and *Moby-Dick* would have been more suitable for mass consumption, Bentley told his author, “If you had . . . restrained your imagination somewhat and had written in a style to be understood by the great mass of readers—nay if you had not sometimes offended the feelings of many sensitive readers you would have succeeded in England” (Melville, *Letters* 151). In *Pierre*, Melville lampoons such motives in the publishing firm of “Steel, Flint and Asbestos,” referencing the stuff of cold manufacturing and construction materials for mass production. The fire imagery in the firm’s name—steel and flint make sparks for fire, and asbestos does not burn—implies that their business is logically and intuitively oxymoronic, wholly antithetical to the heat and flame of serious literature. But *Pierre* was as much an attack on the mass book market as an attempt to capitalize on it; Melville knew domestic romances were selling in huge numbers at the time, and wanted to boost his declining income.<sup>4</sup> Unlike Melville, King voices his criticism of the mass market, particularly his readers, from within the safety of the horror genre in which he had already achieved success.

Pierre initially has no sense of the professional demands of authorship in the marketplace. He begins as an amateur, arrogantly assuming writing to be easy work, “and that it is not altogether impossible to receive a



few pence in exchange for his ditties” (Melville, *Pierre* 305). Pierre naïvely looks at writing for money as a way of retaining his privileged past and avoiding a working class occupation like that of “the mechanic, the day-laborer, [who] had but one way to live; his body must provide for his body.” He instead gleefully embraces the idea of “letting his body stay lazily at home, send off his soul to labor, and his soul would come faithfully back and pay his body her wages” (*Pierre* 307). Pierre’s hubris is class bound. He naïvely believes his genteel background will exempt him from the work of “many a poor be-inked galley-slave, toiling with the heavy oar of the quill, to gain something wherewithal to stave off the cravings of nature; and in his hours of morbid self-reproach, regarding his paltry wages, at all events, as an unavoidable disgrace to him; while this galley-slave of letters would have leaped at delight—reckless of the feeble seams of his pantaloons—at the prospect of inheriting the broad farms of Saddle Meadows” (*Pierre* 307). Pierre’s arrogance is closely associated with Melville’s own self-awareness that in writing *Pierre* he finds himself in the middle of a project (writing for the masses) he has terribly underestimated, perhaps due to the privilege and consequent complacency following his relatively easy success with *Typee*. This combined with a new disrespect for popular fiction grown from his recent alliance with Hawthorne and the ruin of *Moby-Dick*, his high-art magnum opus (dedicated to Hawthorne himself, who famously denounced domestic novelists as “that damned scribbling mob of women”) (qtd. in Schocket 50).

Melville’s realization that *Pierre* was bound to fail springs from his own idealization of his craft as romantically insulated from the reality of material necessity within the economic networks of production in the marketplace. Melville gives full voice to this naïve, immature, and impractical sense of literary business through his protagonist author. Far from sending off his soul to toil while resting his body at home, writing becomes nothing short of self-induced slave labor to Pierre. His writing chamber is a dismal, cramped, prisonlike place. It is hardly a parlor for lounging and soul searching, but is a “most miserable room” with “a plank, paper, pens, and infernally black ink, four leprously dingy white walls, no carpet, a cup of water, and a dry biscuit or two” (Melville, *Pierre* 355). The dismal scene makes Pierre regard the work of writing in disgust and reproach as “the most miserable of all the pursuits of a man, and say if here be the place, and his be the trade that God intended him for” (Melville, *Pierre* 355). Sig-

nificantly, his anger springs from the economic pallor of “the trade that God intended him for” which casts the writer as a prisoner within “four . . . white walls” with his customary ration of bread and water (“a cup of water, and a dry biscuit or two”). King will also offer a writer’s captivity narrative of sorts, only with his antagonist, Constant Reader Annie Wilkes, lodging in the next room and making frequent preposterous demands on his manuscript in progress, which she has made him write in the first place. Both characters, like both authors, significantly, are the architects of their own authorial prisons.

Such confinement takes the shape of unsympathetic and neglectful readers blind to (what the authors perceive as) their lofty literary methods. Melville thought of the reading public as ill-prepared to be weaned from its magazine and newspaper reading of cause-effect prose, a kind of writing that is the extreme opposite of the impressionist, patchwork narrative Melville was writing. Paul Lyons’s study of Melville’s sense of stylistic influence shows that *Pierre*’s egregiously self-reliant method reflects not a seasoned, balanced array of technique and allusion, but rather a quirky, limited set of works that struck his fancy (450). This method only alienated him all the more from his readers. King depicts his allegorical Constant Reader as the antagonist to his writer figure of *Misery* for similar reasons: she thinks the fiction she reads is real, cares nothing about the mechanism of its production or its indices and concordances, and regards the literature as only an object of her own consumption. King’s protagonist writer, Paul, will even criticize himself for straining too hard to escape Annie by winning another, better audience than her. He literally screams for academic praise, begging critics (us!) to notice: “Hey, guys! This stuff has got a sliding perspective! This stuff has got stream of consciousness interludes! This is my REAL WORK you assholes!” (*Misery* 287).

King’s critical neglect in 1987 was far worse than it is now, especially with the emergence of Heidi Strengell’s scholarly work on his intersection with postmodernism, *Dissecting Stephen King: From the Gothic to Literary Naturalism* (2005). But in many ways, he is like Longfellow—wildly popular and critically damned, the inverse of Melville—in that we still have not forgiven him for his success. The one crucial difference from Longfellow, however, is that King was never canonized in the first place, while Longfellow was the first American enshrined in Poets’ Corner in Westminster Abbey. Longfellow’s dismantling at the hands of the modernists and fur-

ther destruction by F. O. Matthiessen (who exhorted readers to “smash the plaster bust” of the “dead reputation” in 1950) he fortunately did not have to witness during his lifetime (qtd. in Irmscher 19). If he was America’s first canonized poet, he was also the first white male to be kicked out of the canon, a fate that never befell Melville (Irmscher 20).

Melville has been critically respected for a century now, but incited more passion in critical hostility than praise during his career. So did King really have as much to complain about as Melville, for example, who suffered such a horrendous critical reception of *Pierre*? “The book is one of the absurdest and most ridiculous things that ever ink and paper were wasted on,” one reviewer proclaimed of *Pierre* (Hazewell 421). Another review conveyed the gravity of a physician delivering a bleak diagnosis: “it appeared to be composed by the ravings and reveries of a madman,” suggesting that “Melville was really supposed to be deranged, and that his friends were taking measures to place him under treatment.” The prescription? “We hope one of the earliest precautions will be to keep him stringently secluded from pen and ink” (Review of *Pierre* 420). King was hurt more by critical neglect than such fever-pitched abuse, as *Misery* marked the point in King’s career when he most achingly felt that, as Strengell points out, “more was required to satisfy his ambition than the sale of books” (263). Through Paul, King confesses “that the increasing dismissal of his work in the critical press as that of a ‘popular writer’ (which was, as he understood it, one step—a small one—above that of a ‘hack’) had hurt him badly” (*Misery* 286).

Escaping the prison of an adoring and suffocating audience has taken nonfictional forms in King. For example, the preface of *Stationary Bike* (2006), King’s recent allegory of his struggle to be taken seriously by the academic community, directly taunts and challenges English professors to decode the novel’s profound symbolism. The posturing makes clear, at least to King, that he has really tied the keepers of the canon in knots with this one. The gesture interestingly echoes Melville’s dare in *Moby-Dick*—regarding the brow of the whale and the novel itself by implication—to “read it if you can” (335). King’s most recent claim to literary distinction comes through an advertisement for *Lisey’s Story* (2006). The placement of the ad in the *New Yorker* and its glowing, enlarged praise from Pulitzer Prize winner Michael Chabon indicate that King has tried to infiltrate the establishment in more subtle ways than the locker-room bravado of es-

entially calling out all English professors to a semiotic brawl behind the woodshed as he does in the preface of *Stationary Bike*. Chabon was heralded, after his first novel, *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh*, as nothing less than the next Fitzgerald according to the *New York Times Book Review*, a publication that ranks among the most authoritative arbiters of culture and literature in existence. Not coincidentally, the *New Yorker* was also where Fitzgerald would get his start as a writer, publishing short and early versions of what would later become almost universally defined as world-class literature of the highest order, with an assortment of readers laying claim to *The Great Gatsby* as the Great American Novel. The *New Yorker* advertisement overtly places King in the same company as Chabon and, by indirection, Fitzgerald, representing another of King's expressions of his desire to be canonized. King has been open about his desire for all the tokens of canonization: "I'd like to win the National Book Award, the Pulitzer Prize, the Nobel Prize. I'd like to have someone write a *New York Times Book Review* piece that says, 'Hey, wait a minute guys, we made a mistake—this guy is one of the great writers of the twentieth century.' But it's not going to happen" (Goldstein 8).

In 2003, when he did receive the Distinguished Contribution to American Letters Award from the National Book Foundation, the organization that adjudicates the National Book Awards, King discussed the relationship of his work to other culturally sanctioned forms of literature. Without naming him, his acceptance speech began with a barb against Harold Bloom, who spearheaded an outcry against the selection of King for the award. His speech goes on to dismantle his image as a "rich hack" perpetrated by the Bloom camp (King, "Acceptance"). In an attempt to align himself with literary royalty by quoting Frank Norris on authenticity in fiction, he asserts that he "never wrote for money" but "to tell the truth about the way people would behave in a similar situation" to his fictional scenarios ("Acceptance"). His spite is more convincing than his defense of his primary authorial role as truth speaker, as he assails pinning the profit motive on "anyone who writes genre fiction or any kind of fiction," which he finds "still hurtful[;] it's infuriating and it's demeaning" ("Acceptance"). Even in receiving the award, King was wise enough to know that it did not seal his place in the canon, alluding to his fear of the "tokenism" his win might serve to shut out other popular writers from the award for years to come, which in at least the four years since, it clearly has

("Acceptance"). Thus it seemed highly unlikely that his win might bridge the gap, King suggested with strained diplomacy, between "the so-called popular writers of this country and the so-called literary writers [who] have stared at each other with animosity and a willful lack of understanding" ("Acceptance").

King openly acknowledged his jealousy of the literary establishment in the speech, admitting being "bitterly angry at writers who were considered 'literary'" ("Acceptance"). Perhaps in an effort to placate the literary authors and critics who largely comprised the very audience before him, he confessed defeat due to lack of skill, "I knew I didn't quite have enough talent or polish to be one of them so there was an element of jealousy," mocking his own anger toward "these writers [who] always seemed to have the inside track in my view at the time" as sounding like the crackpot conspiracy theories of his "least favorite uncle who thought there was an international Jewish cabal running everything from the Ford Motor Company to the Federal Reserve" ("Acceptance"). This is clearly not the man who wrote the hostile preface to *Stationary Bike*. Almost happy to be outside of the canon, he associates Tabitha, who encouraged him to continue in the vein of his initial popular works, with his dedication to his early, unpolished genre fiction fueled by modest talent. Indeed, Tabbie takes on an Annie-like role, goading him on to write what sells, to "shut up and eat your eggs," in the spirit of Ruth Younger (to whom King alludes in *Misery*), "to stop with the breast beating. She said to save my self-pity and turn my energy to the typewriter," not presumably to write the Great American Novel, but, as Ruth admonishes Walter in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, to work the modest resources he has without indulging in grandiose, unattainable visions of professional potential ("Acceptance"). King's characterization of Tabbie in the speech is consonant with this sentiment, as she is the gritty realist—"sarcastic" and tough—to his romantic dreamer.

If Tabbie was right that efforts to write literary fiction would be in vain, her advice also saved him from wasting such work on his least sophisticated fans, as *Misery* so aptly illustrates. Melville also shows his frustration with what he thought was the unsophisticated nature of his readers when he describes with scathing sarcasm the popular reception of his protagonist's first publication by "the . . . applauses of the always intelligent, and extremely discriminating public" (*Pierre* 288). At *Pierre*'s writing desk, we can see that Melville was airing these frustrations about authorship, cast-

ing himself as the victim of a sensationalized gothic torture scene. Like a prisoner serving a life sentence, Pierre the writer becomes a living corpse “[w]ith cheek rather pale . . . and lips rather blue” (Melville, *Pierre* 355). The idealization of literary culture and the work of writing as an activity of the “civilized” and enlightened sensibilities collapses when Melville sets it within its economic context as a trade to show how barbaric it is: “If physical, practical unreason make the savage, which is he? Civilization, Philosophy, Ideal Virtue! Behold your victim!” (*Pierre* 355). Indeed, the growth of the intellect is matched by the deterioration of the body and the loss of the soul. We see this image in King as well; the protagonist of *Misery* is a popular author whose physical condition deteriorates so drastically that he loses a digit on his hand (a punishment courtesy of Annie) as well as keys on his typewriter (thanks to dilapidated equipment supplied by the consumer-oriented Constant Reader, Annie, blind to the material conditions necessary for today’s professional author).

As Pierre develops his authorial skills, he enervates himself economically and therefore physically, depriving himself of money for bread: “the wiser and profounder he should grow, the more and more he lessened the chances for bread” (Melville, *Pierre* 359). He never specifies which kind of romantic mode in particular (psychological? sentimental? domestic? adventure?) would be the path to success: “could he now hurl his book out the window, and fall to on some shallow nothing of a novel, composable in a month at the longest, then could he reasonably hope for both appreciation and cash. But the devouring profundities, now opened up in him, consume all his vigor” (*Pierre* 359). Pierre’s commitment to the “ambiguities” within him now prevent him from writing “entertainingly and profitably shallow in some pellucid romance” (*Pierre* 359). Interestingly, it is precisely this popular yarn-spinning style that King’s Paul uses to survive and escape Annie—thus satisfying the demand for popular fiction—which Pierre (and Melville alike) refuse to resort to.

Genre fiction readers tend not to tolerate “ambiguities” associated with a higher authorial calling. King complains through Paul that “the work, the pride in your work, the worth of the work itself . . . all those things faded away to the magic lantern shades they really were when the pain got bad enough” (*Misery* 29). He directly blames his popular readers, embodied by Annie, for taking away that sense of craft which transcends genre fiction, but is more angry with himself for allowing her to, like a bad addiction:

“That she would do that to him—that she *could*, when he had spent most of his adult life thinking the word *writer* was the most important definition of himself—made her seem utterly monstrous,” as King ironically plays out his woe in precisely the generic melody of gothic horror, “something he *must* escape” (*Misery* 29). Her power promises wealth and death, and as such a powerful figure, “She really was an idol. If she didn’t kill him, she might kill what was in him,” namely his proud aspirations for literary fiction (*Misery* 29).

Like King, Melville strained against the restrictions of genre labels. Genre’s tyranny over literary reputation and the celebrity system that helped produce famous writers emerges in his June 1851 letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne. Melville complained that “all Fame is patronage. Let me be infamous: there is no patronage in *that*. What ‘reputation’ H.M. has is horrible. Think of it! To go down to posterity is bad enough, any way; but to go down as the ‘man who lived among the cannibals!’” (Branch 249). Like King’s inability to shake the horror fiction label, Melville bitterly resists the public’s insistence on grouping him in the travel genre of literature, an association that began with his first novel in 1846, *Typee, or a Peep at Polynesian Life*. He wanted instead to be associated with weightier moral and psychological concerns. Being pinned permanently into the critical category of *Typee* meant for Melville that he would suffer a one-dimensional, even infantile reputation profoundly undeserving of his hard and serious work: “When I speak of posterity in reference to myself, I only mean the babies who will probably be born the moment immediately ensuing upon my giving up the ghost. I shall go down to some of them, in all likelihood. *Typee* will be given to them, perhaps, with their gingerbread. I have come to regard this matter of Fame as the most transparent of all vanities” (Melville, *Correspondence* 193). As the fiction dating from 1851 on attests, Melville confessed, “I did not think of Fame, a year ago, as I do now” (Melville, *Correspondence* 193).

Regarding “Fame as the most transparent of all vanities,” Melville became acutely aware of how the authors he read, even Solomon, “*managed* the truth with a view to popular conservatism” (qtd. in Branch 250). The “popular conservatism” he mentions refers to the mass market of readers who expect particular genre conventions from particular authors. The *Harper and Brother’s Book List* persistently grouped Melville under the heading of “Travel and Adventure” beginning in 1852, which became “Voyages



and Travels” from 1853 to the end of the decade. After the publication of *Moby-Dick* and especially *Pierre*, Harper felt the need to explain their classification of Melville under “Voyages and Travels” in their 1855 book list. They highlighted his glorious tenure at sea visiting and writing about remote tropical islands and “primitive social life.” By keeping him under the “Voyages and Travels” genre classification, Harper in effect decided that Melville would be most marketable as “the man who lived among the cannibals”: “The new path struck out by Melville in *Typee* and *Omoo* has led to a wide and brilliant fame in a short space of time. Few of the younger American Authors are more extensively read and more universally admired,” the glowing first lines of the sales pitch ran (*Harper*). The next segment more directly isolates his works as belonging to “Voyages and Travels”: “His pictures of primitive social life in the islands of the South Sea possess an irresistible charm. The works devoted to this subject are redolent of the spicy fragrance of the native forests, and glow with the splendid lights of a tropical sky” (*Harper*).

The failure to break free from such genre definitions in the literary marketplace and fulfill the inner need to write the truth drives *Pierre* mad, reflecting the psychosis Melville endured after 1852. From 1852 to 1858, during and after the writing of *Pierre*, Melville suffered what some biographers, including Lewis Mumford, have described as a nervous breakdown or a “neurotic state.” *Pierre*’s sentiment echoes Melville’s: “I have wandered in my mind; this book makes me mad” (Melville, *Pierre* 363). The “random slips” from *Pierre*’s writing are much like Melville’s own. They glimpse the tortured heart of a character struggling in the “pursuit of the highest health of virtue and truth,” trying desperately to “explain this darkness, exorcise this devil” (Melville, *Pierre* 356).

The nature of King’s misery in the early 1980s (*Misery* appeared in 1987) was a crisis that significantly linked alcoholism to authorship in a kind of double-epiphany. The thought “*Holy shit, I’m an alcoholic*,” struck him at precisely the same moment he realized *The Shining* was really about him, especially with its associations with writing as grinding labor leading to madness: the protagonist proclaims his insanity by writing in perfectly typed paragraphs and sentences, “All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy” (King, *On Writing* 95). In a fit of writerly madness, Jack becomes a homicidal maniac who stalks his child with an ax. Out of King’s epiphany



that *The Shining* was really about himself arose an awareness that much of his best work was coming from his own analysis of his suffering as a professional author and, in particular, as slave labor within the confines of the horror fiction genre.

King would consciously pour himself into the project of self-analysis, with his professional angst mutually reinforcing the self-medicating that the protagonist Paul of *Misery* would take up, jonesing for his painkillers more and more as a way of getting back at Annie, carving some space away from her, and most importantly, killing the pain she had inflicted upon him. The horrifying paradox, of course, is that King himself created the monster of Annie, not just as a fictional character, but as a profoundly powerful dimension of his career. When we see Annie as an allegory of his own popular, mass readership that he himself created, the link between professional anxiety and addiction comes out in the open. King's own interpretation of Annie in his memoir—"Annie was coke, Annie was booze, and I decided I was tired of being Annie's pet writer" (*On Writing* 98)—is a drastic oversimplification designed to avoid offending and alienating the fan base that she so obviously represents. King allegorized the author-reader-publisher relationship in *Misery*, a writer's nightmare of how a representative reader becomes a tyrannical editor forcing him to make manuscript changes under the threat of physical violence. "Work" implies struggle, negotiation, and pain.

King's own way of dealing with that pain in his real life was by first drinking, a pastime he openly associated with authorship, according to "The Hemingway Defense": "As a writer I am a very sensitive fellow, but I am also a man, and real men don't give in to their sensitivities. Only *sissy* men do that. Therefore I drink" (King, *On Writing* 94). Paul secretly dry swallows his medication, much in the way King gulps down bottles of Robitussin and mouthwash in the early 1980s—not Listerine, but Scope: "It was tastier, had that hint of mint" (97). Humor aside, the substance abuse is really self-medication to kill the pain of Annie, the biggest of his horrors marked by the reality he faces when he sits down to write for his mass audience, increasing his popularity while simultaneously delimiting and restricting his claims on canonical literary distinction. King's sense of guilt for his self-indulgent drug abuse, skyrocketing fame, and growth of his readership arises from his sense of proportional neglect of cultivating

his talent, his artistry. Anesthetizing himself from Annie is essentially an escape from his own self-invention as popular fiction writer. “How else can I face the existential horror of it all and continue to work?” King asks (*On Writing* 94).

King’s office was a kind of battleground on which he waged war with Annie in a struggle to come to terms with his increasingly fixed, permanent role of popular paperback writer. Strewn with tokens of equal parts power and self-destruction, the office he worked in during the early 1980s characterized his state of mind in the years leading up to *Misery*. His desk would signify hedonistic economic power through its size and centrality: “a massive oak slab that would dominate a room—no child’s desk in a trailer laundry-closet, no more cramped kneehole in a rented house. . . . [I] placed it in the middle of a spacious skylighted study . . . [and] sat behind that desk either drunk or wrecked out of my mind, like a ship’s captain in charge of a voyage nowhere” (*On Writing* 100). The tracks of substance abuse littered the mighty desk. King’s wife (Starbuck to his Ahab?) collected it and dumped it out “on the rug: beer cans, cigarette butts, cocaine in gram bottles and cocaine in plastic baggies, coke spoons caked with snot and blood, Valium, Xanax, bottles of Robitussin cough syrup and NyQuil cold medication, even bottles of mouthwash” (*On Writing* 97). Such a display would make him second-guess his seemingly infallible authorial powers. “*You have to be careful then, because if you fuck up,*” he remembered thinking, he could roll his car or blow an interview on live TV (*On Writing* 97). The confrontation would inspire King to treat the problem in early 1986, and if not eradicate it as a form of therapy, to dramatize it as its own horror story in the pages of *Misery*.

Bev Vincent’s recent study shows that King believed that “[t]he ‘serious’ novelist is looking for answers; the ‘popular’ novelist is looking for an audience” (307). *Misery* was King’s attempt to escape the audience he too generously welcomed in, to liberate himself from its tyranny, so that he could “look for answers.” The love/hate relationship would eventually go back to love, albeit masked and reserved in the dedication to the last book of his Dark Tower series: “Constant Reader, this final book in the Dark Tower cycle is dedicated to you. My books are my way of knowing you. Let them be your way of knowing me, as well” (*Dark Tower* 7; qtd. in Vincent 272). Careful to keep his distance by drawing the line between him and Constant Reader at the furthest point possible through the abstraction

of the fictional story and the impersonal physical commodity of the novel itself, he says, "It's enough" (*Dark Tower* 7; qtd. in Vincent 272).

In *Misery*, King's hate toward Annie, his Constant Reader, is palpable: she's a glutton not only for Paul's novels but kitsch art including figurines and Liberace, the aesthetic equivalent of the vanilla ice cream, Reddi-Wip, and Hershey's chocolate syrup she gulps down hungrily. She wants him to read Danielle Steele; he wants to write Mailer and Cheever. His first try at serious fiction is discovered in his car that crashes near Annie's secluded mountain home; under the pretense of taking him in to nurse him back to health, she realizes she has her favorite author captive, and forces him to burn his gritty realism and bring back the heroine of the romance novels she loves. Her editorial methods include confinement, "hobbling" (rebreaking Paul's broken legs to prevent his escape), and thumb amputation. A gothic monster typical of King's horror fiction, Annie becomes even more hideous by revealing that she killed a series of babies while working as a maternity-ward nurse. She seems flatly evil and thus serviceable for Paul's final revenge: he feeds her hunger for his stories in a figurative rape in which he rams his burning manuscript down her throat, screaming "suck my book," and delivering the death blow by smashing her skull with his typewriter, the object of his slavery (317).

Kathleen Margaret Lant has expanded on this passage to argue that authorship for King is about phallic power, equating pen with penis, and that specifically it subjugates his female readership to victims of violent rape (113). But Annie is also the fruit of his own gothic imagination and reflection of the well of fear he regularly taps for his most salable tales, of his fear of being imprisoned and degraded by his own popularity. Stren-gell recently has treated this passage as Paul killing Annie the goddess, a kind of "Angel of Death," tending to its gothic and incestuous undertones convincingly, but not to the killing of King's readership and thus himself as popular author (50). The image of consumption dominates the passage; he is ramming her full of what she has been demanding all along, a kind of death by gorging on the manuscript pages, complete with the full weight of the typewriter on her head, the locus of a reader's consumption. In *Misery*, the typewriter, more than the pen, corresponds with the creative process. Paul strengthens himself with it (lifting its weight physically to regain his muscle mass), and it becomes an object of contention between he and Annie, much like the marked-up manuscript pages he produces.

Both of these, literally and figuratively, are the objects of his assault on Annie, a hideously desperate yet in some ways justifiable lashing out for freedom's sake, like the distorted, perverse desperation of the incarcerated writer figure of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-Paper," who metaphorically kills her keeper at the end of that captivity narrative.

Paul's view of Annie should not be defined by the figurative rape scene alone, as it shares space in the novel with a birth scene of sorts. Paul cries out from his bed as he labors with the narrative, and Annie rushes in to lovingly lift him to his table (his legs are badly injured), her eyes wide at the emergence of the fruit of their author/reader relationship. In a fascinating gender role reversal, she plays the expectant father. "She was looking at him respectfully and not with a little awe," nervously asking, "is it about the book?" to which Paul answers with all the focus of a woman delivering a baby, determined to bring his idea out into the world: "It is the book," quite immanent and emergent. "Be quiet. Don't talk to me" (King, *Misery* 165). Paul calls Annie in not to talk about their new creation, but to say that most certainly, even painfully, it is coming out right now in the form of a plot device, the seed of an idea she had planted in him, all but insuring the completion of the work. Not surprisingly, the outcome is "a good deal more gruesome than the other *Misery* books" of the popular romance series Paul is famous for (King, *Misery* 167).

Though such hints at Annie's redeemable qualities early in the novel are only glancing—she makes him write, catches him illogically "cheating" his way through the plot in order to kill off characters, and as she says, "talk[ed] you out of a bad book you'd written and into the best one you *ever* wrote"—its conclusion brings King's professional dependence on her into the open (King, *Misery* 272). Such dependence, I would argue, is further evidence that Annie is an externalization of Paul; she is his inner slave driver, the one to keep him honest, to keep him spinning a yarn, and a damn good one, for nothing less than survival. Her opinion of his "best book" King is satirizing ironically, of course. But his accomplishment, although a product of compromised ambition, is nonetheless quite clear in this passage. There is no shortage of swagger and cockiness in writing popular fiction well throughout the novel. Paul even reflects on dominating creative writing classroom games such as "CAN YOU?" which pits a character in a perilous situation and asks students to write his way to safety (King, *Misery* 203).

After Annie's death, King complicates her presence in Paul's consciousness not only as a psychological force to be reckoned with in menacing night terrors, but by squarely situating her in the context of professional authorship through the image of Paul sitting down to write the Serious Novel that Annie, his popular audience (and his popular-fiction-writing self), prevented. Ironically, she provides the muse—inspiration through fear—for this new novel, a stab at the Mailer-Cheever school of gritty, urban realism so blasphemous to Paul's army of romance readers. For as much as King voices hate for Constant Reader—enough to figuratively rape and kill her with sadistic vengeance—the sadder truth is that she is a part of Paul, occupying both psychological and professional parts of his identity, living beyond the novel's conclusion and well into King's own professional career, as the dark muse that forces him to remain a writer, nonetheless, in misery. Annie is both blessing and curse, for the alternative is to “cover the typewriter and study for my broker's license,” a figurative death of his authorial identity, a pathetic and unacceptable form of professional suicide in the novel (King, *Misery* 352).

In a 1980 interview with Paul Janeczko, King was careful to mask any aspiration to write literary fiction. King's answer to the question of what he felt he owed his readers is telling. “A good ride on the roller coaster,” he again delimits with the phrase, “and that's all,” thereby keeping his fans at arm's length (Underwood and Miller 78). The genre expectations of that ride, of the precise, stylized nature of its thrills, which Paul/King builds up in the mind of Constant Reader, are precisely the source of tension in *Misery* between Paul and Annie. King worried about failing his readership and the violent consequences in a 1984 interview, just two years prior to penning *Misery*: “I didn't write [horror novels] to make money. . . . [T]he money” and readers “came to me,” he said, in a turn of phrase that instantly amalgamates readers and money into one economic entity signifying profit, beneath which the ever present fear of losing book sales becomes one and the same with alienating readers from their genre expectations: “people who like my stuff will come along unless you shortchange them” (Underwood and Miller 176). Annie is shortchanged, and Paul suffers the consequences. Paul fears Annie as much as he needs her. After all, she calls his writing *art* and him an *artist*, ironically dignifying his hack writing as timeless literature through a staunch resistance to its association with money: she reminds him that “when you pervert the talent God gave you

by calling it a business . . . you might as well call yourself a whore" (King, *Misery* 72).

King's conclusion, voiced through Paul, was to keep feeding Annie, to keep his popular readers occupied to allow for serious fiction, something we clearly see in the recent shape of his career, as his works range between genre departures (likely attempts at "serious" fiction) and standard horror money makers, in which innovations are not narrative, but media (re)packaging through outlets like Internet novels and made-for-TV screenplays. Melville's solution was much more drastic and uncompromising: he chose to squander his early genre fiction success, unlike King, who continues to employ the "hard-hat and lunch pail" approach toward commercial fiction with several exceptions, the most noteworthy being his recent novel *Lisey's Story*, whose protagonist, not coincidentally, is a popular novelist. *Lisey's Story*, like *Stationary Bike* before it, is an attempt to enter the canon through a fictional self-examination of the perils of popular writing. *Stationary Bike* is King's allegory of the meaning of the work of writing in his life, a popular effort that obliquely aspires for literary distinction while justifying employing his commercial, blue-collar creative construction crew (who take shape in the novel as alternately suicidal and homicidal) for most of his career, but not without a little regret and even guilt. Melville's refusal to write for money, on the other hand, would cement his own personal form of misery, increasing his alienation from the professional circles in the literary marketplace as well as vital relationships in his personal life that would bring on what Andrew Delbanco calls "the quiet end" (288). Unfortunately for Melville, he would be late for the celebratory din initiated by D. H. Lawrence and other modernists upon his revival in the 1920s that has yet to end. Melville would speak not only to literary modernism's aesthetic sensibilities but to the twentieth century's perils of popular writing. *Pierre* anticipates *Misery's* crisis of occupational self-definition that, as Jack Cady said of Melville, paints from "a palate of anguish" in which "personal pain translates straight across the story and displays itself as torment" (98). The collision between canonical dreams and consumer culture spark the professional rage and despair if not insanity that Melville and King fearlessly, viscerally unleash in a macabre dance of art and money.

### Authorship and the Transnational Book Market

Questions of art and money persist in the work of Hanif Kureishi and Douglas Coupland, which reflects many of Melville and King's concerns about popularity and canonization, yet with notions of authorship shaped by their prominent roles in the transnational twenty-first-century book market. Both authors straddle the line between popular and literary fiction, but they struggle differently with their reputations. Kureishi has fled racial politics in his work, while Coupland despises being mistaken for an American in his ongoing effort to foreground his own transnational identity as a German-born Canadian ("Strong and Free" 46). Coupland would prefer to be known as literary and transnational rather than popular and virtually American. Kureishi would prefer to be known as an artist and not as a representative of Pakistani Londoners.

Kureishi, English born with ancestors from India, describes himself as "a funny kind of Englishman" (Ranasinha 4). He has received praise from the *New York Times Book Review* and other arbiters of high culture for most of his work. He has been canonized largely for his screenplay for *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1986) and his novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), and continues to win praise for his recent work, which includes *Intimacy* (1998). He is a force in popular culture, writing and producing for Channel 4, England's public broadcast television station, and is supported by the arts council of England and the British Council (Ranasinha 121). He struggles to disaffiliate himself from pressure to be the spokesman for his Pakistani ethnic community in London.<sup>5</sup> To Kureishi, the role of racial spokesman places an unnecessary constraint, even a form of self-censorship, on his work, effectively preventing it from ascending to the higher reaches of artistic greatness. Hence he has abandoned postcolonial racial politics for stories about interpersonal relationships and infidelity, subjects that have grown to dominate much of contemporary fiction. Kureishi's defense of his artistic freedom stems from his awareness of the popular audience, this time not consumers of his fiction for pleasure, but those who attempt to make Kureishi a foot soldier for the antiracist fight on behalf of the black-Asian British.

Kureishi's Annie, as it were, is the force of racial politics that threatens to subsume his work and transform it into a source of "positive" Pakistani role models. Mahmood Jamal begins to sound like King's Annie complain-



ing about the gritty realism and profanity in Paul's literary novel when he assails Kureishi for depicting Asians as "money grabbing, sex-crazed people" (qtd. in Ranasinha 46). Like Annie, there is a puritanical policing of artistic freedom here, and in the context of my argument, King submits to it, while Melville and now Kureishi reject it. Only here it is inflected with the piety of racial politics that operates according to realist assumptions of mimetic tokenism, which Kureishi's technique of ironic distancing constantly thwarts. His response is clearly voiced through his view of Spike Lee's refusal to show black Americans "doing drugs in his films" as a form of self-censorship to which he refuses to stoop and compromise his artistic integrity: "I won't be tied. I can't. . . . Otherwise, it is bollocks. It's censorship. It's just censorship. . . . I think it would be dangerous for writers to have too much of a sense of responsibility" (MacCabe 53). Such is his refusal to be caught in what Ella Shohat has called the "moralistic and essentialist traps embedded in a 'positive-stereotype' and 'positive images' analysis" (214).

There is an echo of Kureishi in the mobster uncle Nasser of *My Beautiful Laundrette*, a ruthless capitalist who refuses to conflate his racial identity with his professional one, proclaiming, "I'm a professional businessman not a professional Pakistani. There's no such thing as race in the new enterprise culture" of the Thatcherite London 1980s (41). Unlike Nasser, the focus of Kureishi's "profession" that transcends race is art, not money. But the common thread of ambition uninterested in identity politics emerges. The disaffiliation from racial issues with the writing of *Intimacy* may have been sparked by Kureishi's earlier distaste for racial exploitation in the arts. He is particularly appalled by the prospect of the majority culture's insistence on transforming race into performance, and colonizing it for the sake of artistic production. Karim, the politically naïve protagonist of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, unwittingly submits to playing Mowgli (the loincloth-clad Indian boy in Kipling's *The Jungle Book*) for his first theater gig in London, the racial equivalent of doing a blackface minstrel show in antebellum America. In another incident, Karim's own racial ethics are called into question by his antiracist colleague, Tracey. She objects to him basing his improvisational comedic character on Changez, a recent Asian immigrant forced to marry Karim's best friend, Jamila. Karim claims Tracey is censoring him, and he is right, yet he is blind to how he censors himself. Like Spike Lee in the earlier example, he allows the positive/nega-



tive representational racial binary to dictate his artistic choices: Lee not depicting drug-using blacks bows to the tyranny of the white audience just as Karim plays to the crowd with a parody of his own people (as “irrational, ridiculous, hysterical”) (Kureishi, *Buddha* 180). Karim’s parody of Changez would have been perfectly acceptable were he to rescue something of Changez’s dignity in the process as Kureishi himself does in the novel itself (180).

While these examples firmly reject race as performance for money—as does the novel’s parody of Haroon’s phony performances of meditation and “enlightenment” that mystify and orientalize ethnic India for white consumption in London suburbs—Kureishi is equally critical of characters piously renouncing the market. Omar’s father in *My Beautiful Laundrette*, for example, is an old left-wing holdout whose efforts to spread education and reform racist skinheads fail and land him in his dump of an apartment on a Tube line. A useless, self-defeating shut-in, this anticapitalist figure disapproves of Omar and Johnny’s entrepreneurial plans for their laundrette and encourages them both to quit and go to college. The depiction of Omar’s father indicates that Kureishi does not advocate a total renunciation of the market, or at least his method of doing so: he regales viewers with close-in shots of the old man vilely, even suicidally, swilling liquor and of Omar dutifully clipping the old man’s toenails, which resemble those of a weeks-old corpse. His only recourse is when the market figure, Nassar, takes pity on him at the end of the film. As an icon of market resistance, Omar’s father is pathetic and powerless, much like King’s Paul is at the beginning of *Misery*. Omar’s father does not gather strength and rebel heroically the way Paul does mainly because he is so detached from market culture, which Paul ultimately reenters and succeeds in.

Kureishi’s complex view of his authorial role should not be confused with ambivalence. The common thread in his comments on authorship in interviews and his figurings of it in his fiction is a refusal to be pigeonholed: like every one of the authors in this book, he clearly is a creature of the market—Omar’s business and Karim’s artistic career ambitions are portrayed sympathetically for all their naïve blindness—who also rejects certain value sets practiced in its culture. Didactic or propagandistic writing is not real art, according to Kureishi, whose literary fame granted him the privilege of reinventing his career as an author of relationships and not transnational youth culture in racially tense postcolonial settings.

Had his success been based on the best-selling popular mass following of his youth culture novels, he may have suffered from the same unshakable association with that genre as King's association with popular horror fiction.

While Kureishi enjoys the freedoms conferred to him via his canonical status—three academic books, six chapters in edited books, and forty-nine scholarly articles have been published on him—Douglas Coupland dreams of canonization despite his love/hate relationship with popular culture. Like Kureishi, he is a transnational author with a heightened global awareness. His works focus less on race than they do on consumerism, technology, and their bizarre dance with spirituality. On the one hand, much of Coupland's work is focused on dismantling consumer culture; on the other hand, he panders to it, basing his appeal to readers on his hipness to all the latest technology in a kind of in-joke that only someone in love with popular culture could tell. His novels *Microserfs* (1995) and *Jpod* (2006) are especially illustrative of the latter, while the former, probably closer to his heart, is voiced in such laments for the hijacking of spirituality by mass production and technologized consumerism in such works as *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture* (1991), *Polaroids from the Dead* (1996), and particularly *Life after God* (1993).

Coupland's desire for canonicity and for creating timeless fiction is uncomfortably bound up in his knack for capturing the zeitgeist of generations, decades, and even half decades, as in *Polaroids from the Dead*, a time capsule of the first half of the 1990s. With such time-bound subject matter, Coupland is nonetheless self-consciously aware that the spirituality his novels try to rescue from the jaws of alienating mass production and consumption ("I hear God approves of various brands of cola competing in the marketplace for sales dominance"), of cubicle office culture ("veal fattening pens"), is popular culture itself (*Hey Nostradamus!* 72; *Generation X* 20). As such, his novels share space in the landscape of popular culture with Nostradamus and astrology, which he condemns for their materialistic bent but praises for their sympathy with the all-too-human desire to speak to the dead. In *Hey Nostradamus!*, Alison the astrologist is vilified for capitalizing on Heather's grief for her lost husband, an act portrayed as a sin of rabid materialism. Interestingly, Coupland distances himself from such pursuits while also confessing some complicity with them: Jason, a survivor of a high school shooting, laments his coworkers' mystification

of his experience, catered to all too willingly by mass-market print media: “Soon enough, Nigel will learn my ‘story,’ and then he’ll go buy a cheapo massacre exploitation paperback in some second-hand bookstore. His behavior around me will change: he’ll walk on eggshells, and then he’ll want to discuss life after death, crop circles, gun laws, Nostradamus” (*Hey Nostradamus!* 66). Coupland’s distaste for the grubby literary market that would profane the solemn and sacred tragedy Jason endured is complicated by Jason’s admission that such reading would allow Nigel “to know more about me than anyone ought to know” (*Hey Nostradamus!* 66). Although Coupland wants to be associated with literature and religion rather than popular fiction and superstition, the hint is that Coupland’s own novel, even if condemned as a “cheapo massacre exploitation paperback” by the most savage of critics, might still hold the keys to self-knowledge and understanding of tragic events that conventional organized religion fails to explain. This can be read as a hyperbolic lament (in the space of the novel itself) for the novel’s popular rather than literary destiny.

Coupland’s attempt in *Life After God* to work within popular culture itself to transcend popular culture echoes Whitman’s project in *Leaves of Grass* that I discuss in chapter 4. Coupland models the bestselling book of all time, the Bible, by mirroring its tropes, size, layout, and contents—short stories that read like parables with a wide archetypal, even universal reach. Indeed, Coupland’s move toward a Whitmanian postmodern persona comes through his resistance to bureaucracies and technology and a desire for God (“my secret is that I need God,” he confesses) (*Life after God* 359). The book suggests that the global market has robbed us of our spiritualities and encourages us to find them again, in part, through the persona of the author, whose hushed, intimate, confessional tones—“Now—here is my secret: I tell it to you with an openness of heart that I doubt I shall ever achieve again, so I pray that you are in a quiet room as you hear these words”—imply that close relationships and a sharing of pain can lead us to rebirth, the final image of the book (*Life After God* 359). Interestingly, the cover art corresponds with this watery rebirth: a baby smugly floats on a raft in a sunny pool like a movie star, his face angled upward toward an unseen source of light, eyes closed to the sheer power of its brightness. The iconography is unmistakable: rebirth and discovery of God is ironically possible in the materialistic, self-indulgent trappings of our modern world. The role of the author, as Coupland understands it, is to commu-

nicate how that rebirth might be accomplished by reconciling with our high-tech consumer world, rather than battling and rigidly disapproving of it as Reg does in *Hey Nostradamus!*

Coupland's movement, like Kureishi's, is toward freedom from political and religious dogma, perhaps signs of growth toward a more complex, transnational multiethnic ideological milieu for the twenty-first century. Coupland comments that "it was through art that I ultimately came to learn that no history is, in itself, history—possibly its most liberating and uncruel form. (You sentimentalize bourgeois consumption patterns; you must be punished)" (*Polaroids* 124). Thus they support laissez-faire politics, particularly freedom of artistic production from political constraints; we see strains of this in Fern's revision of the gentleman publisher's code, liberating it from the control of publisher and resituating increasing financial, and thus artistic, freedom in the hands of authors. Freedom from the shackles of northern racism and surplus economy informed part 1 of this book; the progressive feminism of part 3 concerned itself with liberation from the walls of separate-spheres gender ideology. Yet the need for a sympathetic reader, an audience, and a market drastically complicates such concerns for artistic freedom.

Coupland has embraced rather than resigned himself to his popular status that continues to leave him on the margins of the literary—only two scholarly articles have been published on him, one of which is in a literature and theology journal. This situation has only inspired him to use the basic vocabulary of popular culture to find solace in it, if not transcend it altogether. While Kureishi used his canonical status to flee from further transforming the literary market as his early fiction had, Coupland continues not only to reinvent the material forms of popular fiction, but to dignify and elevate its spiritual potential as well. The authors I have examined in this book all manipulated the conventions of the markets they inhabited, talking back to it, changing it, and forecasting its future. As Coupland's, Kureishi's, and King's careers show, the global market of the twenty-first century continues to inspire attacks on consumerist ideology, while also prompting new methods of self-promotion and innovative forms of authorial reinvention, if not, as in the case of King, a sense of reconciliation with the role of mass producer. Thoreau even celebrated, like Whitman, the global reach of the market as a force capable of expanding his sense of self: "I am refreshed and expanded when the freight train

rattles past me and I smell the shores which go dispensing their odors all the way from the Long Wharf to Lake Champlain reminding one of the foreign ports, of coral reefs, of Indian oceans, and tropical climes, and the extent of the globe. I feel like a citizen of the world" (*Walden* 119).

The antebellum romantic notion of the divinely inspired artist has assumed new forms all apparently in opposition to capitalism's basic values yet in full use of their basic lexicon—artistic freedom for Kureishi, spiritual rebirth for Coupland, literary distinction for King—that continue to shape modes of authorial agency and responses to today's global market culture. Coupland and Kureishi carry on the legacy of questioning the corruption and inequality in the market; King carries on the innovative and successful self-promotional tactics that have transformed the market. Common to all of these responses is a love of market culture, along with an ironic distancing from or even outright assault on it. Even Thoreau's embrace of the bold energy of the market echoes Coupland's own love of the popular culture he deconstructs. Detachment notwithstanding, Coupland's comment about Pop artists Andy Warhol and James Rosenquist applies: "I think all the Pop artists loved the subjects they painted. . . . [They] loved the machine that formatted the disk that was them" (*Polaroids* 124). If the "machine" is market culture and mass production, it is ironic indeed that the works of Warhol and Rosenquist, like Thoreau and Wilson, voiced some of the boldest, most penetrating anticapitalist statements ever. It is precisely a love of the market that would make Whitman and Fern want to make it better, and that prompted Melville and Davis to forecast its accommodations for women. This book has viewed authors as empowered, active agents who talked back to the market, stepped into it, changed it, and looked into its future. The glue holding together all these responses is a tacit understanding of the power of that market not only as a force that organizes definitions of society and self, but also one that changes the material condition of our lives. Indeed, such impassioned engagements with the market represent not merely an awareness and respect for its power to define us. Rather, such engagements with the market understand it as a large, furious, hopeful, and dangerous work in progress, a human construct that can be actively shaped and altered through literary art. The authors in this book all found their voices, in part, because they believed they could make a difference in the world of commercial exchange and in the very ways in which literature is produced and consumed.