

“AM I MY OTHER’S KEEPER?”:  
ALTERITY, DIALOGIC REPRESENTATION AND POLYPHONIC ETHICAL DISCOURSE  
IN LATER ANTEBELLUM AMERICAN FICTION

By

Stephen Andrew Gaertner

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## ABSTRACT

### “AM I MY OTHER’S KEEPER?”: ALTERITY, DIALOGIC REPRESENTATION AND POLYPHONIC ETHICAL DISCOURSE IN LATER ANTEBELLUM AMERICAN FICTION

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Hayden White argues that to create a narrative is to “moralize.” As historicists assert, the moral content of a narrative reflects the social, cultural and political discourses in which it is constructed as well as the ethical value systems that such discourses contain. However, context does not reveal the entire story. Mikhail Bakhtin holds that narratives are polyphonic, that is, they contain multiple, competing discourses, at times represented through singular idiolects. But what are these various voices talking about, and to whom? Polyphonic or “carnavalesque” narratives rehearse and contest contrasting ethical paradigms, exposing their discursive limits as well as their transcendent possibilities in a given *milieu*. Thus, the text manifests the emergence of a dialogic exchange between ethical discourses, the yield of which is a creative destabilization that resists the archaeological confinement of time, place and ideology.

Therefore, I engage an ethical formalist rereading of a selection of antebellum narrative fictions in order to probe the discursive possibilities latent within the texts’ moral imaginaries. In addition to deploying Bakhtin’s work on polyphonic narrative, I use Emmanuel Levinas’ ethical theory of alterity that stresses the moral agent’s duty to respond on behalf of an individualized subject otherwise totalized by an oppressive, thematizing discourse. Whereas Levinas describes the moment of this ethical demand as the face-to-face encounter, I argue that the responsive duty suggested by the instance of inter-subjective recognition is represented within fiction as dialogue, in addition to the more subtle discourses that the narrator adds.

Beyond exposing the text's ethical tensions, these dialogic moments reflect the discursive polyphony theorized by Bakhtin, multi-vocal eruptions often signaled by a *perichoresis* of distinct idiolects.

The works I discuss—James Fenimore Cooper's Littlepage Trilogy, Herman Melville's *Israel Potter* and "Benito Cereno," Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall* and Harriet E. Wilson's *Our Nig*—all contain ethical discourses elaborated through idiolectical dialogic structures and polyphony. Furthermore, the context of their production—the late-antebellum United States—situates them within ethical conversations on totalization and interpersonal duty for the Other in that the modernizing republic was struggling with the moral implications of Indian removal, African slavery, urban labor, poverty and gender oppression.

Yet, a Levinasian reading of antebellum U.S. literature invites looking beyond ideological power discourses. In addition to reflecting how American republicanism and capitalism of the mid-1800's totalized, confined and dehumanized disempowered Others, these texts evidence rhetorical ambivalence respecting the status of the differentiated Other and the moral subject's duty to the Other in a capitalist republic obsessed with categorical ordering and uncomfortable with ambiguity. Despite their concerns with political, social and ethical regulation, though, these polyphonic works contain transcendent ethical counter-discourses on duty and Otherness that expose a symbiosis between radical Others, peoples otherwise divided by contrasting ethical, political, cultural, racial or socioeconomic alignments.

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## INTRODUCTION

Hayden White argues in *The Content of the Form* that “narrativity, certainly in factual storytelling and probably in fictional storytelling as well, is intimately related to, if not a function of, the impulse to moralize reality, that is, to identify it with the social system that is the source of any morality that we can imagine” (14); in short, to create a narrative is to moralize. As White and other historicists suggest, the moral content of a narrative reflects the social, cultural and political discourses in which it is constructed; like an archaeological artifact, the text speaks to its immediate surroundings, and the ethical value systems that inform them. But a narrative’s socio-historical context does not reveal the entire “story.”

Mikhail Bakhtin holds that narrative texts are “polyphonic,” that is, they contain multiple, competing discourses (Murfin and Ray 86), at times represented through the construction of singular “idiolects” (Richter 548). This sort of idiosyncratic, discursive interplay is what makes them interesting! But what are these various voices talking about, and to whom? Polyphonic or “carnavalesque” narratives (Holquist xix), in particular fiction—creative prose provides rich rhetorical terrain for the moral imaginary—rehearse and contest contrasting ethical paradigms, exposing their discursive limits as well as their transcendent possibilities in a given *milieu*. Thus, the text manifests dialogic exchanges between ethical discourses, the yield of which is a creative destabilization of comprehension that opens up a broader horizon regarding hidden or latent meaning(s) that resist the archaeological confinement of time, place and ideology.

In this dissertation, I explore representations of the ethical imagination and the concept of interpersonal response to the Other within antebellum narrative texts from the northeastern

United States. On a formalist plane, I am interested in how the suggestion and depiction of dialogue within polyphonic narratives undergird *and* destabilize larger understandings of social economy, authority, personal responsibility, interpersonal moral obligation and the rhetorical mechanisms for regulating ethical behavior on the antebellum American scene. I also investigate how these notions are translated within narratives into a greater preoccupation regarding individual invocation, and how this sense of personal duty places a moral demand on textual subjects at times in accord with conventional notions of social order, authority and responsibility, but also at times in conflict with them. This vocational tension as manifested within certain works of northeastern American fiction from the mid-1800's opens up a dynamic, discursive public space of competing moral paradigms, and points not only to *the* definitive political rupture to occur in the U.S. in 1861, but also to an *ethical* imperative for citizens and communities to delineate what constitutes the Good and therefore the individual agent's moral responsibility for a differentiated Other. I will explain this crucial ethical concept of Otherness, or "alterity" in Emmanuel Levinas' wording, before moving on to its critical application to my textual analyses and the overarching sociopolitical, historical context that informs the works I examine.

### I. Levinas

In *Totality and Infinity*, Emmanuel Levinas defines the "particular" Other (73) in opposition to the Selfsame "I" as an individualized, unique subject, separate from the Self, and one whom the Self often attempts to objectify and appropriate. He writes:

The other metaphysically desired is not "other" like the bread I eat, the land in which I dwell, the landscape I contemplate, like, sometimes, myself for myself, this "I," that "other." I can "feed" on these realities and to a very great extent satisfy myself, as though I had simply been lacking them. Their *alterity* is thereby



reabsorbed into my own identity as a thinker or a possessor. The metaphysical desire tends toward *something else entirely*, toward the *absolutely other*. (33)

This notion of the “absolutely other” here is key, for it delineates that which cannot—or ought not—be “reabsorbed” or “totalized” by or into the Selfsame—the “I”—who seeks to control, possess and render “like” the absolutely or particularized Other. Levinas explains in *Alterity & Transcendence* that “[t]otalization’ may be understood to mean either the grouping of objects or of points in a whole, or the intellectual operation by which that multiplicity of objects or points is encompassed. [...] The true function of totalizing thought does not consist in looking at being, but in determining it by organizing it” (39-40, 47). A “totality,” then, is an organizing systematization “in which all Other is included in the Same” (56). It is here where Levinas’ notion of alterity moves from the abstract to the distinct and interpersonal, and therefore to the realm of “ethical relation” (97). He continues:

to see the infinite in the suppression of the *Other* or in reconciliation with him assumes that the Other is, for the Same, nothing but limit and menace. Who would dispute that it is so...in a human society subjected, like all finite reality, to the formal principle according to which the *other* limits or cramps the *same*: the wars and violence of the world, of all ages, is sufficient proof of that. But the other man—the absolutely other—the Other [*autrui*—does not exhaust his presence by that repressive function. His presence can be meeting and friendship, and in this the human is in contrast with all other reality. (56)

He then explains the primacy of ethics as the omnipresent responsibility—or “duty” (105)—of the Selfsame “I” to strive for this particular Other’s “right to well-being” (146), as opposed to attempting, often via language, to reduce this Other to a dehumanized type, a part of a totality of

genericized beings who, as a result of their systematized generality, are now assimilated within the dominant hegemonic discourse:

In the relation to the other, the other appears to me as one to whom I owe something, toward whom I have a responsibility. Hence the asymmetry of the I-You relation and the radical inequality between the I and the being toward whom I have obligations. I insist, therefore, on the gratuitousness of the ‘for the other,’ resting on the responsibility that is already there in a dormant state. The ‘for the other’ arises within the *I*, like a command heard by him... [...] The person for whom one is responsible is *unique*, and the one who is responsible cannot delegate his or her responsibility. [...] In that relation to the other, there is *no fusion*: the relation to the other is envisioned as *alterity*. (101, 102, 103, *emphasis mine*)

Here I pause to emphasize that within the scope of my textual analyses, I will deploy the words “Other” and “Otherness”—to offset the importance of these words, I capitalize them—in two ethical senses. One refers to Levinas’ notion of the non-totalized, unique Other for whom the “I” is always responsible. The second—and this is key—is the Other, the person different from the Selfsame “I” who *has* been inscribed within a given “thematizing” (123) or totalizing discourse, that is, one who has been absorbed, assimilated into a type-category and who comprises in part the unaccounted “third party” Other in Levinas’ ethics, or the “other” Other, the totalized person to whom one chooses *not* to respond on a moral plane.<sup>1</sup> In those portions of the project where I

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<sup>1</sup> Levinas explains in *Alterity & Transcendence*: “Alterity’s plot is born before knowledge. But that apparent simplicity of the relation between the I and the You, in its very asymmetry, is yet again disturbed by the arrival of the third person, who stands next to the other, the you. The third party is also a neighbor, a face, an unattainable alterity. [...] Here, with the third party, we have the proximity of a human plurality. Between the second and the third person, there can be relations in which one is guilty toward the other. I pass from the relation in which I am obligated to the other, responsible for the other, to one in which I ask myself which is first. I ask the question of justice: Which one, in that plurality, is the other par excellence? How can one judge? How to compare others—

discuss the concept of hybridity and hybrid identities in conjunction with the ethics of alterity, this bifurcation of the meaning of Other is more essential.

But why *ethics* as opposed to a more common literary-critical approach? And why study just novels? To return again to Hayden White, narrative, whether considered history or fiction, contributes to the author's and the predominant culture's dialectic/didactic project of social and intellectual ordering, of trying to represent, interpret and resolve the conflicts and contradictions that bedevil a society at a given point in time. Underlying this edifying narrative poetics, I argue, is an often unconscious impulse to model *moral* interpersonal relationships, communities and/or polities conducive to human flourishing—the Good—a desire which is the quintessential ethical aim in terms of the definition of ethics that I adopt from Paul Ricoeur's *Oneself as Another*: “*aiming at the good life with and for others in just institutions*” (180, *emphasis author's*). Part and parcel with this narrative ordering is a need to codify motivations and behaviors as either “good” or “bad,” in addition to creating or reinforcing various categories into which different persons, the moral agents of such behaviors, are inscribed. These are the hierarchies of socioeconomic classes, occupations, ethno-racial and cultural-linguistic groups, genders, and geographic and political associations that comprise the various totalities within which the individuated subject's unique identity becomes generalized, losing personal distinction and human particularity. Important to note is that Levinas connects this totalizing impulse with the textual realm. He writes regarding the “hermeneutic totality” that

[t]he understanding of a text, a cultural work...goes from the parts to a whole, but the parts derive their meaning from the totality. There would appear to be a circle in totalizing and analyzing thought that one would be tempted to call vicious, as

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unique and incomparable? The person for whom one is responsible is unique, and the one who is responsible cannot delegate his or her responsibility. In this sense, the latter is also unique” (101-02). I offer that such is the paradox of Levinas' ethics of alterity, and thus the practical, instinctual and unconscious allure of thematizing totalization.

the analysis and the synthesis mutually presuppose one another. [...] A notion of totality and of intellect that would lead to the understanding of all experience, and perhaps all reasoning on things, according to the model of interpretation of texts.

(49)

If the text is a written attempt to totalize reality and all individual subjects therein, I would answer Levinas' claim by asserting that its "analysis and synthesis" shows—and this point I will concretize when I arrive at the matter of novelistic dialogics and polyphonic discourse in my treatment of Mikhail Bakhtin—that formally *and* ethically narrative, by virtue of its inherent interpretive instability, tends to eschew totalization by the dominant sociopolitical, historical context which envelopes its production, even if such a hegemony-resistant phenomenon appears counterintuitive at first.

Still, I concede that novels with a pronounced didactic dimension often attempt to suture hierarchical social categorization with particular rhetorical constructions of good and bad interpersonal conduct. That is, "good" archetypal characters represent persons who champion a stable construction of social order: even abolitionist texts from the 1850's contain strong versions of such rhetoric as part of their ethical fiber. "Bad" archetypes, however, foster categorical ambiguity on one or numerous levels of identity, whether obscuring boundaries between distinct social classes or ethno-racial groups. Put simply, the dangerous yield of such incursions is a blurring of the Selfsame/Other distinction crucial to most paradigms of social ordering. I assert that this narrative model of hierarchicalized, compartmentalized social ethics is problematized in the U.S.'s later antebellum period in that the young republic, within the fabric of its philosophical-ideological inception, was grappling with the ethical implications of a radical reinterpretation of its republican ideals. The nation was also dealing with the increasing and

alarming disintegration of conventional social, hierarchical boundaries that had ordered and totalized various categories of persons, as well as governed the interpersonal ethical relationships between them. Rising numbers of “free” and mobile African Americans and mixed-race persons, the social incorporation of American Indians, a beginning flood of Catholic immigrants, the phenomenon of economically and politically ambitious tenant farmers, the emergence of an urban-industrial yeomanry, and the changing roles—domestic, public and professional—of women in the U.S. made typological classification, and the socioeconomic and ideological-political structures that enforced it, almost impossible to sustain.

Within this complicated, dynamic *milieu* would arise a volatile but necessary dialogue suturing the abstract debate over the U.S.’s republican ideals and the vaguer, though no less present, conversation over the moral status of the particular person. What was the ethical duty owed to the differentiated human subject within a democratic state grounded on the government’s, as well as the individual moral agent’s, responsibility for an-“Other” person’s wellbeing? As I will demonstrate, this antebellum ethical preoccupation comes into relief when the concept of interpersonal duty involves not just the invocation of the Self’s moral responsibility for an individuated subject within a common socioeconomic, cultural or ethno-racial caste, but also for the unique, differentiated Other, the particularized, non-totalized human otherwise inscribed within a contrasting subset of “like” subjects. Or in other words, what happens in a modern republic when the moral agent can no longer dismiss the needs of the absolutely Other by categorizing him or her within a larger generalizing and dehumanizing totality of Others—“third parties”—regarding whom one has already absolved him or herself of moral responsibility on the basis of this ethno-racial, cultural or socioeconomic divide? The novels I examine grapple with varying facets of this question, directly and indirectly, sometimes

with ambivalence and often with irony. I believe that within their “carnavalesque” dialogic narratives, these texts both reflect and contribute to this polyphonic ethical dialogue in late-antebellum America. I pursue a historicized ethico-formalist reading of antebellum fictions in order to probe the discursive possibilities latent in their moral imaginaries.

## II. Bakhtin

Regarding my ethico-formalist focus on novelistic prose, I rely on the theory of Mikhail Bakhtin, in particular his essay “Discourse in the Novel.” Bakhtin’s exploration of the polyphonic or “carnavalesque” phenomenon of competing, socio-ideological discourses within the dialogic rhetorical makeup of narratives works well with a project engaging ambivalent and contradictory discourses, overt and latent, representative of national conversations about the meaning, and future, of American society at an anxious moment in U.S. history.<sup>2</sup> This idea of dialogue is the interpretive linchpin of my critical approach and textual analysis. Like Bakhtin, I employ the terms “dialogue” and “dialogic” on two levels. Literal “dialogue” refers to the textual representation or simulation of speaking, conversing subjects within the narrative. Also like Bakhtin, I use the word *dialogic* to connote the interplay or polyphony within the author’s otherwise monologic prose of contrasting and competing moral-ethical discourses—“internal dialogism” (“Discourse” 326)—relating to these fictional texts’ rhetorical constructions of Otherness. As my discussion will make evident, sometimes these two distinct yet related senses of dialogue overlap: the literal dialogues in a novel depict through the simulation of particularized speech patterns—regional accents, vernaculars or other individualizing

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<sup>2</sup> Bakhtin’s assertion of the primacy of the dialogic interface within language and narrative literature over the monologic—in the sense of there always being within linguistic expression, whether verbal utterance or its representation, the assumption and anticipation of a response—parallels Levinas’ privileging of ethics over ontology, in that his understanding of the ultimate Good within a viable ethical system implies as well the encounter between a Self—a speaking individual subject—and an Other (or between two Others) wherein arises the moral invocation to assume responsibility for the wellbeing of the Other as a distinct, non-totalized person.

mechanisms—different ideological, philosophical and ethical positions. However, at times the larger discursive sense of “dialogic” implies how the narrative’s rhetorical machinery—plot, descriptive language, character archetypes and genre conventions—suggests *and* services these competing interpersonal ethical discourses, and often with ambivalence and irony.

Levinas *and* Bakhtin necessarily form the critical backbone of this project, for as I will show, just as Levinas’ understanding of the ethics of alterity connotes conversation with the Other, so too does Bakhtin’s literary theory on dialogue and discursive polyphony in the novel invoke an ethics of particularity and interpersonal response for the non-totalized, individuated subject.<sup>3</sup> To begin with Levinas, he writes in *Totality and Infinity* that “[t]o approach the Other in conversation is to welcome his expression... The relation with the Other, or Conversation, is a non-allergic relation, an ethical relation” (51), later explaining:

[t]he claim to know and to reach the other is realized in the relationship with the Other that is cast in the relation of language, where the essential is the interpellation, the vocative. The other is maintained and confirmed in his heterogeneity as soon as one calls upon him, be it only to say to him that the one cannot speak to him, to classify him as sick, to announce to him his death sentence; at the same time as grasped, wounded, outraged, he is “respected.” The invoked is not what I comprehend: *he is not under a category*. (69)

Levinas then continues:

in its expressive function language precisely maintains the other—to whom it is addressed, whom it calls upon and invokes. To be sure, language does not consist

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<sup>3</sup> In the context of Levinas’ thought, I define “individuation” as the byproduct of “[a]n ethical relation that would thus not be a simple deficiency or privation of the unity of the One reduced to the multiplicity of individuals in the extension of the genus! Here, on the contrary, in ethical peace, a relation to the unassimilable other, the irreducible other, the unique other. Only the unique is irreducible and absolutely other!” (*Alterity* 137-38).

in invoking him as a being represented and thought. But this is why language institutes a relation irreducible to the subject-object relation: the *revelation* of the other... Language presupposes interlocutors, a plurality. Their commerce is not a representation of the one by the other, nor a participation in universality on the common plane of language. Their commerce, as we shall show shortly, is ethical.

(73)

What Levinas establishes here is the ethical link between vocalized language, in particular inter-subjective dialogue or “conversation,” and the “face to face” encounter with the individuated Other that makes true “justice” possible in the world (71), in that such an encounter impedes the rhetoric of thematizing totalization. Thus, I hold that in novels containing significant moral didacticism, the textual simulation of dialogic face to face encounters suggests an inter-subjective ethical exchange, the moment of mutual, “irreducible” Selfsame/Other recognition that either bears or implies the “invocation” of the moral agent’s responsibility—duty—of “being-for-the-Other” (*Totality* 261).<sup>4</sup>

As Jeffrey T. Nealon points out, the dialogic instance is where Levinas and Bakhtin intersect. Discoursing on Levinas’ ethics of alterity as a response to authoritarian, rhetorical totalization in history and its contemporary relevance and applicability, Nealon explains that postmodern thinkers have increasingly turned to a dialogic, intersubjective understanding of ethics. Dialogic intersubjectivity, understood in terms of an impassioned play of voices, [polyphony, or the “carnavalesque”] has displaced the dominant modernist and existentialist metaphor of the monadic subject and its plaintive demand for social recognition and submission from the other... Voice

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Ricoeur echoes much Levinas’ thinking on the interrelationship of alterity, ethics and verbal exchange in *Oneself as Another* in his explication of the “situation of interlocution”—conversation— between individualized, “irreplaceable” speaking subjects (40-49).



can “de-essentialize” ethics precisely because it also highlights an emphasis on ‘response’...one must learn to *find* one’s own voice and to *hear* the voice of the other within a common social context. It is precisely the movements of seeking, listening and answering that an intersubjective ethics of response might be born. And this points to the distinctly *ethical* character of dialogics: if social space is understood as a rich dialogue of voices rather than a fight for recognition and domination, then the other is not necessarily a menacing or hostile force. (33)

He then invokes Bakhtin’s “ethics of ‘answerability’” from *Art and Answerability* as a “dialogic” complement to Levinas’ project, though it is not congruent in every respect. He writes:

[a]t first, this may seem like an odd pairing insofar as Bakhtin’s formidable reputation has not been built primarily as an ethicist. However,...Bakhtin’s dialogics is becoming recontextualized as a powerful *ethical* discourse. [...] It is Bakhtin’s and Levinas’s mutual insistence on the subject’s irreducible engagement with otherness that has brought them so centrally into the contemporary dialogue concerning ethical subjectivity... Both thinkers deploy some notion of unassimilable excess as a bulwark against the reification of otherness... Both Bakhtin and Levinas insist that ethics exists in an ongoing obligation to respond to the other, rather than a static march toward some philosophical end or conclusion. [...] For both Bakhtin and Levinas, then, it is *ethics*—answerability or responsibility—that is literally first philosophy: response to the concrete [particularized] other comes first, before the thematics of ontology... Both Bakhtin and Levinas link ethical dialogue to the bewildering

specificity of others and social contexts, rather than to the monologizing generality of ethical rules. (35-36, 37).

In addition to situating Bakhtin within the scope of Levinasian alterity ethics—or *vice versa* in that Bakhtin predates Levinas—Nealon makes another crucial move that connects Bakhtin’s ethics of answerability with his formalist, dialogo-centric literary criticism:

To use his most suggestive metaphor, the Bakhtinian subject’s encounter with the other is based on aesthetic [literary] models, where I am the author and the other is my character—someone with whom I relate and experiment... The hero or the other, then, is in some sense a version of the author...but still remains absolutely irreducible to that author, remains in fact the marker of the author’s openness to his or her own excessive, eventful self-overcoming in dialogue with the other...in the eyes of the author, his or her text is precisely one...in which he or she is a voice situated among a carnival of many others. (41-42)

As will become evident during my analysis of the primary texts, the authors’—and narrators’—voices add a significant rhetorical dimension to the discursive ethical polyphony that emerges in them, in addition to the ambivalent and often ironic “carnavalesque” interplay amongst the main characters.

Yet, as Bakhtin also argues, the represented dialogues between characters are also instructive and of ethical importance. Anticipating the work of Hayden White, Bakhtin insists that “the study of verbal art can and must overcome the divorce between the abstract ‘formal’ approach and the equally abstract ‘ideological’ approach. Form and content in discourse are one, once we understand that verbal discourse is a social phenomenon” (“Discourse” 259). He then continues: “As a living socio-ideological concrete thing, as heteroglot opinion, language, for the

individual consciousness lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. [...] Therefore, the stratification of language...that of particular world views, particular tendencies, particular individuals...upon entering the novel establishes its own special order within it, and becomes a unique artistic system” (293, 299). The key point here is the association, also seen in Levinas, between linguistic exchange, the denotation of Otherness from the Selfsame, and of individual particularity. Regarding the singular, discursive import of dialogic representation within the genre of the novel, Bakhtin elaborates:

heteroglossia either enters the novel in person (so to speak) and assumes material form within it in the images of speaking persons, or it determines, as a dialogizing background, the special resonance of novelistic discourse. [...] From this follows the decisive and distinctive importance of the novel as a genre: the human being in the novel is first, foremost and always a speaking human being; the novel requires speaking persons bringing with them their own unique ideological discourse, their own language. [...] The fundamental condition, that which makes a novel a novel, that which is responsible for its stylistic uniqueness, is the *speaking person and his discourse*. (332)

Later, he links the novelistic representation of the speaking—or *dialogizing*—subject with ethics:

The enormous significance of the motif of the speaking person is obvious in the realm of ethical and legal thought and discourse. The speaking person and his discourse is, in these areas, the major topic of thought and speech... An independent, responsible and active discourse is *the* fundamental indicator of an ethical, legal and political human being. [...] In a word, the novelistic plot serves to represent speaking persons and their ideological worlds. What is realized in the

novel is the process of coming to know one's own language as it is perceived in someone else's language, coming to know one's own horizon within someone else's horizon. (349-50, 365)

According to Nealon, Bakhtin's earlier works—*Art and Answerability* and *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*—invest his later master work of formalist criticism, "Discourse in the Novel," with an inter-subjective ethical ballast when read against this larger intellectual backdrop which, as Nealon argues and I affirm, links Bakhtin's ethical mediations with Levinas' work on alterity. Thus, I posit that an ethico-formalist reading of novelistic fiction employing Levinas' and Bakhtin's theories holds critical merit as an insightful analytical interpretive strategy.

### III. Historical Context

The works I have chosen to discuss—Cooper's Littlepage Trilogy, Melville's *Israel Potter* and "Benito Cereno," Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall* and Harriet E. Wilson's *Our Nig*—all contain competing ethical discourses and pronounced dialogic structures featuring Bakhtinian idiolects that signal polyphonic discursive eruptions. Furthermore, the context of their publication—the late-antebellum U.S.—situates them within significant conversations on interpersonal duty as an ethics of "being-for-the-[differentiated] Other," in that the modernizing republic was struggling with the moral implications of Indian removal, slavery, internal migration, foreign immigration, urban labor, poverty and gender oppression.

As Lorna Wood affirms, a Levinasian ethical reading of earlier U.S. literature invites looking beyond ideological power discourses. Wood claims that

[w]hile Levinas's ideas concerning literary criticism do not preclude cultural and historical analysis—such analysis would be crucial to the broader social work of justice—they do refocus attention from issues of ideology and power relations

[discourses] to the ethical considerations connected with recurrence as initiated by aesthetic experience... Levinas's insistence on the delusory nature of freedom in being opens up a space in which to consider both individual aesthetic experiences and cultural work in general as potentially more than [but not divorced from] struggles for and against systems of power. (172)<sup>5</sup>

Nealon goes further, articulating how different critical camps, situated under the umbrella of identity politics, prove inadequate for engaging an ethics of Otherness to the extent that Levinas and Bakhtin manifest in their work, in that identity politics only succeeds—ironically—in creating *more* thematized categories of Others and type amalgamations, as opposed to dignifying the individual person. He writes:

For all its gains, such a contemporary intersubjective or multiculturalist reinscription of identity politics remains unable to deal with the other *as* other; it continues to thematize differences among persons, groups, and discourses in terms of (the impossibility of their) sameness. Each group or identity wants to rule the field, but it can't, so every group and individual must share this lack, mourn collectively for what each can't have. In turn, however, it is precisely this lack or expropriation that bolsters the recriminatory politics of resentment that has plagued and continues to plague identity politics. (6-7).

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<sup>5</sup> From a Bakhtinian angle, I posit that Levinas' ethics as employed in literary criticism need not be subsumed within a totalizing power discourse. Rather, what Wood suggests is the possibility of the ethical interrogation, within literature, of contested notions of justice and freedom. This intersection of ethical conversations surrounding American conceptions of justice and freedom with literary scholarship offers the potential for a re-framing of the present discourse on northeastern antebellum texts. This would allow for the incorporation of an ethical-critical optic within a field which has long relied on analytics shaped by politics and ideology.

I venture that whereas this limitation of identity politics rears its head in general within contemporary literary criticism, as Wood's argument suggests, it has a specific application to American literature. Likewise, Nealon focuses his "ethical" assault:

virtually all critical camps—groups as diverse as Habermasians, feminists, postcolonial theorists, Marxists, Deleuzians, African Americanists, deconstructionists, Lacanians, queer theorists, and pragmatists—remain aligned in their attempts to critique a subjectivity that inexorably goes about reducing the other to the categories of the self. Any ethical system that understands the other as simply 'like the self' will be unable to respond adequately to the other's uniqueness and singularity; indeed, such a reduction amounts to a kind of subjective colonialism, where all the other's desires are reduced to the desires of the 'home country,' the self. (31-32)

That said, I temper Nealon's position, which speaks to a certain level of critical "Balkanization" within literary studies, with the observation that such articulations of Otherness within culture and history are necessary if we are to gain a nuanced understanding of the individualized Other and her/his experience. After all, it is for *this* differentiated subject that Levinas' and Bakhtin's ethics call us to respond or "answer," either as an actual person we encounter face to face, or as an Other dialogically represented within textual discourse. Both the real and the textually simulated instance require, in tandem with recognizing the interpersonal ethical importance of particularity, an awareness of socioeconomic, political, cultural and historical contexts.

Therefore, my analysis integrates a significant concern for time and place.

In addition to reflecting how American republicanism and "free" market capitalism of the mid 1800's in the North *and* South totalized, confined and dehumanized disempowered Others,

the selected primary texts evidence ambivalence. That is, they show a polyphonic—and ironic—instability of ideas respecting the status of the differentiated Other, in addition to a general hesitancy regarding the moral subject's duty to the Other in a “revolutionary” capitalist republic obsessed with order and categorical control and uncomfortable with ambiguity. Thus, these narratives, even Fern's and Wilson's, suggest within their dialogic structures a preoccupation with the discursive restoration of authority, socioeconomic, ethno-racial hierarchies and “authorized” ethical relationships amidst menacing societal instability. Despite their thematic concerns with political, social and ethical regulation, though, these polyphonic works contain volatile dialogues voicing contextually transcendent counter-discourses on interpersonal ethics. These dialogues express a counterintuitive sense of duty to the singular subject, exposing a symbiosis between radical Others, peoples otherwise divided by contrasting moral, political, cultural, socioeconomic or ethno-racial alignments.

Again with respect to Bakhtin and Levinas, I counterbalance this theoretical assemblage of secondary authors and abstract critical thought with a selection of works that ground the primary texts within their socioeconomic, cultural, political and historical contexts during the 1840's and '50's in the northeastern United States. This conscious methodological, geo-historical commitment is also due to the fact that the conceptions of time, history and chronology as framed within the primary works is significant to my overall discussion. Within this polyphony of voices I locate my own critical terrain regarding the evolving academic conversation on antebellum American literature. In proceeding to this end, I was inspired by the work of Myra Jehlen, in particular her introduction to the collected volume *Ideology and Classic American Literature* (1986, co-edited with Sacvan Bercovitch), and by Linda Bolton's *Facing the Other: Ethical Disruption and the American Mind* (2004). While tracing the chronology of

literary criticism and scholarship, Jehlen announces the possibility of, and the demand for, a bolder breed of academic analysis treating “classic” American literature, such as ideological formalism, that pushes beyond the longstanding interpretive boundaries of cultural materialism that have defined, and at times limited, the field’s critical and methodological horizons (1-18).

With this broad critical heuristic in place, Linda Bolton models the novel possibilities of applying Levinas’ ethical theory of alterity to early republican and antebellum texts as a new approach to an existing sociocultural discourse on the problematic, contradictory notion of *justice* in American thought and writing of the late 1700’s and 1800’s.<sup>6</sup> In view of this critical genealogy, I build upon Bolton’s approach to early American literature. I develop a hybrid or “synthetic” analytical study of antebellum narrative prose that investigates not just the ethical questions they raise through a Levinasian optic, but also one which equally incorporates Bakhtin’s dialogic-polyphonic formalism as well as a historicist reading, the interpretive validity of which Bakhtin’s formalism still permits.

Before again examining my choice in genre and texts, a glance at American scene of the mid 1800’s is warranted. For early American historians *and* literary scholars, this particular moment, situated between Nullification and Secession with the Battle of New Orleans and Andrew Jackson’s infamous Trail of Tears in the background and the Mexican-American War in the fore, demands critical attention. Daniel Walker Howe testifies:

Some Americans [after 1815] felt largely satisfied with their society the way it was, slavery and all, especially with the autonomy it provided to so many individual white men and their local communities . . . other Americans, however, were beguiled by the prospect of improvement to pursue economic

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<sup>6</sup> To my knowledge, Bolton is the first to apply in an extended, systematic fashion Levinas’ ethical concept of alterity to early republican and antebellum texts and the development of the American ethical imagination.



diversification and social reform, even at the risk of compromising some precious personal and local independence. They envisioned qualitative, not just quantitative, progress for America. In the long run, the choice was more than an economic decision; it was a *moral* one... (62, *emphasis mine*)

The volatile antebellum period was convulsed by questions regarding modernization, economic development, social change and the continuing evolution of rhetoric of national self-imagining. Howe touches a nerve in linking the notions of autonomy, morality and historical progress prior to Secession. These interrelated yet conflicting ideas are most effectively and *affectively* mined within the genre of narrative writing. Not only does narrative evidence a “political unconscious” as a text produced within a specific socio-historical context (Jameson 13), but it also represents through its mechanisms of action, plot movement, description, character and dialogue discursive simulations or “dress rehearsals” of competing models of American republicanism, culture, economy, citizenship and ethics in the decades before the Civil War. Again with respect to my focus on narrative as well as my further emphasis on *dialogue*, I borrow from the criticism of Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin’s understanding of textual polyphony as a diversity of actualized and implied voices within narrative fits well with an analytic project treating a multitude of dialogized voices or idiolects representing a diverse, changing U.S. sociopolitical topography.

Analyzing diverse Bakhtinian dialogues and polyphonies within mid-century American narratives from the northeast functions as a critical point of entry into a larger conversation about how these texts were wrestling with late modern ethical thought on the American scene during the mid-1800’s. That said, I discuss the antebellum emergence of a preoccupation with ethics in the sense of the demand placed on the moral agent to respond for the Good of the differentiated, particularized Other that interpersonal duty invokes. The latent presence of simultaneous,

competing ideological-ethical discourses within northeastern antebellum fiction offers a concrete glimpse into how language, in particular the textual representation/simulation of dialogue, reflects the U.S.'s shifting moral imaginary prior to 1860.

Finally, aside from being American novels from the mid 1800's, the texts I selected share a regional affinity, in that their authors are all rooted in either New York or New England. My focus on the American northeast is not arbitrary: as the primary locus of political power and abolitionism as well as industrial manufacturing, urbanization, migration and immigration during the mid-1800's, this region before most others was confronting modern social problems and accompanying ethical concerns, as Thomas Skidmore would remind us. Labor issues, poverty, overcrowding and ethno-racial tensions threatened to bury the poor individual worker in a mass urban grave of generic proletarians drained of personal identity and no longer warranting ethical concern as particularized subjects. The work of John Stuart Mill and Thomas Robert Malthus in particular evidence the western trend at the dawn of late modernity to treat human beings as demographic abstractions. The texts I will discuss all engage facets of this greater ethical-historical problem of recognizing the individual human subject within a modern culture of interpersonal distancing and generalization. That said, my purpose in selecting these texts is *not* to suggest that narrative writing from the American northeast in the 1840's and '50's is somehow more "normative" than from other regions of the United States or historical periods, though James Fenimore Cooper and Herman Melville are two of the most well known American authors. Rather, what I do suggest in my reading of these works is that in spite of contextual relatedness, fissures in their ethical understanding and treatment of notions of duty, responsibility and Otherness appear in the texts' language and narrative structures when juxtaposing Cooper (New York), Melville (New York), Fanny Fern (Boston and New York) and Harriet E. Wilson

(Connecticut and Massachusetts). A diversity of cultural, political and socio-economic experiences amongst these authors is at play here, even within a limited geo-historical milieu that, in my study, excludes Edgar Allan Poe, Caroline Kirkland and William Gilmore Simms.

#### IV. Overview of Chapters and Primary Texts

In Chapter 1 I discuss James Fenimore Cooper's novels *Satanstoe* (1845), *The Chainbearer* (1845), and *The Redskins* (1846). I posit that these texts manifest within their dialogic structures salient examples of Bakhtinian discursive polyphony and idiolect. Furthermore, the novels' juxtaposition of distinct dialects is complicated by a *chronological* polyphony where varying voices across a wide span of time synthesize their plots as narrative totalities, yet in their diversity and plurality destabilize the "totalization of history" which would otherwise "thematize" the Other (*Totality* 52, 55, 65). However, in that the three novels have different historical settings, feature different central characters and reflect distinct rhetorical strategies as stand-alone works, I elect to engage each text individually, while still acknowledging the larger "narrative totality" that the trilogy forms. I also note that the novels have *two* implied audiences, one past and fictive—the first-person narrator's audience—and another contemporary and actual—the "Editor's." Within this tangle of voices and idiolects is the historical context surrounding the trilogy's composition, for the novels' ethical ballast, implicit *and* explicit, is informed by New York State's Anti-Rent Wars of the 1830's and 40's. I also focus on how Cooper interweaves the ethical concerns of duty, interpersonal responsibility, familial estate obligation and Otherness within the texts' conventional storylines and archetypal characters. The result is a marked departure from liberal, romanticized notions of individualism, freedom and natural rights that Cooper presents in *The Pioneers* (1823).

In the second chapter I focus on Herman Melville's *Israel Potter* (1854-55) and "Benito Cereno" (1855). Though both are set in the late 1700's, they are nevertheless written against the incendiary backdrop of the Revolutions of 1848, the Compromise of 1850, the Kansas-Nebraska Act and Free Soil politics. Melville's texts expose in their ambivalent, unstable and ironic polyphonic dialogism the extent to which the late-antebellum republic's obsession with delineating and "confining" national ethical discourses that resisted such containment. I discuss how these narratives demonstrate the ways in which the urban-industrial North and the rural-agrarian South offered competing versions of socioeconomic Otherness and interpersonal ethics in addition to their rival political views on federal republicanism and secession. In particular, *Israel Potter* champions the industrial yeoman as oppressed Other, as well as the figure of the African slave in "Benito Cereno." Furthermore, in both works the notions of *hybrid* identity and language complicate the representation of particularized Otherness and thus the interpersonal ethical response that the individuated Other invokes according to Levinas' paradigm.

Finally, Chapter 3 includes close readings of Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall* (1854) and Harriet E. Wilson's *Our Nig* (1859). As I show, these novels work well within a project employing Levinas' ethical theory of alterity as well as Bakhtin's formalism, in that both authors call attention to interpersonal ethical concerns surrounding sociocultural constructions of the Other in the "progressive" and "abolitionist" North: antebellum women oppressed within the domestic *and* the urban-professional sphere as well as liminal housewives and indentured mulatta girls. They also showcase dialogic structures that mirror the polyphonic ethical discourses contained in their narratives. In this final chapter, I focus in particular on the dialogic novelistic construction of sentimental/melodramatic archetypes and their ambivalent and ironic deployment in Fern's and Wilson's novels. Drawing from Levinas' description of the "persecutor" as a particular

Other for whom the moral subject must also assume ethical responsibility (*Otherwise* 111), I show how the prevailing sentimental-rhetorical discourse fueled by the novels' female, sympathetic protagonists and vilified antagonists obscures a competing counter-discourse within the texts. I argue that this ethical counter-discourse destabilizes Fern's and Wilson's "static" characters, resulting in more complicated—and rhetorically problematic—figures that embody aspects of the heroine *and* villainess archetypes, blurring the boundary between the victimized Other and the Selfsame oppressor.

By engaging this permutation of Levinasian ethics, I neither ignore nor diminish pertinent, and necessary, historicist, deconstructionist and postcolonial readings done within early Americanist studies: on the contrary, my intervention builds upon and works in tandem with such criticism, for despite Nealon's legitimate admonitions, identity politics has contributed much to the field. Still, like Nealon I hope that the application of Levinas' theory of alterity guards against theoretical myopia, for as Lorna Wood expounds, "Levinas's privileging of the Other as transcendent lays bare questionable assumptions underlying any critical theory that views struggles for negative (in Levinas' terms, 'arbitrary and violent') freedom and universal recognition of every individual within a totality as the goals toward which society ought to move" (172-73). Thus, I propose a synthesis of, rather than opposition between, Levinasian ethics and critical approaches engaging identity politics and interrogating "power discourses" within earlier U.S. literature.

I submit that dialogic narrative, in its form *and* substance, is about storytelling. The narratives that I selected each tell a "story" about nineteenth-century American ideology, politics and culture generally, but even more compellingly about the development of the ethical principle of interpersonal responsibility in relation to Otherness within the northeastern U.S. in the mid

1800's. Levinas and Bakhtin provide the analytical optics for this critical project. My objective, in broad strokes, is to trace the competing understandings of ethics, Otherness and the demands of interpersonal duty that contributed, in 1860, to a destabilizing and dramatic social, political and cultural disruption within the adolescent republic. That said, Cooper, Melville, Fern and Wilson each demonstrate a facet of the escalating discursive tension between a moral sense of duty for the differentiated, particular Other versus an emergent republican<sup>7</sup> preoccupation with categorizing groups of persons as *types* inscribed within one or several totalities: social classes, cultures, races, genders, political factions, etc. Put simply, these narratives reveal competing ethical invocations. That is, what constitutes the higher calling in an "ethical" republic—the Good of the unique Other, or a more dispassionate philosophical allegiance to generalized sociopolitical sectors and abstract ethical principles such as law, justice, equality or democracy? I argue that despite heavy-handed didacticism regarding ethical *principle* within these texts, polyphonic counter-discourses erupt within their dialogic structures, drawing the reader's gaze back to the fundamental question that Levinas would later pursue and from which I have adapted my project's title: "Why does the other concern me?... Am I my brother's keeper?" (*Otherwise* 117). That is, where lay the moral command to assume responsibility "for-the-Other" as a unique person, and *not* just as a representative type? Am I my *Other's* keeper?

I hold that it was the collective failure to discern this sense of interpersonal responsibility for the differentiated Other in antebellum America, a failure represented by the fiction that this epoch spawned, that in part led to the collapse of public dialogue and political consensus that

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<sup>7</sup> I use the term "republican" within this context in that the U.S.'s republican government necessarily orders and represents its citizenry—as well as omitting "Other" persons—by placing them into constituencies, i.e. districts, states, municipalities, territories or other totalities which bear strong ethno-cultural and class identifiers: this was true in particular during the early republican and antebellum periods. This is in a contrast to a pure "democratic" system, which champions a "one person, one vote" approach that, while impractical, chaotic and prone to manipulation, by its nature maintains a sense of the citizen as a distinct *individual*.

preceded slavery's final chapter, the Civil War and the military subjugation of the remaining autonomous American Indian nations to the west. As Levinas claims, the modern State's recourse to dehumanizing tactics of brute force, violent domination and wars of annihilation are the telltale symptoms of will-to-power totalization, spawned by the empowered political community's fearful need to categorize, to "absorb," to render "Same" and master a different, and *dangerous*, Other (*Totality* 222). To the extent that Cooper, Melville, Fern and Wilson each contribute to the telling of that tragic narrative of systematic totalization, ethical ambivalence and epic moral failure, I am invested in relating something of *their* "stories."

## CHAPTER 1:

### Historicizing an Ethics of Otherness: Dialogism and Ambivalent Constructions of Duty in James Fenimore Cooper's Littlepage Trilogy

James Fenimore Cooper's Littlepage trilogy of *Satanstoe: A Tale of the Colony* (1845), *The Chainbearer; or the Littlepage Manuscripts* (1845), and *The Redskins; or Indian and Injin* (1846) is a conduit to understanding Cooper's evolving thought on American republicanism, law, interpersonal ethics, social economy and Otherness as he entered middle age. Therefore, I submit along with Daniel Marder that the Cooper's stories about New York in the 1700's and 1800's are more than a reaction to New York's Anti-Rent controversy of the 1830's and '40's (31), though the texts' overt didactic rhetoric about that controversy dominates their plotlines and dialogues. In dealing with the Anti-Rent controversy allegorically *and* literally, I argue with Jesse Bier that Cooper demonstrates more ambivalent thinking respecting these topics than the texts suggest at first glance.<sup>1</sup> Such an assertion is striking, in that many view Cooper's later writing as reflecting a time when his moral, social and political views had concretized around a conservative Democratic discourse on American culture and its place in history. Daniel Marder argues:

[i]n the Littlepage trilogy, Cooper nostalgically winds through the cycle of exile one more time, not of the Leatherstocking being driven from his wilderness home but of the gentleman, the aristocratic democrat, from his village patriarchy. The

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<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, Marder points out that on the literal level, "the anti-rent wars served to revive lost causes... In psychological terms, [Cooper's] opposition to the moneyless tenants, refusing to pay rents and demanding ownership rivaled his libel suits as an outlet for vengeance. It also provided as sense of allegiance with some acceptable society, the Dutch patroons" (31).



ostensible purpose is to show the validity of the New York land patents and how subversion of them, even by legislated changes of the law, would erode American society and bring it to the brink of destruction. (31)

That said, the Littlepage novels' polyphonic dialogic structures open fissures within the monolithic or monologic worldview that Cooper otherwise constructs on the sociopolitical and ethical levels.<sup>2</sup> We find evidence of this creative instability in the following motifs: idiolectal miscommunication, confused social roles, captivity, shifting allegiances, sympathetic antagonists and melodramatic scenes of apocalypse. These narrative elements impact how we understand Cooper's conflicted thoughts on duty, ethics and social ordering in the republic. A single, prevalent discourse is not obvious, a counterintuitive assertion in light of the popular view of Cooper's "hardened latter stage" (Bier 514). To illustrate this textual/rhetorical ambivalence, I offer a reading of the "apocalyptic" end of the third novel.

At the conclusion of *The Redskins*, the "Editor" notes the absence of a conclusive resolution to Hugh Littlepage's—and thus the Littlepage trilogy's—narrative. Despite the moral defeat of the Anti-Renter "Injins," the novel ends with a pessimistic lament, as Hugh and family leave their ancestral estate, Ravensnest, for Washington in search of just, "legal" redress regarding the Anti-Rent disputes in the Hudson Valley (365). The following statement from the "Note by the Editor" is telling: "Mr. [Hugh] Littlepage significantly remarked, at parting, that should Washington fail him, he has the refuge of Florence open, where he can reside among the other victims of oppression, with the advantage of being admired as a refuge from republican tyranny" (365). The final Editor's note affirms that a battle has been won—"the 'Injuns' are all defunct" (364)—but that this "victory" is ephemeral, as the war to preserve "the more valuable

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<sup>2</sup> This statement assumes that Cooper's didacticism always steers him toward concrete, unified ideological rhetoric: some Americanists, like Jerome McGann and myself, do not hold this view.

parts of the institutions of this country” (365) will be lost if populist mobocracy prevails over law, order, morality and justice—the true spirit of 1840’s genteel republicanism. The novel’s *finale* chronicles a fighting retreat, as the ruling class of a doomed regime flees a relentless enemy, preparing to enter exile should their “capitol” fall.

Though the Editor mentions the disguised “injins,” the “enemy” here is vague; he refers in general to a “nefarious spirit of cupidity” and, ironically, to “republican tyranny” (365). Similar to the Anti-Renters in calico masks, the identity of the actual enemy of American republicanism is difficult for Cooper to specify. As with termites, we see the destructive results of their activity, but the agents remain hidden. Cooper can identify the “victims of oppression” (365): the genteel Littlepages and the actual Hudson Valley land barons they represent. Still, despite Cooper’s excoriation of the Anti-Renters’ legal, political and economic abuses, these generic antagonists, epitomized by the intergenerational Seneca-Jason Newcome amalgamation, function like the injins’ calico masks and feathers: we know what these categorical descriptions are *supposed* to represent, yet we have the sense that more lies beneath Cooper’s stereotypical rendering of Yankee Anti-Renters.

In depicting genteel Hudson Valley landowners as wronged, soon-to-be dispossessed victims, Cooper portrays them as Other. For antebellum conservatives, educated Americans with hereditary wealth should be moral and cultural *leaders* in the republic’s ideal, patriarchal social hierarchy. Yet instead of focusing on the ethical duty that these “patricians” owe to “plebian” citizens in a republic, Cooper emphasizes the responsibility and agency of the “masses,” the government and the legal system respecting a vulnerable, passive gentility inclined to abandon their tenants to save themselves. This prompts the question: who are the plebian Others ironically terrifying their patrician Others? I argue that Cooper’s Anti-Renter injins are

rhetorical placeholders for the proletarian bogeymen of conservative Northern Whigs *and* Democrats in the 1840's, the urban working classes of immigrants and free African Americans. Furthermore, making the "faceless" mass of Injun Anti-Renters a generic enemy—the embodiment of a "nefarious spirit"—places them within a depersonalizing, mastering totality, negating the interpersonal ethical response that, according to Levinas, they would invoke as individuated Others.<sup>3</sup> Conversely, in being individually named and described in the Editor's note, the wealthy Littlepages usurp this ethical response as unique Others while fleeing the responsibility for *their* Others—the present tenants under historic lease contracts as well as their family legacy and posterity—that their status as estate holders demands.<sup>4</sup> I posit that this circumstance conflicts with Cooper's overt rhetoric in novels preoccupied with reinforcing traditional republican notions of moral obligation and allegiance. In other words, the Littlepages' escape fails to buttress Cooper's conservative ethics of duty and order as it "ought" to be deployed between differentiated individuals, cultural groups and social classes.

Cooper's novels typically evince a strong moral compass, though his morality, like anyone's, was shaped by historical and cultural context. And though all narrative contains a

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<sup>3</sup> In "Stranger History" Lloyd Pratt paraphrases Nancy Fraser, who encapsulates the ethical stakes of interpersonal recognition: "in political philosophy, recognition 'designates an ideal reciprocal relationship between subjects in which each sees the other as its equal and also as separate from it.' This relationship between subjects [...] 'is deemed constitutive for subjectivity; one becomes an individual subject only in virtue of recognizing, and being recognized by, another subject. Thus, 'recognition' implies the Hegelian thesis...that social relations are prior to individuals and intersubjectivity is prior to subjectivity'" (159). I would argue that Fraser (inadvertently) via Hegel touches on Levinas' thesis on the primacy of interpersonal ethics over ontology, which is significant for me here in that a) Pratt, like Linda Bolton, applies the concept of "alterity" to nineteenth-century American literature and also in that b) he invokes a sense of diachronicity within his overall algorithm treating the Otherness of the "masses" textually relegated to an "inferior" past defined by an intellectually superior present. As I will show throughout this chapter, the specter of diachronic historical responsibility for Others forms part of Cooper's ethical and ideological preoccupation within the multi-generational narrative of the Littlepage trilogy, though with a vector opposite to Pratt's: Cooper's "Other" concern is for an unfinished present and a foreboding future for the American republic.

<sup>4</sup> Lloyd Pratt's discussion is illuminating, as he invokes a sense of responsibility for individualized Others not just in the present, but across a diachronic spectrum: "we find ourselves *owing recognition to and requiring it from* not only those who live among us; we also *owe it to and require it from* those who died long ago but whose significance is still in the making" (159). I argue that this historical ethos is strong in the first two Littlepage novels, but ironically falters in *The Redskins*, as romanticized nostalgia for the past, cynicism for the present and pessimism regarding the future begin to crowd out moral rhetoric pointing to an intergenerational sense of duty.

moral dimension, Cooper's dialogic constructions of duty show considerable energy.<sup>5</sup> Throughout his writing career, Cooper, like Balzac, hearkens back to an eighteenth-century model in devoting a significant amount of narrative space to explaining his characters' ethical thought processes and moral decisions. This pertains in particular to their sense of allegiance to abstract principles as well as their dialogic interactions with other persons and political communities.<sup>6</sup> His most iconic character, Natty Bumppo, is a case in point, though the lesser known Tom Coffin or Andries Coejemans function similarly: whether it be the loyal relationships to Oliver Effingham and John Mohegan of *The Pioneers* (1823) or Natty's choice of celibacy in *The Deerslayer* (1841), Cooper is meticulous in unfolding the sociocultural rationale and ethos undergirding his characters' motives. And though Cooper's legal and sociopolitical views evolve throughout his long writing career, biographical study reveals his philosophical and ideological investments, even in novels set in times and places remote from Cooper's nineteenth-century upstate New York.<sup>7</sup> Despite Cooper's sociopolitical and moral didacticism, though, moments of ambivalence erupt within his novels' dialogic structures, revealing competing preoccupations that destabilize Cooper's otherwise obvious ideological and ethical allegiances as a conservative Democrat. Regarding the later Cooper, Jesse Biers remarks, "no matter how overt he appears to be, he is a man of deep fissures and of apparent paradoxes

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<sup>5</sup> In adopting Levinas' ethical method, I privilege the *spoken*, dialogic moment as a proxy for Levinas' notion of the "face to face" encounter with the non-totalized, individualized Other, as this dialogue invokes the free subject's literal response for the Good of this particular Other.

<sup>6</sup> Louise K. Barnett writes in *Authority and Speech*: "[u]ntil a fairly recent period in literary history, the novel was identified as the genre that expressed in fiction the dynamic of the individual and society," as well as a literary form that functioned as an outgrowth of "public language... whose appeal to uniformity of perception, as well as thought, is particularly blatant, a discourse that eschews a total or unbiased view and functions prescriptively to maintain the values and attitudes of some collective entity. The vision of the world inculcated by public language is inevitably some sort of official or authorized version" (6). I counter that though such may be the discursive project within Cooper's novels, even his most didactic narratives resist serving a *single* ideological totality.

<sup>7</sup> Some critics suggest that the didactic voices of Cooper's characters become intertwined with the author's, though as Jerome McGann claims, this phenomenon is Cooper's choice, not an unintended aesthetic/rhetorical by-product of his inability to distance himself from his characters ("Fenimore Cooper's Anti-Aesthetic" 129-30).

that are immitigable though highly interesting contradictions” (511).<sup>8</sup> But so was the Democratic Party in the first half of the 1840’s as home to rival political factions led by Andrew Jackson, John C. Calhoun, Martin van Buren and New York’s William H. Seward. As “paradoxical” Democrat, Cooper was in esteemed company.<sup>9</sup>

Within this chapter, then, I engage Cooper’s Littlepage Trilogy (1845-46), whose polyphony problematizes conventional historicist readings of Cooper and the *Sitz im Leben* that his fiction “ought” to represent. I focus on contradictory constructions of Otherness that inflect or undercut Cooper’s overt conceptions of ethical responsibility for the Other, sociopolitical allegiance and the rule of law in a well-ordered republic.<sup>10</sup> Whereas some critics, such as Charles Hansford Adams, focus on Cooper’s obsession with civil and common law guarantors of divine natural law and the hierarchical structures that they “naturally” ordain (5), I assert that his perspectives, implicit or explicit, on law, polity or social order are actualized first by Cooper’s moral imagination and ethics.<sup>11</sup> That Cooper’s views evolve does not diminish this reality. And though Adams interconnects Cooper’s legal preoccupations with his understanding of the Self and individual character as defined by the law within public and private spheres (5), I argue that

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<sup>8</sup> On the yield of these tensions within Cooper’s novels, Charles Hansford Adams posits in “*Guardian of the Law*”: “the reader’s effort to hold in suspension the possibilities Cooper explores—his conflicting images and contradictory insights—is a small price to pay for the *moral* energy generated by his ambivalences” (24, *emphasis mine*).

<sup>9</sup> There are “great fissures” within Cooper scholarship as well, even that which admits his contradictions. According to Steven Watts, “[t]he great denouncer of crude popular politics, demagoguery, and selfish interest-group maneuver was himself, as it turns out, a solid Jacksonian Democrat. Cooper supported ‘Old Hickory’ in the 1828 election and continued to do so throughout the following decade” (71). Marius Bewley would temper this, and I hold that regardless of where Cooper was politically in the 1830’s, by the mid 1840’s he was a different political animal.

<sup>10</sup> Although my focus is not the role of law in Cooper’s fiction *per se*, law forms a powerful current in his writing. However, in that I examine ethical responsibility as represented in character dialogues, law and authority are significant elements in this discussion. Adams argues respecting Cooper’s milieu: “[i]n the swarm of ethnic and religious groups and subgroups, law provided an established framework for social intercourse. The law, with its precise description of the obligations of each to each, and its formidable array of rituals designed to enforce those bonds, reduced social friction in a world characterized by competing codes of behavior” (5).

<sup>11</sup> Catherine Zuckert speaks to the ethical underpinnings of politicized American novels manifested through their principal characters: “Great American novels also extend American political thought by showing the effects of the regime on the formation of character... Since novels often depict ‘I’ education sentimental’ of their characters, these works of fiction can provide important insights into the effect community standards of right and wrong have upon the development of individual characters” (“American Novelists as Political Thinkers” 684).

if ethics precedes law in Cooper's fiction as it precedes ontological totalization in Levinas' philosophy, so does the primary ethical duty of the Selfsame to be for the individualized Other precede political or legal definition of the Self.

From this last point comes the following claim: Cooper's ambivalence respecting interpersonal ethical obligations for others and "Others" in the Littlepage novels is fueled by his attachment to American common law which safeguards Cooper's hierarchical visions of republicanism, social economy, human behavior and natural law. Yet by the 1840's these visions were ironically threatening the paradigms of moral law, order and individuality that he held dear.<sup>12</sup> As a modernizing American nation changed socially, politically and economically, Cooper attempted to resolve this tension within his legalistic Littlepage novels by positing hyper-controlled, ethical dialogues with more "manageable," amalgamated Others, Yankees, American Indians and women. These function as affective outlets for his "Other" source of unease, the prospect of African Americans gaining legal status as individualized citizens,<sup>13</sup> which would contribute to the problematic rise of a lower class democracy comprised of poor whites, immigrants and now "free" blacks. Cooper's discomfort with the impending traumatic end of slavery,<sup>14</sup> when juxtaposed with his moral/ethical ambivalence, is thematically disruptive throughout the Littlepage novels, resisting rhetorical containment.

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<sup>12</sup> Daniel Marder points out in "Cooper's Second Cycle" that Cooper portrays a "licentious majority who use their lawful freedoms in the later novels to violate natural and moral law and to change the civil law. They wrest power from the narrowing class of the principled and distinguished, the landed gentry. This is the story Cooper tells in various forms and guises during the last decade of his life" (23), later adding that "[h]e desired, rather, humble obedience to civil law and the preservation of the order established by the landed gentry" (27).

<sup>13</sup> In *Facing the Other* Linda Bolton links Levinas ethical concept of the "third party" to the African slave: "The third party, as Levinasian ethics reminds us, is the Other to whom I have not chosen to obligate myself. She is the one who stands invisibly beside and behind the Other whose face [or voice, as I choose to deploy this notion] I have learned to recognize and whom I may be willing to admit into the narrative of history where the rule of 'sameness' [totalization] prevails" (14). The character of the loyal house slave Jaap functions as the "third party" Other to Susquesus, the extolled American Indian Other, that the narrators and Cooper "recognize" and "admit."

<sup>14</sup> Despite the "Great Compromise" of 1850, I argue that before *and* after this date many Americans, David Walker not the least, viewed slavery as a doomed institution, and the Union as a nation would have to endure a traumatic evolution as the 20<sup>th</sup> century approached, even from the perspective of steadfast political optimists.

Bill Christopherson probes this dilemma of race relations, focusing on how slavery, after the Missouri Compromise in 1820-21, was becoming a source of social, political and racial hysteria North *and* South in the 1820's. Whereas he argues that violent American Indians function for Cooper as allegorical racial proxies for latent fears of slave insurrection in *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), *The Pioneers* (1823) and *The Prairie* (1827), I posit that the locus of this unease shifts a generation later for Cooper *and* the U.S., though as Christopherson concedes, "[g]auging Cooper's thoughts on slavery isn't easy" (282). As North and South became more polarized, by the 1840's the thinking of Northern conservatives like Cooper turns ambivalent and alarmist as the prospect of a large, uneducated and *free* black population contributing to the "tyranny of the majority" comes closer to reality. Daniel Marder explains that for Cooper, "the people themselves are the most serious social danger. The majority are not talented, not gifted with intelligence, and not educated. Such democracy drowns its proper leaders, men of natural talent, in mediocrity" (26). Given Cooper's racism towards African Americans in *The American Democrat* and other writing,<sup>15</sup> I extrapolate that despite the inherent, harmful moral evils that Cooper saw in slavery, he felt that the infusion of a massive population of unrefined, landless "plebeians" into American society would hasten the republic's apocalypse, a grim future vision to which he had become resigned by the 1830's and which was epitomized in *The Crater* (1847) four years before his death (Marder 35).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See Cooper's sections "On Slavery," "On American Slavery" and "On Slavery in the District of Columbia" in *The American Democrat* (220-24).

<sup>16</sup> Donald A. Ringe writes in "Cooper's Littlepage Novels": "Cooper was well aware of a principle of change operating throughout society, and although he was certainly unsympathetic with the growing democracy of the 1840's and the tenants' revolt in the Anti-Rent War, he was far too intelligent a man to believe that change could be halted or society return to what it had been in his youth" (281).

That said, I submit that the racial paranoia that Christopherson analyzes in *The Last of the Mohicans* evolves from a conversation engaging white fears about violent social upheaval<sup>17</sup> to one that also encompasses an ethical dimension as manifested in apprehensions concerning the well-being of future American citizens and society. Furthermore, as American Indians receded into a contained, totalized, and thus non-threatening history, their affective capacity to embody such sublime racial anxieties had become by 1845 inadequate for Cooper and his readers.<sup>18</sup> A new question thus reared its head in the collective American consciousness: what would constitute the individual citizen's and the republic's moral duty respecting a host of newly freed African American Others after the inevitable collapse of slavery? As much as the apocalyptic prospect of slavery's sudden, universal abolition terrified whites North *and* South, the overarching unease, I argue, lay not in the public debates over racial, social and political justice that would follow this radical upheaval. Rather, this disquietude pertained to the ways in which such a seismic shift in the U. S.'s sociocultural topography would reorient individual citizens' interpersonal ethical relationships with one another in a modern, diverse republic.

Cooper's treatment of this question through the characters, dialogues, and editorializing sociopolitical commentary of his Anti-Rent novels is the focus of this chapter.<sup>19</sup> I contend there is a polyphonic dialogue within these texts that features three competing discourses on interpersonal ethical obligation—duty—in the antebellum U.S. that are alternately residual, dominant and emergent. Thus, I see Cooper's notion of duty for the unique Other in a post-

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<sup>17</sup> Ringe adds that "all three [Littlepage] novels are linked by an ever recurring threat of violent change, symbolized most clearly by the squatter and the rebellious tenants" (283).

<sup>18</sup> Ringe argues that "Susquesus...survives as a prod to the consciences of the whites, for he reminds them that the lands they are fighting over were bought at the price of a grievous wrong to the original owners [the American Indians]" (282). I add that such a lament is only possible in hindsight, after a former existential threat has been neutralized, therefore allowing the victors (Euro-Americans) to apprehend from a safe historical distance a romanticized sense of injustice.

<sup>19</sup> According to Adams, "Cooper's overriding concern with creating in his books a world of order [specifically regarding social relations and obligations] typically leads him to fabricate conclusions that paper over, unconvincingly, these contradictions" (19).



abolition American society operative within three primary historical paradigms: the romantic-nostalgic, the nationalist-progressive and the cyclic-eschatological—this last model is linked to an ominous, Skidmorean proto-socialism.<sup>20</sup> But as Bill Christopherson and others have argued regarding antebellum American novels, often their deeper ethical, social or ideological significance is obscured, sometimes consciously (281), stopping short of being pure allegories. I claim that the Littlepage trilogy is an exception to this tendency in that these novels, the final two in particular, are outspoken in their sympathy for the landlords’ “legal” position during New York State’s Anti-Rent controversy<sup>21</sup>. Erected around the Anti-Rent issue is a scaffolding of semi-aristocratic, anti-Jacksonian and anti-New England rhetoric which champions the non-Yankee history of New York State as a sociocultural prototype of what the U.S. *should* be.

Also important to note is that fact that New York was a slave state until 1827: the first two novels in the sequence feature Cooper’s portrayal of slavery in New York. It is here where Cooper’s ambivalence begins to show, for though *Satanstoe* appears to champion New York’s colonial permutation of the “peculiar institution” in contrast to an unfavorable depiction of Southern slavery, the Littlepage novels overall betray a sympathy not just toward slavery, but also respecting the antebellum South’s views on quasi-aristocratic social hierarchy, political autonomy and economy. Though Cooper as a Northerner was nominally anti-slavery and as a

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<sup>20</sup> For an approximation of these modalities of Cooper’s historical imagination, see Edgar A. Dryden’s analysis of *The Crater* in “History and Progress” (63-64). Daniel Marder, however, renders Cooper’s “trifurcated” thinking in more negative terms, identifying social, political *and* ethical disillusion in his later texts: “The radical reformers epitomized licentious grasping, destroying what order existed. The Whigs acted always to make money, never with popular opinion, adhering to the idea of the free press and trial by jury, which gave more power to the ignorant than the knowledgeable since they were greater in number. Alone, Cooper tended to become more strident, shouting for attention to his notion of rational behavior” (27). Whereas Marder’s categories do not parallel as near as Dryden’s the analytic model of competing dialogic discourses that I employ, there is some congruence.

<sup>21</sup> Kay Seymour House explains in the “Historical Introduction” to *Satanstoe* that the Anti-Rent Wars were an occurrence where some New York tenants refused to honor the terms of their leases to the point of armed resistance and on the “principled” grounds that their landlords’ conditions were “anti-republican” (xxiii-xx).

Democrat anti-aristocracy, though *not* anti-gentility or anti-patriarchy,<sup>22</sup> the Littlepage novels, in particular *The Redskins*, promote anxieties over democratic populism in step with those felt by Southern “aristocrats,” Democrats *and* Whigs, prior to Secession.<sup>23</sup> That said, Cooper’s treatment of American slavery and the Anti-Rent Wars are topical portals through which we can peer into the Littlepage trilogy’s dominant ethical preoccupation: the tension between allegiance to a flawed American republic and a larger sense of interpersonal duty owed to one’s fellows, family, posterity and the law. For Cooper, this “duty” demanded the preservation of a genteel hierarchy, including class-mediated relationships with one’s social superiors, inferiors and peers.<sup>24</sup> In the post-Jackson era, the crucial debate for Cooper might be framed thus: who was more tyrannical, the oppressive land barons or the “plebian” populist mob seeking to deprive the rich of land, liberty and even life through extreme modes of social “leveling” (O’Donnell 406)?<sup>25</sup> Who was the villain and who was the victimized Other?

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<sup>22</sup> The term “aristocracy” demands unpacking. This term often connotes a wealthy, educated class that wields disproportionate influence in society. Cooper, however, understood “aristocrat” in the archaic continental sense as one who, connected with royal or noble families, holds *formal* political power (England’s anachronistic House of Lords) as opposed to “just” belonging to a genteel, wealthy class. In the wake of Marxism, some contest distinguishing “gentility” from a formal *ruling* class, titles or no. As Donald Ringe implies in “Cooper’s Littlepage Novels: Change and Stability in American Society,” this line is also blurred in the Littlepage trilogy (283-84), though Cooper underscores the difference in *Satanstoe*—though quite wealthy, Herman Mordaunt was *not* a colonial “aristocrat”—and in *The Chainbearer*, expressing a moral preference for gentility. Hence, Anneke Mordaunt chooses Corny over the baronet Bulstrode, and young Mordaunt marries the poor Duss Malbone since her education and refinement still make her a “lady.” The social rhetoric within *The Redskins*, however, becomes more apologetic respecting European aristocracy, amalgamating it with American “gentility” in a *positive* light.

<sup>23</sup> The anti-majoritarian sociopolitical views of South Carolinian John C. Calhoun in the 1840’s are similar to Cooper’s in the Littlepage novels. Orestes Brownson, a supporter of Calhoun, also mirrors Cooper’s sociopolitical thinking on republicanism during the same period. See Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy* (499-501, 535).

<sup>24</sup> Marder comments that “[a]lthough [Cooper] proclaimed himself loyal to America to the end of his years, Cooper had reduced his principle of loyalty to authority for its own sake” (29), explaining later that “[t]here is no moral law left for Cooper, only civil law based on the Constitution” (35). I understand this evolution in Cooper’s thought as evidence that pessimism regarding the future of the antebellum or “post-bellum” republic had pushed him beyond earlier incarnations of American nationalism, cultural triumphalism or progressive humanism, leaving him to cling to a conception of authority as a bulwark against the destructive social-leveling which, in his view, interpersonal morality and just laws had failed to check.

<sup>25</sup> In addition to fears of slave uprisings, Thomas Wilson Dorr’s violent crusade for majority rule in Rhode Island in 1841-42 influenced the thought of wary conservatives, Democrats *and* Whigs, in the northeast (Wilentz 539-45).

From a historical perspective, the answer to this question is complex. But the fact that this issue was haunting the work of an older Cooper in a different, more pronounced way than in his earlier novels is telling. I do not argue that there is a linear connection between the evolution of Cooper's views on American nationhood and the rising political and economic tensions between North and South. Still, Cooper's cultural and regional xenophobia respecting French, English, Iroquois and New Englander incursions into New York and his upper class resistance to what he perceived as disruptive, greedy, ambitious and criminal outsiders ironically parallels similar sentiments amongst Southern gentility towards invasive Abolitionist and Free Soil Yankees. I argue that the paranoia of the Hudson Valley elite *and* Southern landowners lay in each "genteel" group's self-identification as a wronged Other and in a dialogic incapacity to recognize the interpersonal ethical demand of unique Otherness in those they saw as ethno-racial, cultural or social inferiors as well as political and economic adversaries to be assimilated within a mastering categorical totality.

For genteel Southerners such as John C. Calhoun and Northerners like Cooper, this paranoia over threats to their preferred visions of social order and republicanism finds a repository in the image of the mob. With American Indian threats<sup>26</sup> to Euro-American settlement all-but-neutralized—except in the far west—by the 1840's, in addition to the fact that French and British imperial interests had ceased to menace the territorial integrity of the United States, eastern citizens began to distinguish more immediate bogeymen.<sup>27</sup> Whereas Mexicans to the southwest, Catholic Irish and Germans in the East, Yankee Anti-Renters in the North and

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<sup>26</sup> Cooper himself historicizes this progression, for just as Susquehus is valorized and the disappearance of American Indians lamented by Hugh Littlepage in *The Redskins* in 1845, Corny Littlepage expresses distrust of the young Onondago in 1758.

<sup>27</sup> In *The Redskins* the "Editor" notes: "In our view, Oregon, Mexico and Europe, united against us, do not threaten this nation with one half as much real danger as that which menaces it at this moment, from an enemy that is now in possession of many of its strongholds, and which is incessantly working its evils under the cry of liberty, while laying deeper the foundation of a most atrocious tyranny" (365).

Abolitionists in the South represented violent social disorder and cultural destabilization in antebellum America, I argue that the anxiety that these groups spurred suggests fear of a more radical Other: African Americans.

Though the threat of slave insurrection always haunted the antebellum South, Cooper's Littlepage Trilogy, despite its preoccupations with individual ethical conduct, filial interpersonal duty and the principle of law, displays just how pervasive was Northern discomfort with the "inferior" African American Other prior to slavery's abolition. I further submit that Cooper's Yankee tenants, squatters and Anti-Renters—significantly disguised as "injin"—represent a graver social concern respecting the presence of free African Americans in modern American society. Cooper speaks of this eschatological unease in *The American Democrat* (1838):

The time must come when American slavery shall cease, and when that day shall arrive, (unless early and effectual means are devised to obviate it,) two races will exist in the same region, whose feelings will be embittered by inextinguishable hatred, and who carry on their faces, the respective stamps of their factions. The struggle that will follow, will necessarily be a war of extermination. The evil day may be delayed, but can scarcely be averted. (222)

It is this anxiety which destabilizes Cooper's ethical rhetoric throughout the Littlepage novels, a polyphonic phenomenon which complicates his more overt, conservative sociopolitical leanings. Whereas Cooper remains committed to buttressing New York landowners' rights against the populist Anti-Renter "mob," his reflections on slavery betray a belief that such oppressive socioeconomic systems were doomed and that their demise would result in a national apocalypse. As he concedes in the "Preface" to *The Redskins*, New York's patroon system was a

modern American incarnation of state “feudalism” (3), a charge likewise leveled by some Abolitionists at wealthy Southern planters owning vast numbers of African “serfs.”

Thus, I argue that it is not a great rhetorical leap to associate disgruntled Yankee tenants, squatters and Anti-Renters with African American slaves, for each of these groups was a powder keg with a fast-burning fuse for social conservatives like Cooper. And though Cooper may have backed away from prognosticating an actual “race war” except in hyperbole, the prospect of legal and political victory for the Anti-Renters represents the more plausible apocalypse that Cooper envisioned for the post-slavery U.S.: the forced redistribution of land, wealth and political power amongst plebian mobs unfit for such stewardship.<sup>28</sup> “Natural” hierarchical and familial relationships featuring interpersonal ethical responsibility amongst and between like persons *and* Others would be dismantled as freed Southern slaves joined the “leveling” ranks of Northern proletarians as parasitic wards of a modern welfare state. I feel it is no historical coincidence that when Cooper completes *The Redskins*, which betrays the greatest Europhilia of the three novels, the “apocalyptic” Revolution of 1848 is only two years away.

Some argue as well that Cooper’s deeper disaffection within the Littlepage novels and elsewhere was the result of his growing alienation from his native New York *and* his nation after returning from Europe in 1833. I posit, as does Robert H. Zoellner, that Jacksonian America was too much of a social and ideological contrast to Cooper’s vision of an “ordering” gentility manifest in his fiction and social and political commentary (56), though, ironically, at first Cooper had embraced Jackson’s social politics and promotion of the “common man.” Thus, the Anti-Rent controversy offered Cooper the perfect topical justification for excoriating the abuses of “pure” democracy latent in the slightly educated masses, as Daniel Marder suggests (34). Insolent and violent Anti-Renters were not the problem but rather the symptom of a greater

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<sup>28</sup> The figure of the greedy, ruthless Yankee “carpetbagger” in the post-Civil War South personifies this anxiety.

egalitarian and ironically democratic malady affecting the antebellum United States, in particular the political and economic threat of social instability facing rural landholders in the South *and* the North. This fear of sociocultural disruption competes with Cooper's moral/ethical sensibilities regarding interpersonal responsibility and duty within the Littlepage trilogy, evidencing a polyphonic discursive tension that forestalls a final concretization of a single sympathetic figure or antagonist, despite didactic diatribes and jeremiads to the contrary. The ironic result of this rhetorical instability is the emergence of a pro-South, "Northern" ideology and therefore a quasi-feudal,<sup>29</sup> pro-slavery ethos. However, just calling attention to fears of social, political, and cultural disorder present in the Littlepage novels is to risk oversimplifying the significance of Cooper's polyphonic ambivalence. In order to treat Cooper's fluctuating social and ethical anxieties with accuracy, we must understand that the dilemma of race itself, while it exists as a powerful leitmotif in his novels, is not the sole source of his preoccupation. Rather, the intersection of notions of history, social class and property, in addition to ambivalent concerns over ethno-racial Otherness, are what complicate the texts' overt didactic contours.

As Edgar A. Dryden notes, the problem with the Yankee squatters and Anti-Renters is that they are a people without a history (60), for the texts imply that it is this sense of history, in particular a family's legacy, which makes the most forceful ethical demand on the individual subject.<sup>30</sup> Cooper's rhetoric suggests that greater than the threats of violence or death that the Squatters and Anti-Renters represent is the disruption of positive historical progress, a rupture

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<sup>29</sup> See Cooper's "Preface" to *The Redskins* (8).

<sup>30</sup> Dryden offers that "Cooper's imagination...derives its intensity from a conviction that man lives and acts always in the presence of the past. As he begins his imaginative journey he is motivated by the purpose of returning to the present, for he is convinced that the nature of society will stand clear only when there is made manifest in it that which was" (49-50), later adding: "The novelist's task, as [Cooper] conceives it, is one of reawakening the past by re-creating its atmosphere with the intent of revealing society's constitutive elements and the links which bind one generation to the next" (51). I mention that Dryden implies a sense of *diachronic* ethical responsibility in Cooper, as opposed to a lateral synchronicity of immediate relationships in a static, two-dimensional present. Herman Mordaunt's argument regarding a multi-generational project of gradual estate settlement and development in *Satanstoe* exemplifies this ethical, though self-interested, diachronicity.

with the past upon which hope for the present *and* future—symbolized and actualized by a genteel dynasty—is constructed. The seizure or usurpation of “historic” family estates would constitute such a breach.<sup>31</sup> Conversely, the American Indian, even the French-allied Huron enemy encountered in *Satanstoe*, represents a people with a noble history, yet now without land or a future. Though Cooper renders them as primitive, the American Indian’s sense of history entitles him to the status of nobility in a moral *and* hierarchical sense to which lower class Yankees such as Jason Newcome and Aaron Thousandacres can never aspire. Though the moral Susquesus’ racial Otherness makes him the social inferior of the Anglo-Dutch Littlepages and their caste, the juxtaposition of Susquesus and Jaap, Corny Littlepage’s personal slave, establishes a hierarchical racial disparity between American Indians and African Americans. This juxtaposition is thematically paralleled by Cooper’s contrast of opportunistic Yankees with honorable Anglo-Dutch New Yorkers in the trilogy.

Similar to the Yankee tenants, squatters and Anti-Renters, Cooper depicts African American slaves as unsympathetic, having neither history nor property. Though Jaap and Susquesus end their days living in the same hut, the ancient Susquesus resides there as an honorary co-proprietor; as we learn in *Satanstoe*, Susquesus’ nation, the Onodagos, first owned the land that would later comprise the colonial Anglo-Dutch estates (347). Reinforcing this distinction, in *The Redskins* the English butler, John, tells the effete Hugh Littlepage that Susquesus is welcome to eat inside the dining room at Ravensnest, whereas Jaap, even as a long-emancipated centenarian, is still relegated to the kitchen, though according to his supposed preference (227). Considering Cooper’s juxtaposing contrast of the trilogy’s distinct non-white

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<sup>31</sup> Focusing on *The Redskins*, Dryden posits that “the evolution of the gentleman is the result of man’s attempt to sustain and direct his life unaided by God, and for this reason society’s stability is dependent on him. To destroy the American gentleman or to drive him abroad—as the anti-renters almost succeed in doing to Hugh Littlepage—is to rob American society of its supporting substance and leave it vacant at the core... The Littlepage trilogy attempts to reveal the implication of this social subversion” (53-54).

Others, I note how Cooper utilizes their relationship and close physical proximity to contain larger anxieties regarding social destabilization and ethical confusion. The noble Susquesus emerges as the ideal of racial and cultural Otherness that Cooper uses as a foil for the “more” inferior, landless and history-less Jaap. This point is reinforced in *The Redskins*, where we see that though Susquesus is the elder of the two, *Jaap* is the centenarian who cannot keep the Littlepage family history clear in his mind (101), let alone the fact that he never mentions anything significant of his own history.<sup>32</sup> More noteworthy is the humorous yet close friendship that develops between these “odd couple” cabin mates in their old age. This dialogic association between differentiated Others as well as their joint relationship with the Littlepages highlights Cooper’s literal ambivalence regarding Otherness and the interpersonal ethical demand that the Other invokes.

To better unpack this, I argue that Jaap *and* Susquesus in *The Redskins* offer a *double*-foil, not just respecting each other, but also for the Anti-Renters, a circumstance which emerges with its greatest clarity at the conclusion, where the magnanimous centenarians shame the Anti-Renter mob into retreat. Though without a history, language or land of his own in that he rejects being “from Africa,” a senile Jaap ironically serves as the guardian of the genteel Littlepages’ historical continuity—it is only recent history that he forgets—whereas as the ancient Susquesus functions as the traditional repository of its honor and conscience. While the conservative gentleman Hugh and Ro dread the socioeconomic and political leveling that looms in the later antebellum period, these two typological Others, the only two characters present in all three novels and also their stoutest warriors, embody Cooper’s ethical, and ideological, dilemma. That is, within a conservative republican ethics that underscores the moral duty of society’s genteel

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<sup>32</sup> The “Editor” of *The Redskins* remarks: “As for his [Jaaf’s] descendants, he had not been heard to name them for the last forty years” (364).



leaders to care for the less fortunate, does the “gentleman” have the right to refuse this obligation to Others deemed inconvenient or unfit? As Linda Bolton remarks regarding Levinasian ethics, the “third party”—the African slave in antebellum America—complicates the subject’s sense of duty for the “accepted” Other (14), or for the Other that has, paradoxically, been drained enough of his or her “unique” Otherness to fit within the totalizing paradigm of the dominant social discourse. Thus, the fact that Susquesus and Jaap, while not described as equals in their Otherness, form a complementary tandem betrays a counterintuitive and *countercultural* current in Cooper which suggests the possibility of ethical response for the “inconvenient” radical Other. Furthermore, the description of these intergenerational contrasting Others in the presence of Yankee squatter and Anti-Renter Others creates a diachronic historical awareness which laments an idealized, ordered past while offering two contradictory possibilities for the U.S.’s future: progressive adaptation and reinvention, or sociopolitical and ethno-racial Armageddon. Despite overt, didactic rhetoric to the contrary, the omnipresent Susquesus and Jaap evidence that the older, disillusioned Cooper saw, beyond Abolition and Secession, the possibility of a functional republic where citizen *and* polity could respond to the ethical demand to be for the individualized Other and resist the subject-object mastery<sup>33</sup> of systemic totalization.

Whereas the past in the Littlepage novels speaks of familial obligation to a romanticized, hierarchical social economy, fading American Indians, empowered African Americans and violent, self-serving Yankees present the plausible yet sublime prospects of ethical rejuvenation *and* annihilation at a crucial juncture in U.S. history. In *The Crater* (1848), Cooper’s “Platonic” political and ethical ideal is doomed to destruction. The Littlepage trilogy that precedes it is fascinating, therefore, because its ambivalent, historicized treatments of republicanism, ethics,

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<sup>33</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre’s discussion of the “master-slave dialectic” in *Being and Nothingness* is helpful in understanding this human phenomenon (*Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology* 347).

and radical Otherness tell us that Cooper was able to imagine an alternative future for American democracy where the “leveling” social inclusion of the non-totalized, absolutely Other leads *not* to national Armageddon, but to progress, modernity and human flourishing.

### I. *Satanstoe*

*Satanstoe*, the first and most accomplished volume of the Littlepage series (Adams 112), offers several avenues for the close analysis I apply, manifesting polyphony through its dialogues. Though Cooper’s fascination with differing speech patterns—regional, cultural and ethnic idiolects—associated with archetypal figures and the ethical perspectives they embody is not rare in antebellum fiction, his focus in *Satanstoe* on dialect, paralleling correct pronunciation with ethical “correctness,” is extensive. His juxtaposition of distinct dialects—British English, New York English, Yankee English, Dutch English and Native American and African “pidgins”—is further complicated by a chronological polyphony, where different voices across time synthesize the plot. They include: the narrator, Cornelius—“Corny”—Littlepage circa 1800, who also frames his younger dialogized voice from the 1740’s and 50’s; the fictitious “Editor,” who layers in explanatory footnotes from the 1840’s; and other characters who through monologues or framed correspondence contribute to the story. In addition, there are two implied audiences, one past and fictive—the narrator’s audience, circa 1800—the other contemporary and actual—the “Editor’s” in 1845. I argue that the narrator’s evocation of an earlier audience fabricates a sympathetic public as a way of justifying the text’s overt, pro-land grant rhetoric.

Though historical context of the narrative is the French and Indian War, much of the text’s ethical didacticism, implicit and explicit, is informed by New York’s Anti-Rent controversy of the 1830’s and 40’s. Still, ethical notions of duty and familial responsibility are subsumed within the novel’s formulaic plot structure and archetypal characters, as Cooper

borrows conventions from “morals and manners” romances of the early 1800’s as well as elements from his Leatherstocking Tales. Yet it is within these clichéd formulae that Cooper sutures concepts of interpersonal responsibility, the reciprocal duty of landlord and tenant and the financial obligations posed by the estate, the original purpose of the Littlepage party’s excursion to Mooseridge. It is this concern for landowners’ rent collection rights that orients much of the novel’s moral—if less legalistic—didacticism concerning the financial and laboring duties of heirs *and* tenants prevalent in several dialogues.

But there is another ethically salient “story” in *Satanstoe*. As Christopherson argues, though American novels of the early to middle 1800’s were not often *overt* in their cultural commentary, contemporary social, ethical and political anxieties lurked beneath the surface (281). Christopherson posits that slavery was a significant preoccupation within *The Last of the Mohicans*, though Cooper’s plot, set in New York colony during the French and Indian War, focused on American Indians and Frenchmen as its subjects of ethno-cultural difference (264). Cooper’s *Satanstoe* evidences a similar anxiety, but with more ambivalence. In terms of *Satanstoe*’s schizoid rhetoric, Jesse Bier comments that “Cooper constantly subverts his own meanings on point after point and intention after intention in the book. He undermines his primary tenets so frequently, indeed almost systematically, that the self-division presented to us at every turn cannot be ignored” (511). That said, I argue the novel manifests polyphonic eruptions of competing ethical discourses on slavery, highlighted by pregnant dialogic exchanges offset with contrasting idiolects.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Zuckert notes the thematic significance in American novels of the narrative interweaving of diverse voices, setting and plot structure in terms of how this relationship problematizes the reader’s search for a coherent message in the text: “Novelists rarely speak consistently, if at all, in their own voices. Instead, they tell us stories; they present us with the experiences and fate of certain characters in specified circumstances... The only thing we can attribute to the author and only to the author is the structure or organization of the novel in question; he chooses to put these characters into these circumstances; he controls what happens. In order to discover what the novelist thinks, we must therefore study each of his works as an intentionally designed literary whole” (686). Though I consider the

As a historical novel, *Satanstoe* is salted with didactic sociocultural commentary on New York colony in the mid 1700's, in addition to the Editor's explanatory footnotes. Earlier in the novel, during the illuminating Pinkster festival episode, the narrator contrasts colonial New York's more "humane" institution of slavery amongst the Dutch with its degrading counterpart in the South, representing African slaves in the North as more akin to fellow "husbandmen" or domestic coworkers than human chattel on plantations. The text even likens a young lady's or gentleman's relationship with a personal slave to a marriage (69-70). With this frame of commentary, it is ironic that more racist, dehumanizing language respecting African slaves erupts in the text's later dialogues. Furthermore, we can view the Pinkster scene through an a-chronological optic, for the narrator *and* the Editor call our attention away from its diachronic past-ness to a greater sense of immanent futurity in 1757 *and* in 1845, for the Pinkster field's diverse panorama offers a glimpse of the U.S.'s future metropolitan modernity. Persons of various ages, genders, races, cultures, regions, languages, occupations and classes, including African slaves, socialize during an ancient Dutch festival which in the northeast had evolved into a multicultural event, but with a unique African flavor. Considering Cooper's "ethical" preoccupations regarding the historical maintenance of hierarchy, this episode is illuminating and ironic when juxtaposed with his classist, typifying social didacticism.

Cooper also historicizes and thus bifurcates the cultural Otherness of the Africans, for his narrator notes that already by the mid 1700's it was rare to find African slaves in New York who were born in Africa. To reinforce this point, the narrator shows the festivals' few native born Africans engaging in dances imported from their *African* countries of origin that the American born—creole—Africans can only watch and attempt to emulate. While brief, this episode is

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Littlepage trilogy as a "literary whole" in that the characters and plots are interconnected, the Aristotelian disjunction of time between the three novels as well as their featuring of different protagonists renders them distinct narrative subcomponents that warrant individual analysis.

important. As Corny and his companions fetishize the Pinkster spectacle, the old native Africans become the Others to the younger, creole African Other, anticipating the introduction of indigenous American Indian Others in the presence of African slaves later in the narrative. In assuming the role of the Other's "Other," the native Africans—and later the American Indians—function as Levinas' "third party" or the "stranger" (*Alterity & Transcendence* 142) for whom the moral subject does *not* assume responsibility (Bolton 14). Their more pronounced differentness exists beyond the safe margin of racial and cultural Otherness that characterizes the younger creole slaves with whom the genteel Anglo-Dutch have become familiar, though not equals. Thus, description of Manhattan's Pinkster festival introduces contrasting discourses regarding Otherness and duty manifest throughout the trilogy.

By and large, the narrator describes the festival positively, leaving it to the clownish, Yankee bore Jason Newcome to find fault with the revelers. But the Africans *Americans* encounter with their African-born Others also creates a significant contrast within the episode. First, whereas the creole Africans behold the native Africans with "intense interest" as well as "respect and affection" (70)—Cooper differentiates each group, ironically resisting the temptation to categorize the creoles and the indigenous Africans into a generic totality—the Anglo-Dutch interactions at the festival, while also casual and humorous, show tension and conflict. The ill-bred though well-intentioned Jason Newcome progresses through a series of exasperating social *faux pas* betraying his Connecticut lack of genteel upbringing, while the black nannies display a hierarchical sense of propriety and duty superior to his: "Many a sable nurse did I see that day, chaperoning her young master, or young mistress, or both together, through the various groups, demanding of all, and receiving from all the respect that one of these classes was accustomed to pay the other" (65). The contrast is striking, suggesting that New

York's African slaves have a better cultural awareness of social decorum and inter-class obligation than a white Yankee, as the satirical dialogue over the ticket purchase at the lion's cage demonstrates. Jason Newcome attempts to pay for Anneke Mordaunt's ticket, a "treat" as he terms it, though his action is deemed inappropriate by the standards of New York gentility in this circumstance. Nevertheless, Jason reprimands Corny for allowing Anneke to reimburse him, as this would have been considered rude in Yankee Connecticut (72-75). The humorous dialogue leaves the impression that Jason's sense of propriety in this context is *déclassé*. I argue that this moment of humorous but awkward misunderstanding places in relief the contrasting notions of duty and gentlemanliness that separate the Anglo-Dutch gentility from their less-refined Yankee neighbors. For Corny and Anneke, the chivalrous gesture of service is of primary importance, whereas Jason emphasizes material exchange—financial expenditure—as being integral to interpersonal duty, without which the overture is meaningless.

Jason's relentless pedagogical criticism of Corny's views and conduct throughout the Pinkster scene adds another level of meaning to the text. Though he is intended as a lampoon of the stereotype of the myopic, provincial Yankee, Jason's dialogic focus on "appropriate" social interaction highlights the importance, for Cooper, of ethical mentoring on interpersonal responsibility that transcends class, race, and culture. Through a series of ironic juxtapositions, Cooper presents the African nurse Katrinke shepherding her ward Anneke (67), while the latter moderates the behavior of her personal slave Mari, "who was often kept in order by her more sedate and well-mannered young mistress with a good deal of difficulty" (71). In turn, the lower class Jason, who owns no slaves, assumes an air of superiority and patronizing condescension towards Corny *and* Anneke, lecturing his Anglo-Dutch betters on manners from his narrow Yankee perspective. As an exclamation point to this ironic didacticism on social strata, decorum

and interpersonal duty, it is Corny's chivalrous rescue of Anneke from the claws of the caged lion that accelerates the romance that ends in their marriage, though the Littlepages, even as land barons, are the social inferiors of the Mordaunts in terms of fortune and family connections.

Despite the browbeating Corny receives from Jason and his awareness of his social inferiority to the Mordaunts, it is only the arrival of British officers on the scene which elicits the narrator's sense of inadequacy, envy and resentment. At this point Corny begins to note caste-segregation on the Pinkster field as well referring to the Africans in pejorative terms, in contrast to his descriptions of the diverse, intermixing and polyphonic crowd pages earlier: "The whole town seemed alive, and everybody had a desire to glance at the sports of the Pinkster field, though the more dignified and cultivated had self-denial enough to keep aloof, since it would hardly have comported with their years and stations to be seen in such a place" (79). The narrator then describes his ambivalent emotional reaction to seeing British officers at the festival:

I will confess that I gazed at these youths with admiration, and not entirely without envy, as they passed me in pairs, laughing and diverting themselves with the grotesque groups of blacks... These young men, I knew, had enjoyed the advantages of being educated at home, some of them quite likely in the Universities, and all of them amid the high civilization and taste of England. I say all of them, too hastily, as there were young men of the Colonies among them, who probably had not enjoyed these advantages. The easy air, self-possession, and quiet, what shall I call it?—insolence would be too strong a word, and a term that I, the son and grandson of old King's officers would not like to apply, and yet it comes nearest to what I mean as applicable to the covert manner of these young men—but, whatever it was, that peculiar air of metropolitan superiority over

provincial ignorance and provincial dependence, which certainly distinguished all men of this class, had an effect on me, I find it difficult to describe. I was a loyal subject, loved the King... One thus disposed could not but feel amicably towards the King's officers, yet, I will confess there were moments when this air of ill-concealed superiority, this manner that so much resembled that of the master towards the servant, the superior to the dependent, the patron to the client, gave me deep offence, and feelings so bitter that I was obliged to struggle hard to suppress them. But this is anticipating, and is interrupting the course of my narrative. (79-80)

On the one hand the narrator “anticipates” the feelings of many “Colonials” in the 1770's; in this way, Cooper references the growing tensions between British regulars and their Others, the colonial militiamen, that surface during the French and Indian War, despite the mutual call of patriotic duty which otherwise cements their “British” solidarity.<sup>35</sup> Towards the novel's conclusion, Corny and his friends even join General Howe—and Major Bulstrode, Corny's rival for Anneke—at the ill-fated Battle of Ticonderoga in 1758.

On the other hand, regardless of the superabundant ethno-racial intermixing and social role juxtapositions of the previous two chapters, the language of the narrator here betrays, even with Corny re-establishing racial and social boundaries, an increased level of ambivalence, shame and alienation. Though he feels a “loyal subject's” sense of duty to the King, Corny resents the condescension of British officers reared at “home,” despite his pedigree as the son of a British officer and membership within New York's Anglo-Dutch landowner class. Tempted to relegate these “insolent” British “patrons” to a separate totality, Corny self-corrects, noting that

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<sup>35</sup> We learn in the sequel *The Chainbearer* that Corny, like many militiamen, serves in the Continental Army during the American Revolution.



some of their ranks were colonial officers, and proceeds to “suppress” his feeling of resentment. Through this internal affective description, Cooper captures the psychology of American colonists prior to 1775. That said, when juxtaposed with the semi-egalitarian rendering of the Pinkster festival, this extended diatribe in *Satanstoe* also evidences discursive polyphony, for within Corny’s monologue Cooper demonstrates with irony the attitudes of the Yankee squatters and Jason Newcome’s Anti-Renter progeny respecting their resistance to the “aristocratic” landlords in the following volumes. The narrator concludes with this telling reflection: “I am inclined to think there must always be a good deal of this feeling [of bitterness], where the relation of principal and dependent exists, as between distinct territories” (80). From a rhetorical perspective, here Cooper likewise “interrupts the course” of his moralizing trilogy’s pro-landowner condemnation of the Anti-Renter Other.

These ethical concerns regarding social order, interpersonal responsibility and Otherness reemerge at the novel’s dramatic culmination. In particular, Cooper’s depiction of the Battle of Ticonderoga and the accompanying dialogues highlight the narrative’s intertwined manifestations of duty. In the sequences leading up to the battle, duty is rendered as a mixture of the following: filial responsibility; financial obligation; chivalry; friendship; regional, cultural, political and social class allegiances; and martial comradeship. All possess elements of social visibility, suggesting the requirement of public approbation. Adams writes: “[t]he world Cooper paints at *Satanstoe* and Albany is given shape not by laws but by social relations. Manners, the unwritten code of an established social order, tell people [both whites *and* slaves] who they are and how they relate to others” (124). However, the polyphonic dialogues surrounding the capture and abuse of the Huron Muss by Corny’s slave, Jaap, evidence a rhetorical

destabilization of Cooper's "dominant" ethical discourse on duty and slavery positing an alternative perspective on interpersonal, moral conduct toward the differentiated Other.

The remainder of *Satanstoe*'s narrative is shaped by the complication that Jaap's abuse of his prisoner, Muss, engenders. Ironically, Jaap—disempowered, disrespected, voiceless, landless and history-less throughout the novel, a prototypical Levinasian "third party" Other—assumes an enormous amount of agency through his immoral treatment of the American Indian "admitted Other" (Bolton 14) who the slave has rendered powerless and subject to *his* arbitrary will.<sup>36</sup> The ironic juxtaposition is more striking in that Jaap, so-named by his master, in turn names *his* Huron prisoner, the word "Muss" being, the narrator explains, a corruption of the actual Huron name which the "ignorant," illiterate Jaap is unable to pronounce, though "Jaap"—a defective form of *Jacob*—proceeds to make a pun with the name, likening it to "mess" (337). The bizarre scene continues as Jaap emulates and assumes the role of a slave-master, refusing *his* master's order to release Muss, whom he instead flogs. The narrator recalls: "I repeated the order, somewhat sternly, for Jaap to cut the cords...I heard heavy stripes inflicted on the back of someone... Muss, as Jaap called him, neither flinched nor cried...*Indignantly*, I thrust the negro away, cut the fellow's bonds with my own hands, and *drove my slave before me* to the canoe" (338, *emphasis mine*). Just as Guert Ten Eyck refuses as un-Christian the Onondago Susquesus' brutal suggestion that the Huron prisoner be scalped—though Guert refers to Muss as a "devil" in the same sentence—likewise Corny takes the enemy Huron's part against his slave and fearless battlefield comrade, reinforcing the former identity over the latter. Also significant is

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<sup>36</sup> As Adams notes, "[t]he hostilities that characterize the last section of *Satanstoe* mark the fall into an era in which law is made necessary by the collapse of the self-regulating order the Littlepages represent" (125). I add that a significant part of this "fall" of the "self-regulating order" that the eruption of the final battle symbolizes is bound to a latent discomfort with Jaap's increasing agency and the failure of the "whites" to live up to their social responsibility to contain racial Others, either the slave Jaap or the Indian Muss. In killing Muss, who Corny and the others first sought to protect, it is *Jaap* who most "contains" the violence, ironically, through his defiance.

the fact that Muss, the story's chief antagonist, never utters a syllable; nor do we ever learn his real name, aside from the appellation Jaap gives him.

The odd "public" debate amongst Corny, Dirck, Guert, Susquesus and Jaap puts the preceding episode's confusion of morals *and* social roles into a more unsettled state. The ensuing dialogue shows a fluid ethical terrain where the narrator is unable to offer a conclusive sense of where proper morality and responsive interpersonal duty lay respecting the differentiated Other. While disapproving of Jaap flogging Muss as if he were *his* slave, he litigiously comes to the defense of Jaap when Susquesus accuses him of acting foolishly in whipping the Huron enemy like a "dog": "You should not bring such a charge against my slave, Onondago...unless able to prove it" (345). Yet, upon listening to Jaap's self-justifications for his ill-treatment of Muss, he threatens to flog *him*—Jaap is likened to a "dog" himself throughout the novel—to which the impetuous Dutchman Guert assents: "A little hiding does a nigger good sometimes," a statement in conflict with the narrator's earlier remarks that "Among the Dutch, in particular, the treatment of the negro was of the kindest character" (69-70). Perhaps most telling, though, is the description of Dirck Follock in this instance: "I observed that Dirck, who loved my very slave *principally because he was mine*, looked at the offender reprovably, and by these combined demonstrations, we succeeded in curbing [Jaap's] tongue" (345, *emphasis mine*). This ironic scene serves as a trial for Jaap, a slave and therefore not subject to civil or common law as were free persons, where his master first takes his part as advocate, and then as judge pronounces him an "offender," though the precise "offense" is not specified: was it for flogging Muss, or for the public attempt to justify his conduct? As the narrator suggests, Dirck's "ethical" sense of interpersonal responsibility for Jaap is not due to the slave's unique Otherness, but stems from Corny's totalizing ownership of him, subsuming his identity within his master's. Jaap's vocal

agency, his ability to voice a moral demand before his white auditors as a particularized Other, is literally silenced as the group intimidates him into submission, “curbing the fellow’s tongue.” In that Jaap is so reprimanded, it is either ironic or fitting that at the climax *Jaap* kills Muss, the novel’s archetypal antagonist, an honor often reserved for a more prominent, heroic character in Cooper’s novels, though this time, Corny issues no moral objections. Indeed, Cooper is ambivalent towards Jaap’s Otherness, for during the Battle of Ticonderoga Jaap’s bravery and martial ability conflicts with his otherwise prescribed role as an ignorant, obsequious slave. As Jesse Bier observes, “[g]enerally, the Negro is portrayed as a loyal retainer and is congratulated for his ‘dog-like’ fidelity” (512), though

[t]he superiority of the nominal hero [Corny] is undercut in other respects. The patronized inferior Negro, it turns out, is a quite equal man, in the very terms of athletic heroism that Cooper inaugurated. If anything, Jaap’s performance in combat surpasses that of both Corny and Guert. When he fells three charging Indians with the butt of his empty rifle...he climactically exceeds everybody in the book; and the fact is that he has been a consistent, indomitable warrior throughout the campaign. (515)

Jaap’s valor and fighting skill is also combined with the fact that Cooper permits this otherwise “inferior” slave character to bear and discharge firearms against whites—the French—as well as Hurons, though the text depicts *both* groups as cultural, ethno-linguistic Others to the Anglo-Dutch. Despite the historical fact that this was not unprecedented during either the French and Indian War or the American Revolutionary, I contend that the prospect of an armed slave, in particular one who could use his musket to deadly effect against “unequal” European adversaries, would have been unnerving for white American readers in the 1840’s.

The fitting epilogue to this conflicted subplot is the burial of Pete, Guert's slave, who is tortured to death by the vengeful Muss in reprisal for the Huron's capture and abuse by Jaap. The narrator relates: "Guert Ten Eyck actually repeated the Lord's Prayer and the Creed over the grave, when the body was placed in it, *with a fervour and earnestness that a little surprised me*" (366, *emphasis mine*), to which Guert follows: "He was but a nigger...but he was a very goot nigger, in the first place; then, *he had a soul, as well as a white man...*" (366, *emphasis mine*). This ambivalence and moral confusion is underscored as Guert then prays over the graves of the slain white surveyors, again in public-address fashion.<sup>37</sup> Like the others, this passage illustrates the extent to which an otherwise dominant sociocultural discourse on race and slavery, as ventriloquized through the voice of the narrator, the older Cornelius Littlepage, and the supporting characters, unravels through affectively contradictory descriptions and dialogues. What these ironic, polyphonic dialogues showcase amidst a plethora of racist epithets is an ethical inquietude respecting slavery and racial Otherness—pertaining to American Indians as well as African Americans—more prevalent in the 1840's U.S. than in New York colony during the 1750's. Sutured to this formalist and historicist analysis is Levinas' interpersonal ethical optic, which asks: who is the differentiated, particular Other with whom the moral agent publically "converses" and thus for whom the subject assumes responsibility? As we see, the aforementioned dialogues simulate for an audience—Corny's, the Editor's or the text's fictional auditors—how morally conflicted white Americans struggled to attain a "normative" interpersonal ethical stance toward slaves, American Indians and even "Other" Europeans as non-totalized individuals. In short, Cooper's ambivalent dialogues display significant rhetorical fluctuation on this point.

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<sup>37</sup> Compare this scene in Cooper's *Satanstoe* with the grisly image of the African in the hanging cage in Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer*, which Linda Bolton highlights as an example in early American letters of Levinas' notion of the ethical "demand" of the radically Other (35-53).

As the novel concludes, the reader apprehends a restoration of a “proper” social order of class-mediated relations and interpersonal obligations, a thematic *denouement* that does not materialize to the same extent in *The Chainbearer* and which is absent altogether in *The Redskins*. John P. McWilliams focuses on a weakening of Cooper’s narrator-protagonists as the trilogy progresses, each generation of Littlepages becoming less heroic (310), leaving Corny as a romanticized exemplar of genteel leadership and intrepidity that his descendants, in particular Hugh, will fail to match (“Cooper’s Littlepage Novels” 283). I counter that the focus of this decline for Cooper is not the thinning genteel bloodline *per se*, but the misguided march of American history, where the optimistic progress of *Satanstoe*’s ideal, socially stratified past devolves into an ever more pessimistic, chaotic and cyclical eschatology in the series’ final two volumes. Yet, whereas the Littlepage protagonists become less heroic in *The Chainbearer* and *The Redskins*, Susquesus becomes more magnanimous, Jaap more obsequious and the Yankees more menacing. It is this typological evolution of the differentiated Other and its ethical significance within the trilogy’s diachronic narrative that I engage in the following sections.

## II. *The Chainbearer*

Set after the Revolutionary War, *The Chainbearer* resumes the Littlepage story a generation later. The narrator-protagonist’s nickname, “Mordy”—short for Mordaunt, his mother’s maiden name—suggests an amalgamation with his father, “Corny.” However, as Donald Ringe notes, Mordaunt Littlepage is not his father (“Cooper’s Littlepage Novels” 284); nor is the older Jason Newcome just the annoying clown he was in *Satanstoe*. In contrast to its precursor, *The Chainbearer* constructs an ethics of duty regarding the early republic that posits an inversion of Levinasian responsibility as that which the differentiated Other—a non-white person or white yeoman—owes the Selfsame subject. Reduced is the “leveling” martial

comradeship that characterizes the ethos of interpersonal duty in *Satanstoe*. Despite its post-Independence setting, *The Chainbearer* evinces a preoccupation with maintaining social hierarchy as a necessary mediator of ethical *and* political relationships in the early republic, in addition to “diachronically” championing intergenerational familial obligation.

Cooper critiques majoritarian politics—mobocracy—in a telling scene early in the novel. Upon arriving at his ancestral Ravensnest estate, Mordy, operating *incognito* as his father’s “attorney,” witnesses with moral indignation a series of votes manipulated by the conniving Yankee Jason Newcome, his estate’s agent, to “democratically” determine the denomination of the settlement’s church (117-29). Cooper uses this episode, ventriloquizing through his narrator, the middle-aged Mordy, to illustrate the ironic conflict between the “Yankee” notion of direct democracy, as a guard against aristocracy and autocracy, and his ideal of hierarchical republicanism. For Cooper, unchecked democracy is vulnerable to the machinations of unscrupulous demagogues and the “tyranny of the majority” that result when unsophisticated plebian voters lack the paternalistic guidance of cultivated statesmen.<sup>38</sup>

Though this action and dialogue is satirical, the warning is clear—a polity governed solely by the rule—or whim—of the majority will lead to factional domination and oppression by the strongest and most cunning, irrespective of democratic “justice.” This didactic scene fits well with the message of the prior episode, where the narrator recalls a Socratic discourse he has with the Onondago Sureflint, or Susquesus in *Satanstoe*. Mordy here explains western civilization’s dependence on the principles of private ownership and rule of law as key to societal progress (107-110), channeling Adam Smith, John Locke and Friedrich Hegel. The

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<sup>38</sup> Steven Watts explains in “‘Through a Glass Eye Darkly’: James Fenimore Cooper as Social Critic” the author’s political thought: “in a democracy the danger lay in public tyranny. With a susceptibility to the momentary whims and petty desires of public opinion...this system easily degenerated into a short-sighted and unstable mob rule. Obeisance to majoritarian sentiment of the moment obscured questions of truth and justice” (65).

inconsistency *and* the irony in this instance lay, as Bolton points out respecting the Declaration (2), in the conflict between a self-interested American principle, whether it be the totalizing notions of freedom, justice, republican democracy, law or the right to property, and a selfless ethical duty to respond, as Levinas puts it, for the Good of the particularized Other. Watts captures this tension in Cooper:

Cooper found himself trapped in a life-long dilemma about the virtues of profit-seeking ambition...For the novelist, American politics embodied the unhappy social developments of post-republican society, and it came down to an uncomfortable choice between capitalism and democracy...The two conflicting sides of his ideological position—the enshrinement of virtue and condemnation of self-interest, the pursuit of profit and defense of individualism—eventually converged in a certain fashion. (70, 71-72).

Whereas I do not argue that there is a “convergence” of these poles within Cooper’s later work, I posit a creative coexistence of the two. But this occurs more on an ethical level than on the political, in that Cooper viewed the role of the “democratic gentleman” as one of disinterested moral leadership and public service during *and* after Jackson’s presidency (Watts 73).

At the core of Cooper’s text—and the Declaration—lies the question: is the Good of the individual subject bound to conceptions of allegiance, law and the polity that prioritize self-interest, or is there a greater “theological” sense of duty that invokes personal *dis*interest, yoking the Good of the Selfsame to that of the unique, non-totalized Other? That raised, at first glance *The Chainbearer* offers a “totalized monologue”—I use Levinas’ and Bakhtin’s terms in tandem—buttressing Cooper’s rhetoric on republicanism, interpersonal responsibility and Otherness. Nevertheless, this ethical question erupts within the text’s discursive polyphony,



showing Cooper's ironic ambivalence in responding to it. The competing ethical discourses within the novel's dialogues voice the unfinished business of defining an ethos of interpersonal responsibility in an antebellum republic comprised of ever more diverse Others, and one still struggling to forge a single national identity in the 1840's. I argue that the old, menacing Yankee squatter, Aaron Thousandacres, incorporates much of this ambivalent, and creative, rhetorical tension. At first, we apprehend an intransigent, paranoid, angry and violent usurper bent on asserting his will according to his self-serving vision of "rights." His angry diatribes evince a pathetic, juvenile sophistry, as he constructs simplistic, circular arguments devoid of higher logic. Thus, Thousandacres functions not just as an ideal antagonist, a composite of Ishmael Bush of *The Prairie* (Dekker 230) and Tom Hutter in *The Deerslayer*, but also as a straw man for Cooper's "republican" rhetoric, as contrasted with the sociopolitical and economic views of Andrew Jackson or Thomas Skidmore. Reexamined from this rhetorical vantage point, we see a more dynamic character that complicates the didactic ethical functioning of Cooper's archetypal heroes, Mordy, Sureflint, Andries and Duss.

As already indicated, most of the *The Chainbearer's* ethical critiques concern the obligations of non-white and/or lower class subjects toward Mordy and the Littlepages. Whereas in *Satanstoe* Corny views Susquesus with suspicion and Jaap exceeds his social role as a slave, in the sequel Cooper presents the older versions of these Others as more passive, operating as ex-Continental officer Mordy's dutiful *aides de camp*, though their boldness still exceeds that of their young leader. Even the faithful old Dutchman, Andries Coejemans, despite his bravery and magnanimity, does not match the martial intrepidity of the "man of action" Guert Ten Eyck, his younger Dutch amalgamation, in *Satanstoe*. Rather, Andries serves as the novel's moral conscience, functioning as a rhetorical foil for Thousandacres during the latter's heated rants. By

contrast, the lower class Yankees—Thousandacres, his family and the wily Jason Newcome—display boldness, initiative, tenacity and decisiveness that, while deployed for unlawful, self-serving ends that threaten the interests of the Littlepages and the Anglo-Dutch land barons they represent, bring into relief Mordy’s relative helplessness. In spite of their lack of education, refinement, wealth and political connections, the Yankee Others in *The Chainbearer* are a force to be reckoned with, possessing rough-hewn virtues that Andrew Jackson would admire. The novel’s rhetorical preoccupation thus comes into focus: whereas the unsettling image of assertive African slaves is left behind in *Satanstoe*, Cooper’s anxiety regarding unmanageable, aggressive Others is transferred to Thousandacres, Jason Newcome and the militant, lawless and “leveling” Yankees they represent.

In addition to this social anxiety, the significance of the past—or competing *pasts*—is also at issue for Cooper here. Viewed as a historicized totality comprised of relational ethical alignments, the dystopian present—and its immediate future—of *The Redskins* in 1845 looks back on two competing pasts, one in *Satanstoe* in 1757-58, the other in *The Chainbearer* in 1784. In short, the trilogy presents the reader with a bifurcated diachronicity. On the one hand, the problematic intrepidity of the racial Others Susquesus and Jaap in the 1750’s of *Satanstoe* is subsumed within Cooper’s ideal of martial duty in that both in the end serve the “correct” masters—the genteel Littlepages—for the “right” cause—Anglo-Dutch supremacy over the French—alongside subservient, mute and genericized tenants. On the other, the Yankee squatters’ aggressiveness in the 1780’s of *The Chainbearer* repudiates any sense of allegiance to a hierarchical social economy. Thus, in contrast with *Satanstoe*’s conclusion, the climactic combat in *The Chainbearer* does *not* feature a battle against an enemy Other in the sense of a national or imperial adversary. Rather, the novel depicts lawful tenants and U.S. government

deputies confronting fellow Americans as renegades defying the law as well as a hierarchical “republican” ethos delineating interpersonal responsibility and duty within the sanctioned social order. From this perspective, Thousandacres’ sanguine rhetoric on “rights” and his family’s violent encroachments constitute the embryonic beginning in 1784 of the Anti-Rent rebellion that would rock the Hudson Valley’s gentility in the 1830’s and 40’s. Yet beyond this violence, the “democratic” reader ironically sees much to admire as well as fear in Cooper’s rendering of Thousandacres, his family and the Yankee yeoman class they represent.

That said, I argue that Cooper attempts to depict Thousandacres as an uneducated, brutish, and opportunistic encroacher on the rights and property of law-abiding citizens. However, a sympathetic Jacksonian perspective shows a dynamic, self-reliant and decisive leader spearheading a group of rugged entrepreneurs in a remote area, far from commercial infrastructures and government regulation.<sup>39</sup> His “squatting,” which for Cooper is theft on a grander scale, would appear to Americans such as Thomas Skidmore<sup>40</sup> as socioeconomic progress toward an egalitarian democratic society. Furthermore, the Timberman clan’s industriousness is impressive, beyond the stereotype of indolent backwoods hunters, in that the extent of Thousandacres’ “betterment,” including sawmill, is a commendable achievement as even Mordy concedes, though illegally erected on the Littlepage’s patent (232).

We can read Mordy’s character in several ways as well. Foreshadowing the prevalent motif of disguise in *The Redskins*, the proud, “heroic” Mordy is not able to persist in

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<sup>39</sup> Watts remarks of Cooper’s perspective that his “affirmation of hierarchy was balanced by reciprocal respect for the sturdy, independent citizen of the commonwealth” (“James Fenimore Cooper as Social Critic” 58). I wonder, however, to what extent Thousandacres and family are citizens of *any* commonwealth, the narrator explaining that the residents of the Hampshire Grants/Vermont were not incorporated into the republic until 1789 (217-18).

<sup>40</sup> Sean Wilentz explains in *The Rise of American Democracy* that beyond John Locke’s views on property, under Skidmore’s program “[a]ll existing property holdings were illegitimate, based on a primordial violation of the self-evident principle...that each had an equal claim on the creator’s endowment... [I]ndividuals would be permitted to labor as they chose, in cooperative independence. Men and women of superior talent, diligence, luck and intelligence would, Skidmore allowed, inevitably produce more, to the greater benefit of all—and would therefore accumulate, rightfully, more property than others during their lifetimes” (353-54).

counterfeiting a backwoods hunter before Thousandacres' family, despite Sureflint's prudent entreaties. As a result, Mordy becomes Thousandacres' prisoner, rendered helpless for most of the novel, his only pretensions to escape being with the aid of "Others": the Onodago Sureflint, the slave Jaap, the old Dutchman Andries, and the Yankee girl Lowiny. The irony is that Mordy, legally vested with more authority than any other character as his father's "agent," is stripped of his liberty, authority and "agency," literally a prisoner on his own estate. The usurping, lower class Yankee squatter, through audacity and brute force, turns the tables on the genteel Littlepages, explaining to Mordy his proposed "tarms" [terms] of settlement with "gin'ral Littlepage," who he stereotypes, denigrates and implicitly threatens, yet with whom he is still willing to dialogue. In his willingness to converse with the Other, Thousandacres ironically restores the symbiosis in Levinas' ethics of alterity. Though differentiating, totalizing and thereby Othering the Littlepages through his own "mastery" and proto-Skidmorean rhetoric, he nevertheless acknowledges in his dialogue with Mordy the just obligation that he owes the landlords *as* Others, conceding "that gin'ral Littlepage has *some* right" to the land he legally owns (235). But as himself the sociocultural Other to the upper class Littlepages, Thousandacres articulates his understanding of the Littlepages' duty to *his* family: allowing the Timberrmans to keep the lumber *and* mill equipment on the "betterment" prior to departing. Cooper foreshadows this rhetorical-ethical ambivalence during another Socratic dialogue between Mordy and Sureflint, the latter positing the same objections that Thousandacres raises over the Littlepages' "legal" claim to the patent (221-22), though Sureflint, the exemplary "admitted" Other, remains loyal to the Littlepages by virtue of the martial comradeship forged in the *Satanstoe*.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> I argue this is another example of Cooper favoring the romanticized colonial past of 1758 in *Satanstoe* as ironically anchoring his ideal of "republican" duty, as opposed to the problematic ethical narrative of 1784, despite the also-ironic fact that *The Chainbearer* is set *after* the Revolution, when there actually exists a U.S. republic.

Thus, I contend that though Cooper's descriptions and sequences of action undergird his "republican" rhetoric, it is the novel's polyphonic dialogues which evidence competing ethical discourses in *The Chainbearer*. In this line, Louise K. Barnett explains the discursive value and interpretive stakes of novelistic dialogue: "If the authorial [narrator's] voice has powerful advantages, fictive speech has the dramatic immediacy that characterizes the dynamic and competitive process of conversational interaction. Compared to the pronouncements of the authorial voice, its unmediated nature has experiential validity for the reader, the impact of showing rather than telling" (13). Channeling Bakhtin, Barnett then expounds: "[t]he unwritten rules of social discourse apply to fictive speakers, not their authors, along with such extralinguistic factors as the 'capital of authority' that each speaker commands and the type of social occasion which furnishes the context for their talk. For these reasons, the role of language as a social instrument is more directly apparent in fictive speech than in authorial utterance" (15-16). To apply Barnett's argument to the present analysis, Mordy's initial vocal exchanges with Thousandacres, followed by the sublime verbal duels between the latter and his foil, Andries, "show" us more than the narrator would "tell," in particular due to the fact that the last dialogue terminates, literally, in Andries' homicide.

With regards to this last remark, each of the novel's four primary "Thousandacres" dialogues concludes with attempted coercion, incarceration or physical violence, signaling either a failure of dialogue or, as Barnett would argue, its natural albeit extreme continuation as a "contest" of contrasting discourses and competing wills (5-6). As to the first, one could posit that the failed dialogues display an irremediable cognitive dissonance amongst mutual Others, Thousandacres on one side and Mordy or Andries on the other, concerning their different notions of morality, authority and duty and bearing enough affective tension to lead to extra-verbal

conflict. The second viewpoint—the one I subscribe to—situates these dialogues within a discursive context that is already combative, the irony being that the moral obligation for a differentiated Other here is determined *not* by a higher, objective sense of ethical duty, but by the subject's capacity to implement a larger, ideologically invested and totalizing paradigm of Otherness in order to superimpose a self-serving meta-discourse on interpersonal ethics.

Mordy's initial dialogue with Thousandacres and its accompanying actions are a case in point. At first presenting himself as a hunter along with an "accepted" Other, the well-known Sureflint, Aaron and his family offer the Onondago and the "stranger" Mordy food and hospitality. They assume that as a backwoodsman with an American Indian companion, the incognito Mordy identifies more with the rustic Timbermans than with the effete Littlepages. The dialogue thus commences with the moral reference point being that duty is owed to a subject that is either personally familiar or with whom one can sympathize as a member of a common social stratum. As the conversation proceeds, however, cracks appear in Mordy's façade, in particular respecting his erudite diction, which Thousandacres notes: "But you've had opportunities, as a body can tell by your speech, which isn't exactly like our'n, out here in the woods, from which I had kind o' thought your schoolin' might be more than common. A body can tell, though his own l'arnin amounts to no great matter" (232). Mordy attempts, as affirmed by his older, narrator self, to downplay his higher education level: "'My schooling,' I answered, modestly enough, I trust, '*has* been a little better than common, though it has not been good enough, as you see, to keep me out of the woods'" (233). More betraying than his educated diction, though, is the "*immodest*" sentiment Mordy expresses that a central concern of formal education is to keep one from the indignity of the "woods," Aaron's chosen environment. The "Other" rejoins: "Some folks have a nat'ral turn for the wilderness, and it's workin' ag'in the

grain, and nearly useless, to try to make settlement-bodies of ‘em” (233). Despite the stoic Sureflint’s attempts to restrain him, in the end Mordy is unable to bear Thousandacres’ insults towards his family. With haughtiness, Mordy discloses his true identity as General Cornelius Littlepage’s son and “attorney” (239), though he had somewhat self-disclosed at the outset of the interview, revealing his given name to be “Mordaunt,” the surname of his maternal grandfather, the former landlord of Ravensnest. The revelation of Mordy’s identity is revealing: more than a crude device on Cooper’s part to advance the narrative, it underscores Mordy’s elitist reluctance to assume the guise of a lower class Other, even if to assure his safety.

Though Mordy’s self-unmasking confirms the mutual Otherness between him and Thousandacres, the exchange that follows concerning his service in the Revolution ironically expresses ambivalence respecting the ethics of allegiance. In an attempt to reestablish social credibility with the Timbermans, Mordy explains that despite his youth, he saw combat as an officer in the Continental Army during the Revolutionary, then commenting as narrator: “My announcement of this new character was not without a marked effect. Fighting was a thing to the whole family’s taste, and what they could appreciate better, perhaps, than any other deed. There was something warlike in Thousandacres’ very countenance and air, and I was not mistaken in supposing he might feel some little sympathy for a soldier...I saw that he once more relented in purpose” (247). Mordy-as-narrator then expounds on this attempted emotive appeal to martial comradeship and a sentiment of national duty as a way to downplay the now-adversarial, fully Othered relationship between himself and the Timbermans:

I knew that there was often a strange medley of *soi-disant* patriotic feeling mixed up with the most confirmed knavery in ordinary matters, and saw I had touched a chord that might thrill on the sympathies of even these rude and supremely selfish

beings. The patriotism of such men, indeed, is nothing but an enlargement of selfishness, since they prize things because they belong to themselves, or they, in one sense, belong to the things. They take sides with themselves, but never with principles. That patriotism alone is pure, which would keep the country in the paths of truth, honour and justice; and no man is empowered, in his zeal for his particular nation, any more than in his zeal for himself, to forget the law of right. (248)

Even as Mordy searches for common ground with Thousandacres to ensure his personal safety, he demonstrates what he perceives to be an unbridgeable gulf between his “pure patriotism” based on “truth, honour and justice” and the Timbermans’ “selfish” permutation. The fact that Mordy is unable to convince the Timbermans that he fought in the same army is symbolic, for considering the narrator’s diatribe, in a sense they did fight for different causes and for different “principles,” even if under a common national standard.

This portion of the exchange is also framed by Thousandacres’ story of keeping the goods that the British Army took from the Continentals and which he then stole from the British (233-34). Cooper intends to present Thousandacres’ conduct as dereliction of duty, yet Thousandacres’ unapologetic boasting respecting this incident, which he has oft recounted with pride, betrays an alternative ethos opposing the narrator’s. Thousandacres does not revel in nefarious deeds; rather, he feels that his actions here were justified as duty, considering the poverty which the war caused for persons of his persuasion and class. Anticipating the Anti-Rent rhetoric of the 1800’s, Thousandacres explains his rationale for keeping the supplies:

We lumbermen have had an awful time on it these last eight years [of the war]... Congress was poor enough, I’m willin’ to own, but it was richer than I was, or



ever will be. When property has changed hands once, title goes with it; and some say that these very lands, coming from the king, ought now to go to the people, jist as folks happen to want ‘em. There’s reason and right, I’m sartain, in the idee, and I shouldn’t wonder if it held good in law, one day. (234)

The irony is that paired with this dialogue, as well as that which follows Mordy’s self-revelation, is again the reality that Mordy and the Timbermans technically fought on the same side of the Revolution. This exchange also invokes competing versions of an actual past, debating whether or not Mordy fought against General Burgoyne (248). Furthermore, the notion of *duty* is ambivalent here, polyphonically implying either allegiance to particular Others or to a particular—meaning *abstracted*—politico-ethical community.

Though compelling, these dialogues are but prologue to the final verbal duel between Andries and Thousandacres, where the two literally argue themselves to death. Heightening the drama on a formal level is its theatrical arrangement, Cooper staging the conversation in Aaron’s house, described as a *de facto* courtroom, which is ironic considering Thousandacres’s disdain for the law. In addition, the exchange is divided into two episodes by an intermission or “recess,” during which Mordy and Andries are incarcerated. Though this is primarily a dialogue between Thousandacres and Andries, the former’s wife, Prudence, and Mordy interject as advocates for one or the other. As the “Editorial” footnotes here suggest (243, 303, 349 & 350), the debate is meant to foreshadow and discredit the Anti-Renters of the 1840’s and the shameful government officials and politicians cowed by them. Thus, as Cooper scripts the contest’s outcome, we see the magnanimous if also uneducated Andries get the better of Thousandacres’ fallacious, self-serving logic at every turn, exposing the depravity and illegality of the “squatters’” claim to the Littlepage lands and resources. Nevertheless, even within a verbal

contest that Cooper manipulates to the rhetorical advantage of the Anglo-Dutch landlords, dialogic polyphony erupts. Ironically, Cooper's conservative, "republican" ethical discourse on social relations, duty and economy is destabilized by the same formal, rhetorical mechanisms by which he attempts to reinforce it. The first fissure emerges as Thousandacres and Andries argue over what principle confers the right to claim, occupy and sell land. Andries once again gains the upper hand in the debate, noting the flaw in the "Other's" case. Thousandacres claims that what one sees, desires and what "is necessary for his wants" (303) one can possess provided no one "claims" such property first (305). Andries rebuts that the Mordaunts and Littlepages, by that logic, have a more valid claim to the land in that they "viewed" it and "desired" it before anyone else (307), implying Euro-Americans. As we learn in *Satanstoe*, the Mordaunts and Littlepages cheated the Onondagos out of their land, weakening the legitimacy of their claim in the moral/ethical sense regarding what is owed to the differentiated Other, a dialogue renewed between mutual Others Susquesus and Corny in *Satanstoe* and again between Mordy and "Sureflint" in *The Chainbearer*.

In addition to this, Thousandacres builds upon his position that the Revolution invalidated all land titles authorized by the King, making an indirect appeal to Locke and Skidmore as to why his family can claim the land on which they dwell and labor:

"Well, admitten' all you say, squatter, how does t'at make your right [to the land] here better t'an t'at of any other man?" demanded Andries, disdainfully. [...]  
Why, reason tells us where a man's rights begin, you'll see, Chainbearer... When you and I are born, some parts of the world is in use, and some parts isn't. We want land, when we are old enough to turn our hands to labour, and I make my

pitch out here in the woods, say where no man has pitched afore me. Now, in my judgment, that makes the best of titles, the Lord's title." (303).

Thousandacres then rationalizes further:

"I don't think I'm fully understood, a'ter all that's been said," ... "Here's two men start in life at the same time, and both want farms. Wa-a-l; there's the wilderness, or may be it isn't all wilderness, though it once was. One chooses to buy out betterments [Thousandacres' mill], and he makes his pitch. Both them men's in the right, and can hold on to their possessions, I say, to the eend of time. That is, on the supposition that right is stronger than might." (305)

In response, Andries, who has no mind for arithmetic, uncharacteristically redirects the debate in terms of the problems of precise land division and ascertaining specific quantities of property (303, 305), though the contest is first framed by Andries in particular as being about abstracted notions of rights, obligations, entitlement and ownership. Thus, despite the fact that Cooper presents Andries as having the advantage for the majority of the argument, at this crucial moment Thousandacres makes the most salient point, in contrast to his other rhetorical absurdities here and elsewhere. In sum, he holds that human labor, land improvement—hence “betterment”—and material production, in addition to divine mandate, are what entitle one to the “estate,” and from which the property derives its economic value. Considering Cooper's overt ideological investment in the outcome of his simulated debate, it is ironic that the educated Littlepages and their heroic chainbearer, Andries, are the parties who have not “fully understood” the larger ethical stakes of the land dispute, and *not* the Yankee Timbermans.

To examine this line of thought through a historical optic familiar to Cooper's 1846 audience, the American Indians lost any “right” to their land on the “ethical” basis of its apparent

lack of economic or agricultural development, according to the sophistry of Euro-Americans. Yet, the Littlepages, who swindled their property from the Onondagos, have accumulated a quantity of land so vast that they cannot develop all of it or make it “produce.” Ironically, the Timbermans, though “squatters,” have “bettered” their small piece of it. Furthermore, in that Cooper laments the American Indian’s doom, Andries and Thousandacres’ dialogue proves doubly ironic: Thousandacres, the novel’s villain, espouses a more fluid, impermanent and *unwritten* conception of land rights based on immediate necessity and circumstance, more akin to Susquesus/Sureflint’s discourses on land, whereas the mathematically deficient, semi-illiterate Andries becomes a stickler for precision measurements, deeds and official legal claims, despite his friendship with Sureflint. Thus, it is not clear which character’s argument is more ethical and consistent, in spite of Cooper’s dialogic demonization of Thousandacres.

That said the logical inconsistencies present within the dialogue’s argumentation are not the sole evidence of ethical-rhetorical polyphony during this culminating episode, for the problematic dilemma of Otherness versus sameness also emerges amongst the novel’s “different” groups of Euro-Americans. Dana D. Nelson historically frames this early republican/antebellum issue of white male fragmentation in the U.S.:

Adapting “white manhood” as the marker for civic unity worked as an apparently democratizing extension of civic entitlement. It worked symbolically and legally to bring men together in an abstract but increasingly functional community that diverted their attention from differences between them—differences which had come alarmingly into focus in the post-Revolutionary era. Men whose interests had been temporarily unified in wartime were increasingly encountering fellow men not as citizen but competitor in an unstable, rapidly changing, post war

market economy. The national need to cultivate “sameness” was threatened by the differences structured not only through the variety of ethnic, religious, and political backgrounds of the colonial population, and the regional, colonial and state affiliations that they had come to employ, but by the very market economy that supposedly ensured the nation’s health. (6)

Most of these divisive anxieties that Nelson catalogues manifest themselves in the dialogues between Thousandacres, Andries and Mordy, though competing economic interests, philosophies and sociocultural differences are not all that separate these mutual Others.

Whereas Cooper’s social conservatism reemerges in his need to reinforce social hierarchy and the interpersonal obligations they order, Thousandacres attempts to reach an understanding with Andries, concluding such to be impossible with the refined Mordy. “There’s no use in talkin’ to this young spark [Mordy], Chainbearer...he’s passed his days in the open country, and has got open-country ways, and notions, and talk; and them’s things I don’t pretend to understand. You’re woods, mainly; he’s open country; and I’m clearin’. There’s a difference atween each; but woods and clearin’ come clusset; and so I’ll say my say to you” (353). Thousandacres seeks the “white” solidarity with Andries that Nelson describes, utilizing a “triangular structure” to foster an “imagined affiliation”<sup>42</sup> with his adversary by objectifying and *Othering* Mordy as an ironic “third party,” whose “open country ways, and notions, and talk” so differentiate him that they cannot dialogue. But while acknowledging Andries’ difference from him, Thousandacres downplays the cultural and philosophical gulf between “woods and

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<sup>42</sup> Nelson also explains in *National Manhood* that “‘republican’ subjectivity is consolidated through a triangular structure, in imagined affiliation with other men who have power over groups of people—the power to objectivity, to identify, to manage. Those powers collate discourses of science, legality, and property (personality and realty) to a certain select, commanding, and specifically raced, masculine identity” (3). The irony here is that though Mordy, by dint of the laws of the republic, has the most authority, property and status of *any* of the characters, he is by and large Othered as impotent throughout most of the text.

clearin.” Yet Andries’ magnanimity for Cooper lies in his resistance to “clearin” Thousandacres’ “leveling” or same-ing as the Dutchman insists: “I do not t’ink, however, t’at t’ere ist much resemblance between you and me, T’ousandacres, in any one t’ing, except it pe in olt age” (343). Andries thus rebuffs Thousandacres’ same-ing scheme, the proposed marriage of his son, Zephaniah, to Andries’ better-bred niece, an attempt at a formalized alliance that would work to Mordy’s disadvantage, considering his romantic attachment to her.<sup>43</sup> Still, the eventual failure of Aaron’s attempted accords with Andries and Mordy, the inability of each to make his dissonant thinking on duty, legality and authority intelligible to the “Other,” parallels the sectional political tensions of the 1840’s in that this fictionalized failure of dialogue ends not in compromise, but in violence.

In spite of the stark philosophical polemic that Cooper displays through the Andries-Thousandacres debates, the characters’ dialogic-rhetorical representation betrays polyphonic ambivalence. The speech of both offers examples of contrasting idiolects, in that the phonetic renderings of their spoken language suggest specific ethno-cultural, political and class differences. However, at the dramatic height of this scripted, idiolect-rich dialogue, Andries blurts: “name your *tarms* —name your *tarms*!” (347, *emphasis mine*), “tarms” being a phonetic spelling of “terms” that Cooper attributes to Yankee pronunciation within this novel, as seen earlier (342). Andries’ exclamation is doubly curious in that he soon concedes: “I haf no proposals to make, nor any aut’ority to offer t’em. I’m nut’in here, but a chainpearer, wit’ a contract to survey t’e patent into small lots, and t’en my tuty is tone” (348). Andries contradicts himself: he demands to hear Thousandacres’ “tarms,” when he has not the official “aut’ority” to

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<sup>43</sup> Also interesting is the fact that one of the few successful intercultural/interclass alliances that evolve during the narrative is between Lowiny and Mordy, the former clandestinely assisting the latter, though her implausible romantic affections for Mordy are “naturally” unrequited in Cooper’s ideal social hierarchy. All that Lowiny yields from her allegiance to Mordy is employment as one of the Littlepages’ domestics following her family’s flight.

make counterproposals, though he acknowledges that Mordy, his father's "attorney," does (348), despite his silence and effective irrelevance during most of the discussion. There thus occurs a confusing double amalgamation: despite his antipathy for the squatter, Andries literally assumes Thousandacre's voice while usurping the prerogative of the estate's official agent, Mordy. Ironically, the "unambiguous" chainbearer, who by his profession is invested in demarcating straight, clear lines, here blurs the text's "lines" of duty, authority, hierarchy and Otherness.

Beneath Andries' colorful, archetypal dialogue is a more complicated, and ambivalent, character. George Dekker remarks that as an honorable yet humble woodsman, he forms an amalgamation with the older Leatherstocking in *The Prairie* (230-31). Within the context of *The Chainbearer* he functions as different "type" of liminal figure, not one straddling the Othering dichotomy of wilderness and civilization, but rather the gulf between gentry and peasantry. At the novel's beginning the narrator introduces the brave, chivalrous Dutchman as one who could claim genteel heritage, also having served as an officer in the Continental army, yet also as a person whose status as a gentleman was matched by neither education nor fortune, though ironically, like his Littlepage "masters," he too owns slaves.<sup>44</sup> From a different perspective, then, the obsequious Andries is the inferior of the younger Mordy while often functioning as an alternative father-figure for him in that Corny Littlepage is absent for most of the novel. The narrator also notes that *Captain* Andries refuses the post-service promotion to major that *he* accepts (20), signaling more than a distinction in military rank, but a social one. Furthermore, the Littlepages patronize the destitute Andries with employment as a humble chainbearer, though the family holds him in the high regard, hoping to offer the "proud" Andries some land to farm (79-80). As an uneducated woodsman and Dutchman, Andries is the *Anglo-Dutch* Mordy's

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<sup>44</sup> Andries must be a gentleman in order to render socially appropriate Mordy's marriage to Duss, who despite her proclivity for the woods is described as possessing a true lady's refinement, education, and family connections.

Other, while his technical status as gentleman, army officer and slave holder aligns him with the Littlepages' patroon class interests in opposition to Thousandacres, who on an ironic level is his lower class peer. That said, how the ambivalent Andries embodies duty and Otherness inflects Cooper's ethical rhetoric. But even if not quite a gentleman on par with the Littlepages, Cooper still depicts Andries as a moral exemplar, for the selfless duty he manifests in speech and action serves as a rebuke to the self-serving Thousandacres.<sup>45</sup> Within Cooper's conservative republican social structure, the uneducated chainbearer knows by intuition with whom his allegiance must lie: society's shepherding elite. Likewise, Jaap, Sureflint, and Lowiny also offer examples of this instinctive hierarchical sense of loyalty. Even in his reticence respecting the match between Duss and Mordy, Andries' hesitancy has only to do with his hierarchical sense of propriety, the belief that the Littlepages are too far above his family's class to allow such a union (335).

However, Donald Ringe notes that as the trilogy unfolds we see with respect to marriage and social strata an ambivalent nuancing of Cooper's "republican" social thought (*James Fenimore Cooper* 118, 121), for not only do Mordy and Duss wed, but in *Satanstoe* Anneke chooses the socially inferior, "colonial" Corny over the British soldier-baronet Bulstrode to her father's initial displeasure. Even the effete Hugh chooses the poor parson's daughter, Mary Warren, as his bride in *The Redskins*, though in this case Cooper furnishes a contrast, for Hugh rejects the advances of the "opportunistic" yet attractive Yankee woman, Opportunity Newcome, indicating a definite matrimonial hierarchy even amongst those with lesser material social advantages. In other words, genteel character and conduct, over and above wealth or land, are what qualify a person for the solemn duties that accompany inclusion within the republic's social

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<sup>45</sup> Thousandacres' daughter, Lowiny, also proves herself to be a steadfast confederate of Mordy's throughout the narrative, an irony for the conservative "republican" Cooper, for above her romantic interest in Mordy, her noble conduct as an ignorant Yankee, suggests the common citizen's—even a young *woman's*—innate capacity to discern right conduct and duty *without* the direction of a social elite. This facet of the plot is radically democratic even for a one-time Jackson supporter like Cooper.



vanguard. It is within this “republican” social matrix that Andries can serve as “an officer and a gentleman,” and offer his niece to the heir of a Hudson Valley land baron.

Like *Satanstoe*, *The Chainbearer* concludes with a “battle” against armed encroachers invading a patroon’s lands, though here the “enemies” are Yankee squatters as opposed to French-allied Hurons. In one sense, both texts conclude with the restoration of a proper social hierarchy and the affirmation of “rightful” land possession through the aid of a homogenized tenant yeomanry which drives out the lawless invaders. Unlike *Satanstoe*, however, the climactic skirmish in the sequel, aside from being less dramatic, is also distinct in historical context, and not just in terms of chronology. Whereas *Satanstoe*’s battle against the Hurons is part of the French and Indian War, the final confrontation in *The Chainbearer* takes place *after* the end of the Revolution and between groups of Americans who, ironically, had both fought the British. Furthermore, the anticlimactic gunplay in *The Chainbearer* is the result *and* representation of the failure of intra-national dialogue and compromise, whereas the battle in *Satanstoe* is against a generic Other that, even as a paramilitary force, is already muted by virtue of their inscription within a thematizing totality of ethno-racial difference.

Thus, we behold a dialogic as well as ontological evolution regarding the Others in proceeding from *Satanstoe* to *The Chainbearer*. In the former, all the antagonistic and insubordinate Others are either racially or culturally categorized as Frenchmen, American Indians and Africans, none belonging to the Anglo-Dutch political community. The antagonists and insubordinates of the latter, however, are less distinct from the protagonists racially, culturally and politically, for the Littlepages *and* the Timbermans are Euro-American and Patriots: regional affinity, wealth and education are what separate them, in addition to their contrasting political and economic views. That said, the ethical *and* idiolectical gulfs between

the Others in *The Chainbearer*, in particular their understandings of interpersonal responsibility, have grown wider in anticipation of the Anti-Renter/landlord polemic to come in Cooper's trilogy's third and final novel.

Before discussing *The Redskins*, though, I call attention back to the three discourses on duty and history outlined in this chapter's introduction. Whereas *Satanstoe* evinces romantic nostalgia, Cooper's nationalist-progressive discourse in *The Chainbearer* does not match its predecessor's rhetorical or poetic strength: the evident amalgamation of the novels' climaxes suggests a repetitive or "cyclic" dimension to the narrative of 1784, just as *The Chainbearer*'s anticlimactic finale—some of Thousandacres' sons escape and formal justice for Andries' murder is never dispensed—highlights Cooper's ethical ambivalence. Put another way, the ethical "dialogue" that occurs between the contrasting histories of 1758 and 1784 manifests with irony that for Cooper, the U.S.'s sociopolitical and ethical fabric post-Independence does equal the "republican" standard set by its *colonial* precursor. Thus, as Cooper fast-forwards the trilogy to 1845 in *The Redskins*, to his contemporary audience's historical present, we can examine the culmination of Cooper's sociopolitical and ethical critique of antebellum American society. It features a rhetoric of ideological disillusion, cyclical-historical decline and national apocalypse which, at first glance, appears to have little of the polyphonic ambivalence prevalent in the first two Anti-Rent novels. Upon closer analysis, however, a more conflicted, and ironic, ethical narrative concerning interpersonal duty, sociopolitical allegiance and Otherness in the 1840's U.S. emerges in the concluding volume.

### III. *The Redskins*

The most didactic and the angriest of Cooper's Littlepage novels, *The Redskins* was, according to most critics, an aesthetic failure. But Jerome McGann takes a contrary view of this

novel, one that considers the context of the entire trilogy, though not in terms of aesthetic or poetic comparisons: “The Littlepage books are not a quest; they are a conscious project. If they fail (or disappoint), it is not for want of deliberation and purpose. In that respect, the problem of the trilogy may be less a problem of Cooper’s art and more a problem...of his audience’s desires and dreams for America and the representation of America” (149). With respect to *The Redskins* in particular, McGann concedes that “the book has scandalized the project as a whole,” yet adds: “It seems to me obvious and demonstrable, however, that *The Redskins* has been seriously misread” (150). I also posit that as an object of ethical analysis, the otherwise anticlimactic conclusion of Cooper’s trilogy is the most illuminating volume of the three.<sup>46</sup>

The sympathetic Other figures of Susquesus and Jaap in their own ways add *diachronic* as well as dialogic depth to the ethical exhortation on interpersonal duty that Cooper constructs throughout his trilogy, but only unveils fully in *The Redskins*’ melodramatic episodes. I argue that Susquesus, the “admitted” Other, and Jaap, the “third party” Other, form an unstable and peculiar amalgam in that both Others ironically totalize a second “third party” Other, the “leveling mob” of injin Anti-Renters. For Cooper, the injins personify the apocalyptic present, and future, which the U.S. faces in 1845, the nation having opted for the *The Chainbearer*’s problematic past of 1784 as opposed to *Satanstoe*’s idealized one of 1758. To understand this complicated dynamic at play in *The Redskins*, we must first grasp the essentials of the political discourse unfolding in the U.S. during the 1840’s. Ironically, the perspective of a *Southerner*,

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<sup>46</sup>According to Barnett, “[s]ince the novel is both a written form of discourse and an artwork, we conventionally assume that it is both a stable text and a finished product, revised and refined before publication to be a meaningful communication. The degree will vary not only among individual texts but among genres... When resolution and certainty are absent...the reader accustomed to traditional novels is apt to be uneasy, prey to a deep seated conviction that since the literary construct *can* provide order and significance to an extent that life cannot, it ought to do so” (10, 15). This supports McGann’s assertion that the Littlepage trilogy’s perceived aesthetic problems are more a byproduct of the readers’ unfulfilled expectations than a function of the texts’ poetic limitations. I extend this type of analysis to the thematic instabilities or incompatible ideological polyphonies prevalent or latent within the trilogy, particularly in *The Redskins*, viewed as the most flawed novel of the series.

John C. Calhoun, best illuminates Cooper's conflicted thinking in the third novel. Stranger still is the fact that the Anti-Rent ordeal pushed Cooper closer to a Whiggish ideology, an evolution in his sociopolitical and ethical thought unthinkable even in 1840.<sup>47</sup>

Calhoun began his *Disquisition on Government* (1850) at about the same time that Cooper was writing his Littlepage trilogy in answer to New York's Anti-Rent conflict. In articulating his vision for a democratic republic, Calhoun was responding to his experiences with the controversial Federal Tariff in South Carolina as well as to the oft-sectional tensions amongst pro-Bank Whigs, hard-money Democrats, radical abolitionists, Free Soilers, and pro-slavery advocates during the 1840's.<sup>48</sup> Cooper's Anti-Renters *and* the Littlepages appropriate the core elements of Calhoun's political argument in their respective rhetoric and oratory in *The Redskins*, though on paper neither group has much in common with Calhoun's Southern constituency. During an Anti-Rent meeting, a rabble-rousing lecturer, in attempting to win the Ravensnest tenants to the populist cause—and channeling Thousandacres' rhetoric from the previous novel—addresses the problem that Calhoun *and* Hugh raise regarding majoritarian tyranny:

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<sup>47</sup> With respect to the effect of the Anti-Rent episode on Cooper's sociopolitical thought, Schlessinger writes in *The Age of Jackson*: "Cooper's radicalism [of the election of 1844] was soon to disappear...As a champion of the land, Cooper had rejoiced at the Jacksonian attacks on business; but now demagogues were extending the attack, under the same rallying cries, to the land itself...From a minor fault of democracy the 'demagogue' [Anti-Renter] was becoming a major threat, and the vicious agitators of the antirent trilogy showed Cooper's abhorrence of the class...The antirent troubles did more than shake his belief in popular rule. They destroyed his Jeffersonian faith in the moral infallibility of life on the land...His old hatred of the commercial oligarchy had weakened, and he recognized it as the only bulwark of property" (379-80).

<sup>48</sup> One of the cornerstones of Calhoun's thought is his awareness of the governing challenges presented by the vast diversity of persons, cultures and interests in the U.S. (9, 13-14). This inflects his argument throughout the *Disquisition*, particularly his apprehensions over "numerical" majority rule in a popular democracy (23-24), and his insistence on a process of "nullification" to protect the rights of the minorities (28). Many of Calhoun's fears were born out within the Anti-Rent conflict, in that William H. Seward and his agents from Cooper's perspective reacted timidly to the legal transgressions of the radical Anti-Renters due to fear of electoral repercussions. Or, as Calhoun writes, "The right of suffrage, of itself, can do no more than give complete control to those who elect over the conduct of those they have elected" (12). Of concern here for Calhoun and for the conservative Democrat Cooper is that universal suffrage cannot be extended in governments "of the numerical majority without placing them under the control of the more ignorant and dependent portions of the community...as the poor and dependent [tenants] become more numerous in proportion, there will be in governments of the numerical majority no want of leaders among the wealthy and ambitious [Whigs] to excite and direct them in their efforts to obtain control" (36). Thousandacres implies this threat in *The Chainbearer*.

I think the majority ought to rule in all things, and that it is the duty of the minority to submit. Now, I've had this here sentiment thrown back upon me... and been asked, 'How is this—the majority must rule, and the minority must submit—in that case, the minority isn't as good as the majority in practice, and hasn't the same right. They are made to own what they think ought not be done? The answer to this is so plain, I wonder any sensible man can ask the questions, for all the minority has to do, is to join the majority, to have things as they want 'em. (189)

Though he does not use Calhoun's exact wording, the lecturer anticipates Calhoun's distinction of "numerical" and "concurrent" majorities, highlighting the principal objection to majority rule as well as proposing, in ham-handed fashion, Calhoun's solution: the rule of a "concurrent majority," comprised of the majority *and* minority (*Disquisition* 36-37). Though Cooper wishes to make the lecturer's reasoning appear foolish and contradictory—rhetorically associating him with Thousandacres—that he acknowledges minority concerns and the possibility of an inclusive polity as opposed one with a marginalized minority is significant, as is the fact that he is a Democrat and *not* a Whig.

Cooper ventriloquizes his own rhetoric through Tim Hall, a generic yeoman and also Democrat, to add proletarian "street credibility" to his—and Calhoun's—rebuttals to the lecturer's populist, anti-"aristocracy" rants, though the lucid precision of Hall's dialogue destroys the subterfuge; *Cooper* is doing the talking. Acknowledging the possibility that a voting minority could alter the Constitution to protect durable leases, Hall sermonizes that "the people, in the common meaning, are not as omnipotent as some suppose. There's something

stronger than the people, after all, and that's principles" (195). Hugh as conservative Democrat *and* narrator then responds to the lecturer following Hall's erudite discourse:

The idea that the people are not omnipotent, was one little likely to find favor among any portion of the population that fancy themselves to be peculiarly the people. So much accustomed to consider themselves invested with the exercise of a power which, in any case, can be rightfully exercised by only the whole people [concurrent majority], have local assemblages got to be, that they often run into illegal excesses, fancying even their little fragment of the body politic infallible, as well as omnipotent, in such matters at least. To have it openly denied, therefore, that the popular fabric of American institutions is so put together, as to leave it in the power of a decided minority to change the organic law, as is unquestionably the fact in theory, however little likely to occur in practice, sounded in the ears of Mr. Hall's auditors like political blasphemy. (195)

Hugh's telling of the Anti-Rent meeting suggests the Littlepages identify with Calhoun's fears of tyranny and oppression in a republic where law and government are created and enforced by a popular or "numerical" majority comprised of citizens from society's lower strata. That said, the Anti-Renters could refer to Calhoun's understanding of negative power in a polity, where an oppressed faction can exercise a localized veto—nullification—or appeal to the "spirit of the institutions" to justify a "legal" refusal to honor their lease agreements.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> For Calhoun, a veto or "nullification" is employed for the good of the entire polity, *not* just in service of the narrow interests of a particular faction: compromise is the ideal. Thus, he explains that "in governments of the concurrent majority individual feelings are, from its organism, necessarily enlisted on the side of the social, and made to unite with them in promoting the interests of the whole as the best way of promoting the interests of each, while in those of the numerical majority the social are necessarily enlisted on the side of the individual and made to contribute to the interest of parties regardless of that of the whole" (54). The motive behind compromise, according to Calhoun, reveals the party's ethical disposition: "In the one, it is done with that reluctance and hostility ever incident to enforced submission to what is regarded as injustice and oppression, accompanied by the desire and purpose to seize on the first favorable opportunity for resistance; but in the other, willingly and cheerfully, under the

From a Levinasian perspective, Cooper's rhetoric in *The Redskins* as well as Calhoun's political philosophy create a competitive dynamic respecting ethical obligation wherein a polity's different factions attempt to claim the status of oppressed Other to whom the whole community "ought" to respond, but who nevertheless remain marginalized. Calhoun's minority and Cooper's genteel Littlepages both fear the tyranny of a proletarian numerical majority, who will abuse the electoral process to skirt principle, create unjust laws and intimidate elected officials at the expense of the vulnerable minority. The narrator reflects on the ideal, "republican" ethic of governing "principle":

As yet, the experience of two centuries has offered nothing so menacing to the future prosperity of this country, as the social fermentation which is at this moment at work, in the State of New York. On the result of this depends the solution of the all-important question, whether *principles* are to rule this republic, or men; and these last, too, viewed in their most vulgar and repulsive qualities, or as the mere creatures of self, instead of being the guardians and agents of that which ought to be. (213, *emphasis mine*)

However, Cooper's Anti-Renters, in claiming that New York's patroons are a "feudal aristocracy" in owning large estates first granted by the British king, view the Hudson Valley oligarchy of land barons as existing in a state within a state. They perceive that here tenants are subject to an arbitrary and oppressive authority protected by antiquated durable leases and royal land grants anachronistically honored by the federal and state governments, as the Anti-Rent lecturer claims (186-88). Thus, the Anti-Renters view themselves with irony as marginalized

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impulse of an exalted patriotism, impelling all to acquiesce in whatever the common good requires" (54). I posit that the Anti-Renters and the Littlepages *both* fail on this count, neither responding for the greater good of the Other.

Others living in a republic shaped by democratic and egalitarian ideals.<sup>50</sup> The real battle in *The Redskins* is not over land, but about both groups' opposing understandings of law and ethical governing principle as protectors of their rights, as well as each "faction's" capacity to implement and enforce its own interpretation.

Presiding over this contest over rights and legalities are, ironically, *bona fide* non-citizen Others who have the least legal status or recourse to justice of anyone in the U.S.: Susquesus, Jaap—the "third party" Other—and the delegation of Indian chiefs returning from the Capitol. As Ringe maintains, throughout the narrative and at its conclusion in particular, Susquesus, Jaap and the chiefs add moral *gravitas* to Cooper's anti-Anti-Renter rhetoric ("Cooper's Littlepage Novels" 282), not just as "colorful" racial Others but as chronological Others as well. As the last surviving links to the events of *Satanstoe*, Jaap and Susquesus memorialize via the dramatic monologues and dialogues Cooper assigns them a fading ethos of duty in 1845, serving in tandem as a living rebuke or "conscience" ("Cooper's Littlepage Novels" 282) to a generation of Euro-Americans and their descendants who chose Thousandacres' degenerate, populist ethos of 1784 over the genteel "republican" ideal of 1758.<sup>51</sup> Susquesus and Jaap in the final episode have

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<sup>50</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville notes in *Democracy in America* that where the phenomenon of social "leveling" is pronounced, the popular fixation with equality trumps the concern for freedom (583-84). For Cooper, this view is consistent with his assessment of the Anti-Renters or Yankees—personified by Thousandacres and Jason Newcome—who will deprive others of liberty and wield autocratic authority when it serves their interests.

<sup>51</sup> De Tocqueville writes concerning the effects of popular democracy and egalitarianism on society that just as class distinctions are effaced, so too is a diachronic sense of the past and future replaced by a focus on present needs, particularly in terms posterity's duties as well as a person's, family's or community's responsibilities respecting antecedents or descendants (588). Cooper's sense of chronology/diachronicity, his preoccupation with the past and the notion of legacy, inflects his dialogic rhetoric on ethical duty and Otherness in the Littlepage trilogy. I also note that his sense that Americans opted for the "wrong" history is driven home by the rhetorical amalgamation of the Anti-Rent lecturer's speech with Thousandacres' squatter's discourse: "I respect and revere pre-emption rights; for they fortify and sustain the right to the elements. Now, I do not condemn squattin' as some does. It's actin' accordin' to natur', and natur' is right. I respect and venerate the squatter's possession; for it's held under the sacred principle of usefulness. It says, 'Go and make the wilderness blossom as the rose,' and means 'progress'" (188). Whereas Cooper represents Thousandacres' as bested by Andries during their epic debates in *The Chainbearer*, the sad irony for the Littlepages—and Cooper—is that Thousandacres' argument appears to have prevailed in 1845.



an air of dignity and magnanimity in their idiolectal monologues before the Anti-Renter mob that the effete Hugh cannot match. Jaap harangues the masked crowd thus:

What all them fellow want, bundle up in calico, like so many squaw? ... Home wid ye!—get out! Oh! I do grow so ole!—I wish I was was I wasn when young for your sake, you varmint! What you want wid Masser Hugh’s land?—why dat you t’ink to get gentle’em’s property, eh? Member e’ time when your fadder come creepin’ and beggin’ to Masser [Mordaunt], to ask just a little farm to lib on, and be he tenant, and try to do a little for the family, like; and now come, in calico bundle, to tell my Masser Hugh da he shan’t be masser of he own land. Who you, I want to know, to come and talk to gentle’em in dis poor fashion? Go home—get off—off wid you, or you hear what you don’t like. (345)

Hugh-as-narrator comments that “while there was a good deal of ‘nigger’ in this argument, it was quite as good as that which was sometimes advanced in support of the ‘spirit of the institutions’ more especially that part of the latter which is connected with ‘aristocracy’ and ‘poodle [feudal] usages’ ... I have recorded the negro’s speech, simply to show some...that there are two sides to the question; and, in the way of argument, I do not see but one is quite as good as the other” (345). Distinct from Cooper’s erudite ventriloquizing of the proletarian Democrat Hall at the Anti-Rent assembly, Cooper here employs Jaap’s slave-idiolect as a humble, non-“aristocratic” voice in order to shame the plebian Anti-Renters. Yet the narrator’s commentary is ambiguous: is he saying that Jaap’s argument, which adheres to the Littlepage’s—Cooper’s—position, is just as flawed, or just as valid as the Anti-Renters’? Either way, Jaap’s speech injects ambivalence into Cooper’s hierarchical rhetoric in that he follows Hugh’s, a sequential circumstance which, in the public oratory tradition, invests *Jaap*’s, an Other’s, with more status than his “master’s.”

Furthermore, Jaap's speech in defense of his young "masser" assumes a paternalistic authority, not just due to his extreme old age, but also due to his direct connection to the Littlepages' history on the land, which in the centenarian's brain has become confused, amalgamated with the family's present (101). Noteworthy too is the fact that Jaap, a long time slave who repudiates his and his family's legal emancipation, lectures the ingrate Anti-Renters on *their* legal duty as tenants to the generous Littlepages, who have leased them land on liberal terms. Once again, though, the dialogic polyphony of this exchange betrays ambivalence: does Jaap's shaming rebuke of the masked injins dismantle their claim to being oppressed Others within an anachronistic "feudal" system, or does the contrast drawn between Jaap's understanding and Anti-Renters' pertain to moral/ethical conduct only? Or, as a third possibility, does Jaap address the injins as an ungrateful mob of fellow "serfs" who, unlike the ancient, magnanimous house slave, have forgotten their proper place on the estate under the benign protection of "gentle'em"? Ironical is the fact that Jaap particularizes his remarks, addressing an individual "injin"—Seneca Newcome, Jason's son—thereby refusing to treat the Anti-Renters, despite their genericizing calico masks, as a faceless totality as the narrator's language does, just as the Anti-Renters would literally tar all of the Littlepages as "aristocrats."<sup>52</sup> Thus, even though Cooper's conscious views are clear, the novel's rhetorical picture is quite ambivalent.

I contend that the moral high ground regarding interpersonal duty that Jaap and Susquesus occupy, in particular during the concluding dialogues, does not just shame the Anti-Renters as per Cooper's overt intention, but ironically marginalizes as Other both the Littlepages *and* the injins. This reading is reinforced by the fact that Hugh and Uncle Ro as well as the Anti-

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<sup>52</sup> The name "Littlepage" itself is ambivalent in its etymology, in that "page" in English denotes a youth aspiring to knighthood, a lower order of nobility, though the qualitative modifier "little" makes it too diminutive to have any noble significance, aside from signifying that the Littlepages are "*genteel*-men," even if not linked to English nobility, as is Bulstrode, Corny's bested rival, in *Satanstoe*.

Renter tenants for much of the novel are disguised as disempowered ethno-racial Others. Even after they shed their German peddler disguises, though, it is evident that the ancient “Upright Onondago,” buttressed by the centenarian Jaap, remains the narrative’s center of moral gravity as well the focus of the trilogy’s concluding melodrama, a centrality Susquesus does *not* hold in the first two novels. Thus, it is no coincidence that the sublime secret behind Susquesus’ near-century of self-imposed exile, his magnanimous refusal to take his beloved as wife because she was, by Onondago law, betrothed to another, is revealed at the moment of Cooper’s ultimate rhetorical condemnation of the injins, featuring Susquesus’ dramatic farewell discourse:

These men are not warriors...They hide their faces and they carry rifles, but they frighten none but the squaws and papposes.<sup>53</sup> When they take a scalp, it is because they are a hundred, and their enemies one. They are not braves...They want the land of this young chief [Hugh]. My children, all the land, far and near, was ours. The pale faces came with their papers, and made laws, and said ‘It is well! We want this land. There is plenty farther west for you redmen’...They made laws, and sold the land, as the redmen sell the skins of beavers. When the money was paid, each pale-face got a deed, and thought he owned all that he had paid for. But the wicked spirit that drove out the redman is now about to drive off the pale-face chiefs... He wanted land then, and he wants land now...When the pale-face drove off the redman there was no treaty between them...When the pale-face drives off the pale-face, there is a treaty...This is the difference. Indian

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<sup>53</sup> Jaap makes a similar remark in his discourse. It is curious in light of these rebukes that in addition to “squaws and papposes [small children],” the fictional Littlepages and the actual Cooper appear to be frightened by the Anti-Renter injins, whereas Jaap, Susquesus and the chiefs are not. This circumstance ironically highlights just how thin the “daring” Littlepage bloodline has run since 1758.

will keep his word with Indian; pale-face will not keep his word with pale-face.

(349-50)

Whereas Susquesus condemns the shameful, cowardly conduct of the injins, taking care to emphasize that they are not real “braves,” his oratory and Eagleflight’s also highlight the moral, and legal, dubiousness regarding how the Littlepages and other patroons acquired their lands.

As it is recounted in *Satanstoe*, the Littlepages and Mordaunts cheated the Onondagos out of their land for a few casks of cheap liquor and a handful of muskets. Ironically, then, Susquesus’ speech augments the Anti-Rent lecturer’s argument in delegitimizing the original patroon claims. The lecturer argues, albeit in error according to both federal and New York state law at the time, that the king’s patent grants were made null and void by the Revolution, whereas Susquesus questions the moral basis of the original land acquisition itself. If read in this way, Susquesus’ concluding oratory, together with Jaap’s, destabilizes Cooper’s implicit championing of the ethical duty owed to posterity, the bearers of the genteel ethos of 1758. Though the romanticizing of entrepreneurial, risk-taking Anglo-Dutch gentlemen forms the foundation of the ensuing generations’ legal *and* moral claims to the land, the flagrant injustice, even fraudulence, behind this original “claim” puts everything that follows in doubt. In the last analysis, Jaap and Susquesus, the trilogy’s near-amalgamated ethno-racial Others who have, as the narrator notes, even assumed the same greyish skin tone in their extreme old age and long domestic proximity (97), indict their white Littlepage patrons just as they condemn the injins’ greed and cowardice. Jaap is caricatured and parodied yet also honored as a loyal “former” slave who refuses legal emancipation and whose senility has forced him to live his life in the idealized past of the mid-1700’s, whereas the more lucid Susquesus ironically interrogates that very history of martial duty, comradeship and “being-for-the-Other” which Cooper intends him to memorialize.

Beyond Susquesus' and Jaap's references to the "shame" and cowardice that the calico masks of the injins represent, the *Leitmotif* of disguise also plays a role here. We recall that in *The Chainbearer* Mordy conceals his identity from Thousandacres, who takes him prisoner upon the disclosure of his real name and purpose. In *The Redskins*, Hugh and Uncle Ro are disguised as poor German merchants and showmen: a foil to the disguised injin Anti-Renters, who also conceal their true identities as a self-protective measure. The nature of their disguises is also significant. Hugh and Ro disguise themselves not only as foreigners, but as destitute, though as Hugh defines these roles, their "characters" are those of educated gentlemen fallen on hard times, and therefore not the complete social Others of the relations they deceive. The injins, on the other hand, are a composite caricature, racially offensive even by the standards of the 1840's. The more important contrast is the fact that their ruse is not credible: no one believes that the feathered, pidgin-uttering injins are real American Indians, nor is such their intention. Rather, the calico-mask injin disguise is only meant to hide the particular identities of the Anti-Renters to protect them from prosecution—their corporate identity in New York State by 1845 is already well established.

I maintain, though, that the notion of disguise in *The Redskins* is more than a signal preoccupation with racial difference or a conventional narrative mechanism. Though Cooper endeavors to contrast the Yankee Anti-Renters and the Anglo-Dutch patroons, the phenomenon of hidden identity evidences rhetorical ambivalence within the text. As I argue, conflicting impulses regarding an ethos of responsibility for the individualized Other in the antebellum U.S. emerge and destabilize Cooper's moral didacticism throughout the trilogy. Furthermore, as Calhoun's writing makes clear, a Northerner like Cooper could share sociopolitical terrain with a pro-slavery, anti-Tariff, states' rights Southerner while backing away from the residue of

Andrew Jackson's "demagogic" Democracy and backing *into* elements of the Whig platform (Schlesinger 379-80), though all three figures were Democrats. That said Cooper's fixation with disguise in the third novel introduces another example of Whiggish cross-pollination within his sociopolitical and ethical thought, reflective of similar anxieties and blurred lines within antebellum New York and elsewhere.<sup>54</sup>

Again, the oratories of the Anti-Renter meeting prove iconic. Framing this episode is the fact that the injins, who are functioning as paramilitary security force for the assembly, as well as Hugh and Ro enter the meeting in their disguises. As the polyphonic political discourse to follow makes clear, however, disguise is a metaphor for the reality that even within the inflammatory, polarizing context of the Anti-Rent controversy political allegiances are not always what they appear to be. The Anti-Rent lecturer remarks:

Fellow-citizens, I profess to be what is called a democrat. I know that many of you be what is called whigs; but I apprehend there isn't much difference between us on the subject of this system of leasing land. We are all republicans, and leasing farms is anti-republican. Then, I wish to be liberal even to them I

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<sup>54</sup> In *The Political Culture of the American Whigs*, Daniel Walker Howe describes "Whiggery" as a current of American thought in the mid 1800's that championed entrepreneurship, large businesses, and progressive economic development. It was also an "absolutist"—and often evangelical flavored—moral philosophy based on Scottish Common Sense and self-discipline, government regulation, and a social conservatism characterized by an ordering, social hierarchy led by educated statesmen (23-42). In particular, Howe notes that "American Whigs typically assumed moral responsibility for others" (34), as well as emphasizing morality and duty over "Jacksonian rhetoric" on equality and individualism (21-22). Walker explains that "the Whigs were usually concerned with muting social conflict. In their determined assertion of the interdependence of different classes, regions, and interest groups [e. g. 'differentiated Others'], one recognizes the same analogy between the individual and society that also characterized the other two main principles of Whig social thought [directing the improving 'forces of change' and 'corporate' morality]" (21). Like Cooper, Whigs tended to support the cause of the American Indian, though they were divided on the issue of slavery (28-29). Finally, while progressive in their understanding of history, the Whigs, as with Cooper in the Littlepage trilogy, looked back to *colonial* times for examples for the U.S. future (71), while also maintaining "the right and duty of one generation to bind another... Whigs sought to imbue Americans with a proper sense of responsibility, both toward previous generations, whose sacrifices [Cooper's Littlepages and Mordaunts] had made freedom possible, and toward subsequent generations, who depended on present exertions" (72). Along with Cooper, the Whigs were responding to de Tocqueville's critique of American democracy in the sense that democracy tends to foster historical amnesia and a sense of individualism and personal disconnection from posterity and even one's immediate fellows.

commonly oppose at elections ... on the whull, the whigs have rather outdone us democrats on the subject of this anti-rentism. I am sorry to be obliged to own in it, but it must be confessed that, while in the way of governors there hasn't been much difference—yes, put 'em in a bag, and shake 'em up, and you'd hardly know which would come out first—which has done himself the most immortal honor, which has shown himself the most comprehensive, profound, and safe statesman... Let but the people truly rule, and all must come out well. (188-89).

Some of this is tongue in cheek on Cooper's part, for in addition to the "governors," the Anti-Renter injins had, literally, already placed themselves in calico "bags," regardless of their party affiliations. More significant is the fact that Cooper denigrates his own Democratic party, or at least a portion of it, in associating it with Whigs, whom he detested (Schlesinger 379). Yet beyond the question of party alliance here is the perversion of republicanism, which the lecturer links with the principle of majority rule and, as his myopic discourse continues, with his own construction of political equality: "Equality is my axiom. Nor, by equality, do I mean your narrow, pitiful equality before the law, as is sometimes tanned [by Cooper *and* Calhoun], for that may be no equality at all; but, I mean equality that is substantial, and which must be restored, when the working of the law has deranged it [according to Skidmore and even Jackson]" (189). From this rationale follows the lecturer's insistence that in order to achieve socioeconomic "equality" which the "law" failed to establish, "we must, from time to time, divide up the land" (189).

Though Hall, the noble proletarian Democrat and Cooper's mouthpiece, rebuts these assertions, the confusion of political allegiances persists, as does Cooper's ambivalence, for just as the disguises suggest within the novel, for actual New York Democrats of the 1840's it was

becoming difficult to distinguish friend from adversary.<sup>55</sup> That said, I suggest that the narrative deployment of hidden identities within the novel mirrors the ambiguous political, socioeconomic and ethical commitments of the historical players during New York's Anti-Rent crisis of the 1830's and '40's, such as Governor William H. Seward.<sup>56</sup> At least on paper, the majority of the Yankee Anti-Rent proponents were Whigs (Schlesinger 379), whereas the Anglo-Dutch patroons, the social class and ethno-cultural faction that Cooper champions, were mostly conservative Democrats (*Political Culture* 17, 35). In terms of social ethos, historical understanding and politics, though, as Schlesinger and I suggest, by the mid-1840's, Cooper was ironically drifting towards Whiggery. This is also ironic on a chronological plane in that by this time, the Whigs—as a viable political party as opposed to a loose confederation of related ideas—were declining, to be superseded by the modern Republican Party in the 1850's, their political successor. At the same time, though, within the Anti-Renters' "demagogic" rhetoric on democracy and popular rule—as Cooper pejoratively presents it—we detect the strains of Jacksonian Democratic thought as well.

An ethico-formalist reading of *The Redskins*—and hence the entire trilogy—is at its best when we consider the historical tensions it manifests between Jacksonian Democracy, Calhoun's alternative to Jackson, and Whiggery. In terms of the Bakhtinian formalist and the Levinasian ethical contours that I trace, these political tensions present within Cooper's polyphonic

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<sup>55</sup> I consider Calhoun's position on the Tariff here: despite the areas of ideological commonality the later Cooper and Calhoun appear to share, the Anti-Rent Rebellion could be viewed, by a Jacksonian, as a microcosm of the Nullification Crisis in South Carolina.

<sup>56</sup> According to Howe, "the Anti-Rent War...caught Seward between his obligation to uphold the law, on the one hand, and, on the other, the just cause and political strength of the protesters (most of them Whig voters). The governor made it clear that his sympathies were with the tenants and succeeded in calming them while calling on the legislature to abolish the archaic system of land tenure that had caused the problem. The persistence of the relics of feudalism was hardly in keeping with Seward's ambitions for his state" (200). While Cooper too advocates law and order throughout *The Redskins*, in the "Preface" he characterizes the New York state legislature's measures to force the break-up of the vast patroon estates through excessive taxation as "far more tyrannical than the attempt of Great Britain to tax her colonies, which brought about the revolution" (4).



dialogues and narrative structures, considering the socioeconomic and ethical ballast they hold, have everything to do with how the antebellum U.S. was trying to come to terms with the competing ethical concepts of individualized Otherness, categorizing social hierarchy and citizens' interpersonal responsibility. This was complicated by the reality that the republic in the 1840's was drifting toward sectional political fragmentation, to the growing alarm of Americans in the North *and* South, east and west. Also embedded within these political anxieties was the problem of how antebellum Americans were attempting to develop a distinct, diachronic sense of their own historicity within public and literary discourses, a national self-imagining that, as Cooper's Littlepage novels show, often resisted unity in thought *and* voice.

Just as *The Redskins* anticipates much of Calhoun's political philosophy in *Disquisition* in addition to giving evidence of Cooper's political and ethical shift towards Whiggery, likewise I argue that it responds to Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, considering Cooper's sensitivity to continental opinion on American culture, politics and letters since his formative travels in the 1830's. Amongst many areas of congruence, de Tocqueville's views on the effects, and the social impetus, of universal equality in a democracy are echoed pessimistically in Calhoun's *and* Cooper's rhetoric. Similar to Calhoun's remarks in *Disquisition*,<sup>57</sup> Cooper criticizes the Anti-Renters for their views on universal equality, asserting in the "Preface" that

[i]n point of fact, the relation of landlord and tenant is one entirely natural and salutary, in a wealthy community, and one that is so much in accordance with the

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<sup>57</sup> Calhoun writes: "it is a great and dangerous error to suppose that all people are equally entitled to liberty. It is a reward to be earned, not a blessing to be gratuitously lavished on all alike—a reward reserved for the intelligent, the patriotic, the virtuous and deserving, and not a boon to be bestowed on a people too ignorant, degraded and vicious to be capable either of appreciating or of enjoying it... These dangerous errors have their origin in the prevalent opinion that all men are born free and equal—than which nothing can be more unfounded and false... As, then, there never was such a state as the so-called state of nature, and never can be, it follows that men, instead of being born in it, are born in the social and political state; and of course, instead of being born free and equal, are born subject, not only to parental authority, but to the laws and institutions of the country where born and under whose protection they draw their first breath" (42, 45).

necessities of men, that no legislation can long prevent it...The notion that every husbandman is to be a freeholder, is as Utopian in practice as it would be to expect that all men were to be on the same level in fortune, condition, education, and habits. As such a state of things as the last never yet did exist, it was probably never designed by divine wisdom that it should exist. (6)

De Tocqueville articulates much of what both Calhoun and Cooper fear respecting the detrimental effects of a “leveling” democracy. In particular, he treats the sense of ethical obligation—or lack thereof—the subject holds for a distinct Other in democratic society, as opposed to in an “aristocratic” society, though de Tocqueville is *not* advocating for a reinvigoration of aristocracy, but only pointing out democracy’s weaknesses. He writes:

Individualism is democratic in origin and threatens to grow as conditions become equal...aristocratic institutions achieve the effect of binding each man closely to several of his fellow citizens...As each class closes up to the others and merges with them, its members become indifferent to each other and treat each other as strangers. Aristocracy had created a long chain of citizens from the peasant to the king; democracy breaks down this chain and separates all the links... As social equality spreads, a greater number of individuals are no longer rich or powerful enough to exercise great influence upon the fate of their fellows... Such a people owe nothing to anyone and, as it were, expect nothing from anyone. They are used to considering themselves in isolation and quite willingly imagine their destiny as entirely in their own hands. (588-89)

To examine all three through a Levinasian lens, the key point to note is that totalizing class “leveling” threatens more than just the interests of the upper echelons, but destroys a polity’s

capacity to foster a virtuous citizenry with a greater sense of interpersonal, ethical obligation for differentiated, particularized Others. Hence, the ironic lesson that Jaap and Susquesus offer is the circumstance that the “admitted” Other and the more-marginalized “third party” Other who occupy the lowest rungs of the social ladder that Cooper, Calhoun and de Tocqueville champion cultivate an ethos of duty for history *and* their distinct Others, their Anglo-Dutch overlords, that has escaped the Yankee Anti-Renters and the sermonizing narrator alike.

John P. McWilliams, reflecting on the diachronic significance of the Littlepage trilogy as a whole, offers that

*The Redskins* was clearly the book for which the Littlepage trilogy was written.

The gradual emergence of social lawlessness and the eclipse of the gentry were to end in violent, domestic conflict. In *Satanstoe* [1758] the blood shed to establish Ravensnest had seemed to Corny to be a necessary sacrifice for a community that was to evolve settled, gracious forms of living. By 1784, however, jealous, alegal settlers had already darkened Corny’s expectations. (325)

As I have argued, Cooper’s tone in *The Redskins* is not just didactic, but apocalyptic:

McWilliams focuses in particular on the themes of post-Revolution proletarian violence and lawlessness that emerge in *The Chainbearer*’s 1784 and reach their “dark” fulfillment in the *The Redskins*’ 1845. I add, though, that Cooper’s “eschatology” here is not just about violent class conflict or lawlessness. Cooper’s contrast of the ancient yet humble Jaap with the proudly indolent Susquesus in *The Redskins* illuminates best what I am driving at: “Accustomed to labor from childhood, he could not be kept from work, even by his extreme old age. He had the hoe, or the axe, or the spade in his hand daily, many years after he could either to any material advantage. The little he did in this way, now, was not done to kill thought, for he never had any

to kill; it was purely the effect of habit, and of a craving desire to be Jaaf still, and to act his life over again” (322).<sup>58</sup> Jaap’s refusal of emancipation has as much to do with the sentiment Cooper describes as his fear of “disgrace and poverty” were he to embrace freedom and leave the rigid social hierarchy to which he had become accustomed (323). What these passages suggest, however, is that Jaap, the “third party” Other, now oblivious to the boundaries between past and present due to his increasing senility, nevertheless opts for a recurring history of servile duties towards his masters, uncomplicated by a shifting sociopolitical and ethical climate and the uncertain and foreboding future to which the Anti-Rent turmoil pointed. By contrast, the more alert Susquesus chooses stoic resignation to history’s “progressive” march, whereas the Littlepages pursue a course of despair, disengagement and flight rather than reimagine an ethical paradigm of duty toward malignant social and cultural Others grown too powerful to control. Even as a “former” slave, Jaap’s salvation is that he can imagine and will a return to the dutiful ideal of 1758, where he both fought and, ironically, exceeded the mandates of his social station. As for Susquesus, he accepts that the past is gone, and that doom will follow the Euro-Americans just as history has annihilated the American Indians. But the most acute anguish of all for the Littlepages—and Cooper—is the realization that their ideal, “admitted” past of 1758, constructed on a fraud, is no better than the post-Revolution degeneracy of greedy squatters, ambitious entrepreneurs and “leveling” proto-Whigs like Thousandacres and Jason Newcome of 1784.

The rhetorical instability and ambivalence referenced in my discussion of Cooper are not limited to that which we encounter in the Littlepage texts, or across the diachronic spectrum of his work; they also reference the critical conversation surrounding these novels, which displays a remarkable instability of ideas regarding Cooper’s ethics and ideology. Whereas Marius Bewley

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<sup>58</sup> The wording of this passage is uncannily similar to that of Nietzsche’s description of eternally-recurring will to power in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (249-254). The fact that a *slave* functions as the exemplar for this line of thought in *Cooper* is ironic on several levels.

claims that Cooper's rhetoric in the Littlepage trilogy betrays an anti-Whig conservatism bent on preserving a strong social hierarchy within the republic, Donald Ringe takes the opposite view, asserting that the Littlepage narrator-protagonists and their didacticism become progressively more "democratic" in a liberal, egalitarian sense throughout the novels. A generation later, Steven Watts finds a middle ground between the two. Though I align more with Bewley's historicist conclusions, such disparate critical interpretations are significant, for in evidencing the polyphonic presence of contrasting discourses embedded in the trilogy's dialogues they suggest that Cooper had more than an unconscious ambivalence. They show a nuanced rhetorical attempt to engage political, social and ethical conflicts through the supposedly monolithic heuristic of conservative Northern republicanism in the 1840's. That Ringe and Bewley read these texts with varying optics betrays more the latent discursive tension within Cooper's work than the analysts' ideological biases.

The thing to keep in mind with Cooper's later fiction is that unlike the incendiary unnerving issue of slavery that haunts Cooper's fiction in the 1820's, by the 1840's the problem of Otherness in Cooper has shifted and expanded. Christopherson frames *The Last of the Mohicans*, *The Pioneers* and *The Prairie* within the debate over the Missouri Crisis, positing that "dark clouds" of hostile American Indian Others conjure Southern fears of slave insurrection and Northern concerns about racial conflict. I argue, however, that by the 1840's, in the wake of Andrew Jackson's championing the "common man" and majority rule, increasing industrialization, urbanization and immigration and the rejection, as Cooper saw it, of an ordering, hierarchical republicanism threatened his idealized agrarian and patriarchal model of interpersonal ethical relations in thus U.S. True, the prospects of disunion, rebellion and civil war weighed on the American collective consciousness in the 1820's. By the 1840's, though, the

more disturbing questions for social and political conservatives like Cooper and John C. Calhoun, Northerners *and* Southerners concerned what would follow these events.

For Cooper, gentlemen citizens had a responsibility to shepherd the crude masses including radical Others just as constables, the judiciary and the government had the moral obligation to uphold laws and protect citizens' rights while *all* were to be loyal to the State. That said, how would this sense of duty be affected by extreme, violent, self-determining Others now legitimized by a "Spirit of the Institutions" which heretofore had guarded an American republicanism that connected polity with caste stratification? Might not a post-1848, post-Abolition United States risk substituting a worse form of totalization for the previous? Would the Good of the differentiated Other, now including free African Americans, working class Jacksonians and American Indians, be served in a radical, reorganized republic? Could this majoritarian paradigm spawn new classes of oppressed Others subject to the unconstrained currents of profit-driven, populist politics? How would an ethos of interpersonal duty survive in this version of America?

As I shift my discussion to Herman Melville's *Israel Potter* and "Benito Cereno," these questions remain in play. However, Melville casts the issues of interpersonal ethics, social order, polity and Otherness in a different hue. As I argue, by the 1850's, issues of sociopolitical stability in the U.S. had expanded beyond Cooper's "Littlepage" conversations on the roles of gentility, peasantry and indigenous persons in a democratic republic. Thus, what emerges through the polyphonic dialogues of Melville's texts is an ambivalent, ironic discourse on the two primary competing visions of American polity, economy and social organization: Northern industrialism and Southern agrarianism. As we will see, the issues reflected in Melville concern the ways in which the different models of economy and labor in the North and South create *two*

contrasting classes of totalized Other, the Northern industrial worker versus the African slave in the South. Melville also suggests a further anxiety: ethno-racial, social and functional hybridity threatened the socioeconomic stability of both regions, in addition to confusing the larger ethical sense of responsibility for the oppressed, particularized and laboring Other.

## CHAPTER 2:

### The Ethics of Confinement: Race, Class and Labor in Herman Melville's *Israel Potter* and "Benito Cereno"

Charles N. Watson argues that Herman Melville likely read Edgar Allan Poe's *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838) because "Israel's three-day entombment in Squire Woodcock's mansion [in *Israel Potter*]...bears a close resemblance to Pym's initial adventure on the *Grampus*," where Pym is confined "in a coffinlike box in the hold to prevent his being detected" (105). However, Watson also points out the contrast between the two authors: "Though both writers were concerned with the nightmarish emotions inspired by the sensation of entombment, Poe took Pym through a series of ingenious attempts at escape, in each of which Pym's rationality was put to the test and defeated. These contrivances were apparently of no interest to Melville, who seems to have...reshaped the source to his own ends" (107). But if Poe's deeper, philosophical aim in representing scenes of premature burial is to argue that "ingenious rationality" cannot provide the subject an "escape" from the existential confines of fate or the fallen human condition, what are *Melville's* "ends" in depicting "entombment"? What is his greater interest in the motif of *confinement*? This is the central ethical question that I address in this chapter: I argue that in Melville's *Israel Potter: His Fifty Years of Exile* (1854-55) and "Benito Cereno" (1855) the polyphonic-dialogic representation of physical and psychological confinement gestures towards an ambivalent ethical preoccupation regarding the totalization and implementation of urban workers and African American slaves as objectified Others in the United States of the 1850's.



That said, the notion of premature burial or “confinement” in an antebellum context was never just a titillating narrative device in Poe and Melville, and on the metaphoric-historical plane it signified more than adolescent America’s spatial claustrophobia in general: it was emblematic of many issues confronting the growing New World republic. Following the War of 1812, succeeding presidential administrations looked inward as well as entertaining expansionist designs, forced to grapple with inadequate infrastructures in the U.S.’s hinterland as the population and the economy mushroomed. Modern roads, canals and railways would be needed, especially in the manufacturing North, to accommodate unprecedented growth and urbanization as America’s Industrial Revolution took hold following Jackson’s victory in New Orleans.

Despite vast quantities of land, natural resources and a vigorous populace, the U.S.’s lack of financial and transportation development confined the republic’s empire-sized ambitions during the early and mid-1800’s.<sup>1</sup> Within growing metropolises, an emerging class of urban poor, many recent immigrants<sup>2</sup> and free blacks, reflected the poverty of American workers and their families who were being asphyxiated within squalid living and working conditions that totalized and entombed them in large manufacturing neighborhoods.<sup>3</sup> The agrarian South, the

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<sup>1</sup> In *Waking Giant: America in the Age of Jackson*, David S. Reynolds notes, “Madison and his successor, James Monroe, praised such projects [internal transportation improvements of Henry Clay’s American System], which they saw as crucial to national growth and unity... Transportation changes fed the movement toward a capitalist economy, which gained momentum in the opening decades of the nineteenth century. The subsistence economy of the past...shifted toward a market economy, in which goods were produced, sold, and bought outside the home. Economic development and westward migration were closely linked to transportation of goods and people” (11-12). I submit that a manufacturing economy in turn spurred improvements in the U.S.’s transportation infrastructure.

<sup>2</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson notes this phenomenon with ambivalence in “Wealth,” the influx being the result of America’s economic rise (711).

<sup>3</sup> Gavin Jones argues in “Poverty and the Limits of Literary Criticism” that poverty is “a term that has registered constructions of inferior otherness... A number of recent scholars have suggested that the racial explanations and representations of social difference that are so prevalent in the US have traditionally stood in for the nation’s ‘extremely impoverished political language of class’ (Wray and Newitz 8). But the antebellum era saw the establishment of a complex, conspicuous discourse on poverty that comprehended economic inequality in ways largely independent of race and slavery (issues that admittedly outweighed poverty as a national concern)” (771), later adding, “a focus [in literature and literary criticism] on race has acted to divide and pacify the working class, thus delegitimizing poverty as a political question ... poverty is clearly connected to the cultural questions of power, difference, and signifying practice that animate any discussion of social marginalization in its most basic and universal sense” (777-78). As I argue, the figure of the poor urban worker in the antebellum North emerges as a

supposed test case for Jefferson's idyllic vision of the republic,<sup>4</sup> offered no better alternative for an underclass of poor whites and African Americans, as the explosion of cotton planting on an "industrial" scale created an insatiable thirst for laborers, cheap freemen *and* slaves, to meet the enormous demands of Northern and European textile mills (Reynolds 32, 62). Powerful political interests, North *and* South, staked their financial wellbeing, and their visions for the future, on perpetuating and expanding these competing models of production and labor in the 1850's.

Thus, cultural, economic, and sectional conflicts added to a sense of national confinement as well. As Cooper's Littlepage trilogy demonstrates, the quasi-feudal "patroons" of New York's Hudson Valley by the 1840's found themselves enmeshed in violent class/labor conflicts with their serf-like tenants, who viewed their hereditary landlords as medieval barriers to modernity and economic justice. Each faction understood its duty as aligned with a certain ideological model (Democrat or Whig) and epoch of American history as much as with the ethical principles that they claimed. While Cooper wrote, however, a younger New Yorker was commencing his writing career in the 1840's with a sequence of exotic, semi-autobiographical maritime novels. Like Cooper, Herman Melville addressed pressing social, political, and ethical issues erupting on the American scene, though with differing and more obscure views. For Melville, a former sailor, the inter-subjective ethics of duty held a special fascination, in that his historical perspective on social and political confinement was inflected by a global vantage

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modern representative of a post-Industrial Revolution category of Other, counterbalancing earlier versions of labor-related Otherness based on "aristocratic" notions of social class or those rooted in race/ethnicity, such as African slaves, American Indians and Spaniards. This social distinction finds representation within the work of antebellum writers as well—Melville's *Israel Potter* is an example.

<sup>4</sup> Though Thomas Jefferson was a planter, his vision for the American Republic was that of a rural nation of small yeoman farmers. Large, industrial-scale plantations did not fit this model, though many Southerners interpreted Jefferson differently.

point.<sup>5</sup> As the U.S. and Melville entered the 1850's, questions concerning duty and confinement would come to the forefront of the ethical consciousness, and conscience, of his fiction.

But what does “confinement” mean within an ethical literary context? Within the works of Melville that I treat, confinement manifests itself in physical, psychological, socioeconomic *and* political ways. In a literal sense, confinement is manifested as a constriction of one's space, freedom and personal agency, exemplified by the claustrophobic episodes of captivity, dialogic coercion and existential despair that recur in *Israel Potter*. “Benito Cereno” too features motifs of captivity and constraint; I argue, however, that this text engages confinement on a subtler, more psychological level through the pressured sequences of ethno-racial paranoia and linguistic manipulation.<sup>6</sup> On the historical plane I point to the frustrating confinement of aspirations encountered by the American yeoman typified in Israel Potter, a Patriot during the Revolution who, anonymously “entombed” for decades as a stranger-Other in a post-Industrial Revolution urban wasteland (Rogin 228), never accesses the promise of “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of

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<sup>5</sup> Melville engaged in social and political critique in his semi-autobiographical maritime fiction, such as *Typee*, *Omoo*, *Redburn* and *White-Jacket*. Evident within these texts is a rendering of non-commissioned sailors (and immigrant steerage passengers in *Redburn*) as a mixture of ages, nationalities, races and ethnicities whose common poverty renders them as a servile class vulnerable to deception and abuse on the part of those who hold authority over them. In particular, the sense of claustrophobia or “confinement” within the imprisoning barriers of a sailing vessel is palpable, in the sense of physical space restrictions and through the stifling, arbitrary power wielded by the ships' officers, including the legal right to “flog” insubordinate sailors in the U. S. Navy. Wellingborough's explorations of working-class Liverpool in *Redburn* suture Melville's depiction of life at sea for a sailor to the plight of workers in a post-Industrial Revolution city. I also assert that the Revolutions of 1848 had an effect on the labor and class awareness of most literate Americans, especially those with more global experience, like Melville's. For further discussion of this topic, see Janis P. Stout, “The Encroaching Sodom: Melville's Urban Fiction” (163-64).

<sup>6</sup> Both *Israel Potter* and “Benito Cereno” are based on actual historical events and persons, extracted by and large from Henry Trumbull's *Life and Remarkable Adventures of Israel Potter* and Amasa Delano's *Narrative of Voyages and Travels in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres*, to the extent that Melville uses many of the same names for his characters. Nevertheless, I read Melville's texts as works of historical fiction, though containing reconstructions of real occurrences and representations of real figures. Despite the historical bases for these narratives, however, Melville made deliberate choices as to what elements would remain “true” to the historical records, and those persons or episodes he would alter or omit. For discussions of Melville's source texts for *Israel Potter* and “Benito Cereno,” see Peter J. Bellis, “Israel Potter: Autobiography as History as Fiction”; David Chacko and Alexander Kulcsa, “Israel Potter: Genesis of a Legend”; Douglass M. Coulson, “Distorted Records in ‘Benito Cereno’ and the Slave Rebellion Tradition”; Jeannine Marie DeLombard, “Salvaging Legal Personhood: Melville's *Benito Cereno*”; and Shari Goldberg, “Benito Cereno's Mute Testimony: On the Politics of Reading Melville's Silences.”

Happiness” championed by Jefferson.<sup>7</sup> By contrast, “Benito Cereno,” though set in 1799, reflects the U.S.’s anxieties of the 1850’s regarding the nation’s inability to “confine” threats of slave insurrection, of intersectional conflict, and of the blurring of hierarchical ethno-racial, social and labor boundaries in a republic featuring two different regional, economic cultures. On the one hand, there were Northern concerns that slavery would expand into newly admitted frontier States, confining the expansion of the free labor economy;<sup>8</sup> on the other, both North *and* South feared a general racial conflagration and intersectional conflict, as violence in Missouri and Kansas foreshadowed (*Waking Giant* 196, 381). Underlying these confining currents of political instability, class oppression, social confusion, urban degeneracy and violent rebellion within Melville’s works, though, is an interpersonal ethical probe, brought into relief through their dialogic polyphony and evocative discourses on duty, differentiated Otherness and totalization.

To better demonstrate my critical axis of approach, I present an orienting analysis linking significant elements from *Israel Potter* and “Benito Cereno.” A thematic key to each text is a cryptic slogan that announces, frames, and actualizes their layers of meaning. In *Israel Potter* Melville imports Benjamin Franklin’s ubiquitous “God helps them that help themselves” (70) from *Poor Richard’s Almanack*. “Benito Cereno,” by contrast, features the more sinister, enigmatic motto “Follow your leader” scrawled beneath Don Alexandro’s skeleton on the bow of

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<sup>7</sup> Cindy Weinstein notes in “Melville, Labor and the Discourses of Reception”: “Melville’s representation of workers damaged (and here erased) by their work was not unique. These anxieties were most acutely expressed in working-class publications and speeches to working-class audiences” (205, *emphasis mine*). Thomas Skidmore again comes to mind. With respect to Melville’s *Israel Potter*, I reinforce this notion of erasure within an urban-industrial context as that which follows the laborer’s socioeconomic confinement.

<sup>8</sup> See Abraham Lincoln’s “Speech on the Kansas-Nebraska Act” (307-48). Wai-chee Dimock also offers a lucid discussion of this topic in *Empire for Liberty: Melville and the Poetics of Individualism*: “What Lincoln dismissed was not only the Southern claim to sovereignty, but any version of history that refused to recognize the primacy of harmony... In short, Lincoln’s plea for harmony operated, paradoxically enough, by an act of subordination: most immediately, by subordinating the validity of conflict. America was personified strictly for the benefit of the North. With its organic governance, its sovereign dictates, the ‘body of the Republic’ permitted the South no identity except as part of a whole, a whole of which it would always have to remain a part” (28).

the *San Dominick* (234). Within both narratives, each saying voices an ethical theme which, ironically, the texts also undercut. In *Israel Potter*, Benjamin Franklin consecrates his slogan with his larger-than-life persona as one of the United States' founding fathers and its greatest *bona fide* celebrity of the late 1700's. Nevertheless, Israel, who "helps himself" via tenacity and practical thinking as a yeoman Patriot soldier, Emerson's quintessential "self-reliant" American,<sup>9</sup> receives no help from God, in that he dies in obscure poverty, the scant assistance he does receive coming from unlikely benefactors. The motto on the *San Dominick* is also ironic in that Captain Delano enters the blighted ship's story *in medias res*, after a slave mutiny has decimated the vessel's governance structure and the original crew, leaving Don Benito, the ship's nominal "captain," as the prisoner and masquerading puppet of his personal "slave," Babo, the leader of the revolt: Babo and the slaves no more intend to "follow" their previous "leaders," Don Benito and Don Alexandro, any more than the surviving crew members wish to continue under the tyrannical rule of Babo's re-ordered hierarchy. Hence, each text repudiates the ethical logic of institutional loyalty, interpersonal duty and the belief in a benevolent authority, and so champions a ruthless, individualistic ethos of mercenary survival on the one hand, and self-preservation through compulsory submission on the other. Indeed, the motto of *both* texts could be the famous last words attributed to the *Titanic*'s Captain Smith: "Every man for himself."

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<sup>9</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson in "Self-Reliance" extols the industrious New England yeoman over the easily discouraged young "city dolls" of Boston and New York (146). I add that Emerson's advocacy of a pastoral ideal suggests more than a mere romantic fixation with the rural yeoman or the city/country dichotomy discussed by Raymond Williams in the 1970's. Taking my lead from Gavin Jones, I argue that the more pressing sociocultural polarity in American society during the late antebellum period revolves around impoverished labor as a distinct category of Otherness, and what that means within the totalizations of rural Southern slavery and the Northern urban industrialism. In both arenas, an ethos respecting dialogic responsiveness to the individualized Other is overridden by the pragmatic economic interests of each region. Emerson alludes to this loss of individuality within the context of labor in "The American Scholar," where he notes, with the dismemberment of the original "One Man" of whom all persons are individualized functional components, that "[m]an is thus metamorphosed into a thing, into many things. The planter, who is Man sent out into the field to gather food is seldom cheered by the idea of the true dignity of his ministry... The tradesman scarcely ever gives an ideal worth to his work, but is ridden by the routine of his craft, and the soul is subject to dollars. The priest becomes a form; the attorney a statute-book; the mechanic a machine; the sailor the rope of the ship" (46). Tragically, Melville's Israel Potter too is rendered an implement struggling to "help himself," and at the hands of his own countrymen.

A closer analysis of these two phrases is revealing. In the first instance, “God helps them that help themselves,” agency is dispersed, albeit linked: one could interpret this as implying that taking initiative toward self-sufficiency invokes God’s compassion. Furthermore, aside from this slogan’s theological baggage, the language is ethically confining in its egocentric insularity, a repudiation of the Golden Rule: responsibility towards an Other does not enter this value equation. If anything, the Selfsame—“themselves”—becomes the “Other” party who God assists only after the Selfsame has first attended to its-Self, for-itself. But whereas Poor Richard’s is a statement, intended as advice that *ought* to be heeded by anyone reads or hears it, the clipped and emphatic “Follow your leader,” or “*Seguid vuestro jefe*” in Spanish, is a command, though its lack of any surrounding sematic context renders it ambiguous, despite the thematic color of the enveloping narrative. Still, respecting the mandate itself, the issuer of the command, not necessarily *the* referenced “leader,” and the group<sup>10</sup> being tasked to “follow” are obscure, though the text discloses Babo as its author at the conclusion. The motto exists in a vacuum of meaning, though the Spanish grammar implies multiple familiar addressees. The motto’s reader is hailed as a part of a general audience, but to what end, and by what governing authority? Just as Poor Richard’s slogan emphasizes agency and initiative while confining any greater sense of duty toward the community to the wellbeing of the Selfsame, or a conglomeration of similar-minded Selves, the *San Dominick*’s motto restricts agency while demanding submission to an imposed hierarchical structure from any persons who might read it. One phrase totalizes through unfettered egocentrism authorized by narcissistic popular wisdom, the other through a generic appeal to social order, an authoritative mandate without a visible

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<sup>10</sup> The Spanish verb *seguir*, meaning “to follow,” is here conjugated in the more archaic, informal, second person plural imperative, suggesting not only a command to a group, but also persons either familiar and/or inferior to the issuer. If one were to associate this motto with Babo, the Spanish grammar would indicate not only an authoritative role and maleness—*jefe* is masculine—but also higher social status in relation to the implied audience.

source. What this exegesis says about these texts their antebellum *milieu* is the focus of my argument.

I claim that the slogans that Melville's texts contain and critique, in conjunction with the larger historical narrative that contains *them*, offer contrasting versions of a common ethos, two different avenues through which the antebellum United States, as a confederation of cultural, regional and ethical communities, might realize a single, symbiotic social hierarchy. In the midst of technological proliferation, urbanization, industrialization, arguments over slavery and a crisis over the Federal Union itself following the debates of 1850,<sup>11</sup> *Israel Potter* and "Benito Cereno" manifest an ethical preoccupation with physical, social, psychological and *dialogic* confinement that ironically resists containment, just as the changes facing antebellum America could no longer be controlled, as Paul Michael Rogin asserts (229). Granted, neither Melville nor anyone else in the 1850's could envision the cataclysm to occur after 1860 or the long, painful and uncertain period of national rebuilding and self-reimagining to follow. Nevertheless, the volatile, ethical anxieties that these texts treat reveal a duplicitous, violent and unpredictable context where interpersonal duty is a practical liability, where Otherness is hybrid and dangerous, and where the ordering of epistemological totalization is incapable of restoring either a benign social economy or of recovering from history a paradigm of ethical values to illuminate a dark, "modern" future.

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<sup>11</sup> Wai-chee Dimock sutures the issues of western expansion, sectional conflict, slavery and labor in *Empire for Liberty*: "Antebellum America, the age of individualism, was also a period of sharpening tensions and polarities ... Jacksonian America, in short, was an America newly confronted with class difference, which explains why 'prosperity' became a damning word in the period's public oratory... Images of earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and other catastrophic violence dominated antebellum discourse on labor relations and class divisions" (11-12). She notes that especially for the North, the western territories offered a needed outlet for surplus labor saturating large urban areas (15-20). Thus, the North's stake in slavery's potential expansion westward was more than ethical, but bound to its own socioeconomic interests.

Published after Europe's Revolution of 1848<sup>12</sup> and the U.S.'s Compromise of 1850 (with its amplified Fugitive Slave Law) and between the controversial Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854) and the infamous Dred Scott Decision (1857), *Israel Potter* and "Benito Cereno" must be read in critical acknowledgement of their historical context. That said, the issues of slavery, racism, class/labor turmoil related to industrialization, and the image of the ship as a claustrophobic, dystopian microcosm of the modern polity, while important from an interpretive standpoint, do not tell the whole story.<sup>13</sup> I argue that the questions of Otherness, morality and duty raised in Melville should not be "confined" by a solely historical interpretive optic as they are in the criticism of Douglas M. Coulson, Wai-chee Dimock and Christopher Hager, but are better addressed through Levinas' ethics of alterity.

Melville's polyphonic and ambivalent interrogation via *Israel Potter* and "Benito Cereno" of antebellum America's two predominant versions of the totalized laboring Other, the urban laborer and the African slave, institutionalized by the differing socioeconomic systems of the industrial North and the agrarian South, exhibits an anxiety respecting the confinement of the individual in a modern, production-driven republic. Could the United States in the 1850's still

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<sup>12</sup> The Revolution of 1848 was a transatlantic phenomenon. David S. Reynolds writes in *Waking Giant*: "the most important product of 1848 was the revolutionary spirit that energized Northern reform movements at a time when Southern proslavery sentiment was turning into a self-justifying cultural myth... Utopian socialism, for instance, exposed Northern class divisions, providing a convenient platform for fire-eaters like George Fitzhugh and John C. Calhoun to contrast the misery of urban workers with the alleged unhappiness of enslaved blacks" (379).

<sup>13</sup> According to Warner Berthoff in *The Example of Melville*, "[t]wo works most notable for scene and atmosphere, and most explicitly pictorial, are *Israel Potter* and 'Benito Cereno,' and both of these were in good part pieced together out of old documents, the main substance of which Melville somewhat reinterpreted but did not systematically change" (68). Berthoff adds that "the effective setting is something more than the sum of background (or foreground) descriptions. It embraces also the kinds of life and enterprise that are proper to the conditions presented, and it includes some corresponding view of the capacity for action and the reaction within the human agent. It realizes, then, a general view of nature and a general view of human nature. I am convinced that there is no simpler way of defining *setting*, in Melville's case" (69). Though Berthoff is not speaking strictly of historical context in *Israel Potter* and "Benito Cereno," and though I take issue with his minimizing of the narrative differences between the "historical" records and Melville's fiction, his overall argument is well-stated, in that the "background," while important, ought not to be the end of all analyses. To the extent that questions regarding "human nature" and the "human agent" are crucial to any discussion concerning ethics, Otherness or duty, Berthoff's literary criticism foregrounds my own analysis.



realize the Revolutionary ethical invocations implicit in the Declaration's language when economic forces North *and* South were rendering increasing numbers of poor whites and black slaves faceless, voiceless, powerless and immobile implements of commercial production? Ironically, as debate over the personhood, emancipation and the potential citizenship of African-Americans increased, impoverished, urban workers saw their autonomy, social mobility and individuality obliterated as the collateral damage of America's Industrial Revolution.<sup>14</sup> If by the 1850's actual Southern slaves, like the fictitious ones on board the claustrophobic *San Dominick*, could no longer be ethically ordered to "follow their leader," neither could the totalized proletariat of the Northern metropolis be told, *a la* "Poor Richard," just to "help themselves." So the question is raised: was Melville gesturing toward the possibility of a *redemptive* American ethics, the invocation of a proto-Levinasian individualized Other for whom citizens *ought* to assume personal responsibility in a post-1854 polity confined not just by race, ethnicity, regional politics or social class, but by ruthless socioeconomic and labor barriers as well? Despite the bleakness and existential despair that dominate the imagery and tone of *Israel Potter* and "Benito Cereno," I answer *yes*, for the stark ethical confinement that Melville's dialogues represent point beyond the texts' horizons. That is, they suggest the possibility of something better by invoking an ethical demand to redraw the contours of an American polity and social economy heretofore sketched by exploitative self-helpers at the expense of an Othered underclass of depersonalized leader-followers, totalities of laboring "nobodies," in *Israel Potter's* language.

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<sup>14</sup> Russ Castronovo discusses the "obliteration" of the individual as a "dead citizen" in *Necro Citizenship: Death, Eroticism, and the Public Sphere in the Nineteenth-century United States*. He argues that in the 1800's the U.S. develops "an ideology of citizenship that prefers the immobile and abstract identity of state citizen over the dynamic condition of materially specific historical subjects" (7). I claim that the yeoman *Israel Potter* is an excellent literary example of this phenomenon of "immobile," abstracted and "dead" personhood typified in "[t]he *laboring* body, licentious body,...emancipated slave body, and corpse" (17, *emphasis mine*). Suturing this notion of the democratic State's Othering of the "abstract identity" to the hierarchical totalization of the "dead citizen" on the nineteenth-century American scene, Castronovo continues: "Abstract personhood is rhetorically, if not actually, financed by the experiences, memories, and stories of *others*; the privileges of (white male) citizenship are tied up with the hyperembodiment of blacks, women, and workers" (17, *emphasis mine*).

With respect to “Benito Cereno,” beyond probing the significance of the inscrutable, Iago-like Babo, to borrow Charles N. Watson’s allusion (404), I argue that the emasculated, hybridized Don Benito, emblematic of the Anglo-American ethnic stereotype of the “dark Spaniard,” complicates conventional treatments of African Otherness versus Southern Euro-American “whiteness” and hierarchical mastery in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>15</sup> Complementing the typological descriptions in “Benito Cereno” are those in *Israel Potter*, which also includes characters based on actual historical figures. Though both works are set in the late 1700’s, each grapples with the ethical issues of duty and Otherness emergent in the United States during the 1850’s. I am referring to the brief period in U.S. history where, ironically, two competing, disempowered laboring Others coexist, each within one of the U.S.’s dominant regional cultures: the poor “free” worker of the urban North and the African American slave in the rural South.

Both groups constituted an oppressed labor force within the antebellum United States and, as Alan Brinkley asserts, each was an indispensable cog in the realization of each section’s vision of America’s economic future and the prosperity instrumental in securing political power (452-57). Thus, I argue that the industrial North’s totalizing of the proletarian Other was just as economically necessary as the agrarian South’s oppression of black slaves. On the one hand, Northern Free Soilers and Abolitionists could invoke an ethical imperative regarding the welfare of the individual African American Other in the South while ignoring the plight of Northern “wage slaves.” On the other, the South could point its moralizing finger at the dehumanization

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<sup>15</sup> As María de Guzmán discusses in *Spain’s Long Shadow: The Black Legend, Off-Whiteness and Anglo-American Empire*, the “Spaniard” character Benito Cereno can be read as a liminal figure, that is, as racially “off-white,” as Spaniards have been traditionally contrasted with “white” Anglo-Saxons, and therefore are Other to Africans, northwestern Europeans and Anglo-Americans (47-67). This racialized understanding of Benito Cereno is also found in readings of Delano’s *Narrative* where, as Douglass M. Coulson posits in “Distorted Records in ‘Benito Cereno’ and the Slave Rebellion Tradition,” the “Spaniard” is suspected of complicity with the slaves in the revolt (28). I too hold that a suspicion of Don Benito’s true allegiances, even within a tale dominated by intentional and coerced performativity, situates him in a liminal space between African and “white” European identities. That said, I assert that the diminished Don Benito does not fit the stereotype of the sanguine Spaniard, either: on at least two levels he is an ambiguous figure of singular Otherness, as I will discuss.

of Northern factories and the vast urban slums of impoverished “free” laborers. Supremely ironic is the fact that it was the slave-powered production of Southern cotton that fueled the growth of textile mills in new industrial cities like Lowell (*Waking Giant* 62-64); from this perspective, Big Cotton helped create slaves on *both* sides of the Mason-Dixon Line.<sup>16</sup>

Hence, what links *Israel Potter* and “Benito Cereno” within the present discussion is how their scenes of confinement and paranoid hyper-control shape their polyphonic ethical discourses on socioeconomic hierarchy, individualized versus totalized Otherness and interpersonal duty. Much of Melville’s pre-*Billy Budd* fiction engages prisoner motifs within the “confines” of a labor or class hierarchy, such *Redburn*, *Typee*, *Omoo* and “Bartleby, the Scrivener.” Furthermore, any novelistic conversation suturing ethical issues of duty, Otherness and agency after 1854 carries additional baggage, for the potential expansion of slavery intensified the ethical debate between the North and South regarding the moral status of each section’s contrasting yet exploited labor force. Thus, I argue that *Israel Potter* and “Benito Cereno” mirror this ironic, ambivalent dialogue, a circumstance that we also glean from the “ethos” of their mottos. If “Benito Cereno”’s “Follow your leader” connotes an ubiquitous, authoritative command to submit to the prevailing socioeconomic and ethno-racial hierarchies of oppressive plantations *and* wage slave factories, Franklin’s more individualistic, Whiggishly entrepreneurial slogan in *Israel Potter* anticipates Nietzsche’s will to power ethos, for embedded within it is a permutation of Emersonian “Self-Reliance” that authorizes, from a Malthusian angle, the totalization of a vulnerable, laboring underclass within the mechanized, metropolitan State. And though Melville’s claustrophobic polyphonic texts, despite their suggestiveness, are never quite able to transcend the rhetorical-contextual confines of race, labor and antebellum

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<sup>16</sup> Carolyn L. Karcher makes a similar observation in *Shadow Over the Promised Land: Slavery Race and Violence in Melville’s America* (126-27).

socioeconomics, *Israel Potter* and “Benito Cereno” nevertheless speak toward a modern, and potentially redemptive, ethical “dialogue” on interpersonal duty that invites social and literary critics alike to reexamine how persons understand the dialogically-invoked ethos of response for the particularized Other.

### I. *Israel Potter*

Herman Melville’s *Israel Potter*, while set several generations in the past, is “remarkably well-attuned to the *Zeitgeist* of its culture” (Temple 16), though it did not sell many copies. Unlike Cooper’s gentility-sympathizing Littlepage novels, however, Melville’s novel champions the American yeoman Israel Potter, a forsaken, destitute, wandering Moses-figure—“Israel”—unable to enter the “Promised Land” and exiled in a hostile London, “a landscape of desolation” (Stout 169). As an old man he returns to the United States, only to find the environs of his youth unrecognizable and himself a stranger still, an alien Other in his native country.<sup>17</sup>

America *had* of course changed in the intervening fifty years: but, was this the same traumatic sociocultural, ethical metamorphosis that the later generations of Cooper’s Littlepages experience? I assert that Melville does something distinct from Cooper respecting his rendering of chronology and historical change<sup>18</sup> in that, while treating many “American” issues of the day, little of *Israel Potter*, while about America, takes place *in* America: the text eludes, literally, national “confinement.” That said, we might consider the circumstance that by the 1850’s, much of the political *and* ethical discourse in the United States was also concerned with events on the

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<sup>17</sup> Judith R. Hiltner writes in “From Pisgah to Egypt: Narrative continuities in Melville’s ‘Israel Potter’ and ‘The Two Temples’” that *Israel Potter* “[explodes] the popular American typological association between the Old Testament nation of Israel and the original settlers of the New World, destined for deliverance from Old-World bondage into the Promised Land of America . . . In the *Israel Potter* narrative . . . the repudiation of America as fulfillment of the promise to Israel *is* the ‘inside narrative’ of the novel, as the aptly named protagonist is delivered from freedom to bondage, from the Canaan of his Berkshire mountain home to the wilderness of London, the ‘English Egypt’ . . . Israel discovers himself a slave in the heart of modern civilization, imaged as no more than a wilderness that consumes its victims” (305).

<sup>18</sup> Janis P. Stout notes in *The Encroaching Sodom: Melville’s Urban Fiction* that Melville “shares a symbolic world with the creations of Cooper’s mythmaking (though not his critical) imagination” (158).

periphery; the Transatlantic world to the east, the remaining Frontier to the west and Mexico and Latin America to the south. With respect to *Israel Potter*, I am referring to the unraveling of the Missouri Compromise of 1820, the Revolutions of 1848, the Compromise of 1850 and the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854.<sup>19</sup>

*Israel Potter* does not deal with African slavery directly, although at several junctures Israel experiences similar hardships and is treated much like an African slave in encountering violent captivity and involuntary servitude.<sup>20</sup> During those episodes where Israel wanders as a fugitive prisoner of war, he assumes a false identity, including when he serves as a clandestine intelligence courier for Benjamin Franklin in Paris and Patriot sympathizers in England. The myriad subterfuges that Israel engages prevent him from manifesting a concrete identity within an ethical community as he roams from locale to locale. Bill Christopherson argues: “Israel’s obscurity [is not] just luckless coincidence. Rather it suggests an identity vacuum... Like the marginal characters and nonentities he impersonates, Israel seems somehow insubstantial—a fast talking figment, stopped time and again by the question, ‘Who are you?’” (141). Respecting this question of an “identity vacuum” in *Israel Potter* Gale Temple posits: “Melville’s goal is...to throw into relief the psychic disruptions inherent in finding intelligible visions of individual and collective identity through a literary form [the serial publication] that...was intimately tied to the rise of the capitalist market” (5), adding: “Israel’s inability to sustain a unique self is rooted in

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<sup>19</sup> As Manuel Broncano notes in “Strategies of Textual Subversion in Herman Melville’s *Israel Potter*,” “Melville published [*Israel Potter*] in a context of rising social tensions and turmoil, at a time when American society was beginning to realize its inherent paradoxes and contradictions: on the same Fourth of July when the novel started to appear in a serialized form, Henry David Thoreau read his ‘Slavery in Massachusetts’ before an abolitionist assembly, in which he contrasted the heroism of Massachusetts in Revolutionary days to its present moral cowardice as evident in the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Law... These and similar events show that the sense of crisis so apparent in Melville’s novel was in the very air of its times and is an active, if invisible interlocutor in the dialogue that is embedded in the book...the novel becomes a deep and bitter discussion of U.S. society unable to find a happy balance between its ideals and its realities” (494). I add that the social condition of labor in urban centers during the late antebellum period is also a part of this prevalent “sense of crisis” within the country and Melville.

<sup>20</sup> Melville repeatedly deals with the unethical, unjust practice of British naval impressment, a form of involuntary conscription into the Royal Navy. This was one of the grievances that brought the U.S. into the War of 1812.

the logic of the marketplace itself” (10). As a fugitive he is prevented, as a categorized Other, from making any “marketable” claim upon the charity of those equipped to assist him.

Among the few persons to whom Israel makes his true identity known, an English nobleman and the King treat him with the most benevolence, despite being the symbols of everything that the Patriots are fighting against. As an enemy, they owe him no duty, yet they respect his individual dignity and take an interest in his wellbeing. By contrast, Benjamin Franklin and the Patriot sympathizers regard Israel as a mere cog in a larger mechanism of war and *Realpolitik* to be “dutifully” cared for in order to assure his continuation as an agent of *their* interests. This reading of Israel’s “representational form” is consistent with Wai-Chee Dimock’s understanding of “personified agency” in antebellum America, in that Israel represents “the personification of Property, the making of a human agent out of a proprietary relation” (26) to the extent that Franklin treats him as a piece of “property” whose functionality he owns and to which he “helps himself,” *a la* Poor Richard. Likewise, Dimock explains: “To be human at all, in Locke’s [and Thomas Skidmore’s] terms, is by definition to be a property owner” (31-32), which Israel is not, accounting for Franklin’s coercive and ethically non-responsive dialogues with him. The severe, literal confinement that Israel experiences comes from Franklin and Squire Woodcock and *not* from the “obvious” oppressors, King George III and Sir John Millet, who assume responsibility for his welfare. An examination of the polyphony present in these dialogic encounters illuminates this strange but significant circumstance.

But as Warner Berthoff would admonish, the novel’s ethically responsive dialogic encounters should not be read only against the historical backdrop of the setting, but also with the *Zeitgeist* of the 1800’s in mind. Manuel Broncano insists that *Israel Potter*’s “polyphonic structure is further extended... by the voices of the historical contexts... Revolutionary America,

the 1820s [Missouri Compromise] and the 1850s [Kansas-Nebraska]” though “[t]he importance of the polyphonic structure has remained almost unnoticed by critics” (497).<sup>21</sup> That said the dichotomy between Israel’s dialogues with Benjamin Franklin, Squire Woodcock and John Paul Jones on the one side and those with Sir John Millet and George III on the other connotes more than a superficial contrast between American republicans and British monarchists. I suggest that Melville’s typological amalgamations offer the reader a critique of an economic culture struggle within the antebellum United States, a dialogic discourse that shows the interpersonal ethical stakes at play as a young America sought to define its labor reality as a modern capitalist republic. Anne Baker writes: “*Israel Potter* reveals a fundamental shift in Melville’s imagination. His writings from this period convey an increasing preoccupation with the ways that historical forces like capitalism, industrialization, and urbanization diminish or even destroy individuals... The conditions of mass production objectify the workers as if they become the products they so monotonously create” (19). However, this “objectification” occurs when Israel encounters the penny-pinching, “product”-oriented Franklin, long before his dehumanizing “Egypt” experience in the London brick factory.

Thus, Melville’s juxtaposition of Israel’s dialogic encounters with British rulers and Patriot leaders evidences deep ambivalence. In both his experiences with Sir John and George III, Israel assumes the status of a rural, serf-like laborer within a feudal hierarchy; nevertheless, he receives, as an impoverished fugitive Other, more responsive treatment from would-be oppressors than he does from the pragmatic, urban interactions with his own non-aristocratic,

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<sup>21</sup> Broncano follows up: “for [Mikhail] Bakhtin, the purport of a novel necessarily varies from one period to another. This phenomenon [*heteroglossia*] ensures the primacy of the context over the text... In the case of *Israel Potter*, the multitude of voices that participate in the text offered to the reader contemporary with Melville a plural of meanings which is necessarily different from what would be perceived by a modern day reader. The voices are not just narrative, but also historical and literary, since *Israel Potter* is both a meditation on the fate of America and a reflection on literature itself” (501). For example, Gale Temple connects the novel’s serialization with antebellum market economics. For more on the significance of the historical contexts of the 1820’s and the 1850’s in *Israel Potter*, see Peter J. Bellis, “*Israel Potter*: Autobiography as History as Fiction.”

American countrymen. I argue, as Manuel Broncano also suggests (497), that what we encounter here is not so much an accommodation of British monarchy and aristocracy over American republicanism, but rather a textual hesitancy to underwrite a vision of the American Revolution that has as its socioeconomic teleology an endorsement of Hamiltonian manufacturing. Melville would not endorse Jeffersonian agrarianism while legal slavery still existed;<sup>22</sup> still, the industrial North's literal "implementation" of thousands of indigent workers like Israel, signified by Franklin's, Squire Woodcock's and John Paul Jones' "utilization" of him, totalized and dehumanized the laboring Other almost as much as legal slavery did to blacks in the South. Melville's sobering descriptions of Israel's abject and "anonymous" sojourn in London, to use Christopherson's descriptive (144-45), puts this in stark relief. These typological contrasts also showcase the dark underside to Poor Richard's self-reliant ethos: for those few fortunate who are able to "help themselves," a laboring Other like Israel necessarily bears the "dutiful" cost of their self-aggrandizement.

That said, in Israel's dialogic encounters with Sir John, George III and Benjamin Franklin, an ethical ambivalence regarding interpersonal duty arises in each exchange, as the characters manifest, in a Bakhtinian sense, multiple ethical voices. Though Sir John Millet insists with frustration that Israel, whom he knows to be an escaped American prisoner and who thus refuses to call him "Sir John," address him with his title of nobility, he relents after

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<sup>22</sup> Janis P. Stout argues that "metaphysical contrasts such as freedom and constraint" emerge as a consistent thematic dichotomy within Melville's "urban" narratives, such as *Israel Potter*: "Melville only tentatively accepts the stereotyped opposition of country and city... Ever the expounder of ambiguities, he both adopts the conventions and collapses them by revealing their inadequacy. To the urban hell he contrasts an imagined but generally unavailable primitive heaven, not the agricultural America of sentimental idealization. Thus his indictment of social misery in his cities implies no vision of rural virtue" (158). This theme of social "confinement" forms a significant portion of Melville's rendering of the urban sphere, in particular regarding the material condition of the working-class Other. Anne Baker remarks in "What to *Israel Potter* is the Fourth of July? Melville, Douglass, and the Agency of Words" in contrast to Stout that "Israel's fictional birthplace in the Berkshire mountains is an important component of Melville's critique of industrialization and urbanization, for it represents a kind of *pastoral paradise*... The New World wilderness of Israel's youth enables him to profit from his entrepreneurial spirit... But the Old World in which Israel finds himself an exile [Britain] is an urban, industrial nightmare. The capitalism and poverty of post-Independence London keeps him struggling to survive, with no way to get ahead." (17, 18-19, *emphasis mine*).



“pledging” Israel sanctuary and offers him employment (33-34). This vocal exchange signals a lack of a contractual one, to the extent that Sir John grants Israel refuge despite the “Other’s” refusal to return any symbolic social capital. Nevertheless, Sir John warns Israel, “I do not wish unnecessarily to speak against my own countrymen . . . I but plainly speak for your good. The [British] soldiers you meet prowling on the roads . . . are a set of mean, dastardly banditti, who, to obtain their fee, would betray their best friends” (33). On the one hand, Sir John attempts to control Israel’s American form of vocal address—“mister”—insofar as it resists the English duty of verbally recognizing social rank, though in the end he tells the polite but firm Israel, “I excuse you from Sir Johnning me” (33). On the other, he elects with ambivalence to “speak for” Israel’s “good” at the literal “expense” of his “countrymen,” whose mercenary conduct towards both Others and “friends” is unworthy.

The vulnerable Israel also wishes to treat with respect his new-found benefactor and confidant, yet in contrast to Sir John, he remains true to his identity and allegiance as a democratic American, refusing, though with embarrassment, to address Sir John by his title, despite the latter’s repeated entreaties: “Why sir—pardon me—but somehow I can’t. You won’t betray me for that?” (33). Unlike the condescending Franklin, Sir John does not “capitalize” on his social and material advantages over Israel in order to “confine” him. He does not “help himself” by coercing or implementizing him as a cheap source of expendable labor, even though Israel insists on his individuated cultural Otherness to the extent of declining to use his host’s preferred form of address. Far from rendering Israel obnoxious, however, this dialogic resistance acknowledges the differentiated individuality of “Sir” John beyond his aristocratic categorization. Thus, Israel too refuses to “help himself” by vocally totalizing a social Other, and at the risk of offending a needed material benefactor. Despite his poverty and vulnerability,

Israel opts not to use obsequious dialogue to manipulate and implementize an Other who has manifested, without formal obligation, such interpersonal ethical responsiveness.

In a similar vein, during his encounter with George III, Israel struggles again with this conundrum regarding democratic principle, national allegiance, and one's duty to a material benefactor. Upon happening upon George III in the garden at Kew, Israel fails to remove his hat, which exposes his true identity as a "Yankee" (37). A curious exchange then ensues, whereby Israel admits to fighting at Bunker Hill and "flogging" the King's soldiers, at the same time expressing regret to the King: "I took it to be my sad *duty*" (38, *emphasis mine*). This is an odd remark, for when the subject of the American Revolution was earlier raised by a Briton, the narrator expounds: "Illy could the exile [Israel] brook in silence such insults upon the country for which he had bled, and for whose honoured sake he was that very instant a sufferer. More than once, his indignation came very nigh getting the better of his prudence. He longed for the war to end, that he might but speak a little of his mind" (34-35). But despite his regret and deference to George III, Israel insists "firmly, but with deep respect": "I have no king" (38).<sup>23</sup> Yet, upon being informed by George III that, as at Sir John's, he would be afforded sanctuary as a fugitive, Israel erupts, "God bless your noble Majesty!" to which the king replies, "I thought I could conquer ye" (39). Israel then explains that it was not the "king" who "conquered" him, "but the king's kindness," to which George III then invites the ever-loyal Patriot to join the British army, an offer Israel declines. But in contrast to Israel's dialogic encounter with Sir John, the King and Israel *do* in the end categorize each other as types, Israel as a member of a "stubborn race" (37),

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<sup>23</sup> This response, in conjunction to the literal reference to "flogging," renders the dialogue between Israel and George III reminiscent of the one between Pontius Pilate and the mob in John: "Shall I crucify your King? . . . We have no king but Caesar" (Jn 19:15 *ESV*). In both the Gospel and Melville's text, this statement is made by "Israel." This is ironic because Israel Potter embodies Christ-like *kenosis* far more than defiance—Bill Christopherson refers to Israel as a "Yankee Christ" (138)—despite being a combatant in several theaters during the Revolutionary War and having been tempted to assassinate his (former) king. For more on Israel Potter as a resurrected "Christlike" figure, see also Charles N. Watson, "Premature Burial in *Arthur Gordon Pym* and *Israel Potter*" (107).

George III as a monarch. Thus, I read this episode as inter-subjectively inconsistent with Israel's prior dialogue with Sir John, marking ambivalence. However, this ambivalence lies within the singular dialogue itself, for despite the fact that each character totalizes his Other, this vocal obscuring of individuality in favor of typology does *not* translate into an explicit, contractual exchange of materiel for labor nor the implicit construction of inter-class duty between a master and "serf."

Still, in terms of its interpersonal ethical responsiveness, this exchange inhabits a liminal space between Israel's dialogue with Sir John and his conversations with Ben Franklin. Though the King does not try to utilize or confine Israel to the extent that the "Sage" does, he *does* request that Israel "[s]ay nothing of this talk to anyone" (38) and join the British army (39), ignoring Israel's both differentiating *and* composite identity as an American soldier by inviting him to embrace the "Other" ideological totality. Upon Israel's refusal, the King orders him to "gravel the walk" (39), appearing content to command, and accept, Israel's dutiful compliance with anonymous menial labor. George III does endeavor to "help himself" in requesting Israel's enlistment, yet he does not insist, respecting the "Other's" autonomy. And though Israel grants the King verbal recognition through addressing him as "Majesty," he still resists George III's pressure to concede to additional claims to his labor, a coercion camouflaged as ethical duty that Israel succumbs to before Benjamin Franklin and John Paul Jones.

Melville also adds the narrator's ambivalent voice to this ethical polyphony. As the episode with the King concludes, the narrator offers the following:

Without any impeachment of Israel's fealty to his country, it must still be narrated, that from this his familiar audience with George the Third, he went away with very favorable views of that monarch. Israel now thought that it could not be

the warm heart of the king, but the cold heads of his lords in council, that persuaded him so tyrannically to persecute America. Yet hitherto the precise contrary of this had been Israel's opinion, agreeably to popular prejudice throughout New England. (39)

The narrator then muses, "[t]hus we see what strange and powerful magic resides in a crown, and how subtly that cheap and easy magnanimity, which in private belongs to most kings, may operate on good-natured and unfortunate souls. Indeed, had it not been for the peculiar disinterested fidelity of our adventurer's patriotism, he would have soon sported the red coat..." (39-40). Despite Israel's newfound high-regard for George III's unsolicited hospitality, the narrator cautions that a king's responsive liberality ought *not* to be confused with true charity, for excessive resources render arbitrary gestures of kindness of small account, in that little of personal value is ventured within an inter-subjective ethical economy devoid of contractual obligations of material or labor. Once again, illuminating is the fact that George III confines Israel within a totality in that he addresses him not by name, but rather as "Yankee" and "one of that stubborn race" (37), answering Sir John's earlier query of the democratic Israel: "are all your countrymen like you? If so, it's no use fighting them" (33). Still, the reader apprehends the extent of the polyphonic ambivalence, and irony, displayed in these dialogic encounters. True, Israel receives the greatest measure of kindness from these two type figures, Sir John Millet and George III, representatives of an aristocratic and imperial ideology, who stand to lose the most in history should democratic republicanism prevail. At the same time, in their present generosity and forbearance they risk the least of anyone by assuming interpersonal ethical responsibility for an individual alien Other due to their empowered status as elites.

Israel's own ethical ambivalence regarding duty erupts within the dialogues with Sir John and George III. Though wishing to avoid vocalizing titles of nobility or royalty as inconsistent with democratic ideals, Israel also does not want to offend "enemies" to whom he feels he owes respect and gratitude for their assistance. Despite his "Yankee" mentality, Israel questions whether he can "lie to a king" (37). Also with regard to George III, the narrator explains:

Unauthorized and abhorrent thoughts will sometimes invade the best human heart. Seeing the monarch unguarded before him; remembering that the war was imputed more to the self-will of the king than to the willingness of parliament or the nation; and calling to mind all his own sufferings growing out of that war, with all the calamities of his country; dim impulses, such as those to which the regicide Ravaillac yielded, would shoot balefully across the soul of the exile. But thrusting Satan behind him, Israel vanquished all such temptations. (37)<sup>24</sup>

As a soldier of the American Revolution, personal grievance and a sense of national duty might impel Israel to regicide, should the opportunity present itself. Yet the narrator ascribes such impulses to diabolical temptation, deeming such a plan of action reprehensible even within the context of war. But as we see when the ruthless privateer John Paul Jones enters the story, this ethical stance regarding the "moral" conduct of war is not consistent either in the narrator's rhetoric or in the dialogue and action of the American characters.

Within the polyphony of ethical voices that emerges in *Israel Potter* there is an unstable competition of moral impulses concerning interpersonal duty. That said, I argue that these

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<sup>24</sup> Another semi-veiled Gospel reference: this time, Israel assumes the role of Jesus, who chides Peter, "Get behind me, Satan!" (Mt 16:23 *ESV*). This is interesting considering that the previous reference places "Israel" in the position of the Judean mob, who intended to kill Jesus for claiming to be "the King of the Jews," just as Israel earlier contemplates killing George III who, to add another level of irony to this *exegesis*, behaves more as an examining Pontius Pilate than Christ. This alternating assignation of biblical-symbolic roles buttresses my claim regarding Melville's polyphonic ethical ambivalence in his dialogues and narration.

ethical preoccupations remain thematically oriented, like the narrative itself, by the destabilizing irony of Poor Richard's motto: if "God helps them that help themselves," then who "helps them that help an *Other*?" In the cases of Sir John Millet and King George, the reader in 1855 knows that Great Britain is on the losing end of the American Revolution. If British elites intended to retain the colonists as slaves to their imperial, mercantile ambitions, the benevolence of Sir John and the King toward Israel could appear as the hollow "magnanimous" gestures of those on the losing side of history anyway, as Sir John already suspects (33). By contrast, the ever-dutiful Israel finds himself literally and ironically a "prisoner" of Benjamin Franklin and Squire Woodcock, his nominal allies in the victorious cause of American "freedom." Ever the pragmatist, Franklin rebuffs Israel's intent to go sight-seeing in Paris as compromising his overall utility: "You must absolutely remain in your room, just as if you were my *prisoner*... Not knowing now at what instant I shall want you to start, your keeping to your room is indispensable" (55, *emphasis mine*). Squire Woodcock then entombs him in a dungeon-like hiding place with few amenities once Israel returns to England, as he remarks, "[t]hough to be sure I was a sort of prisoner in Paris, just as I seem to be made here... Poverty and liberty, or plenty and a prison, seem to be the two horns of the constant dilemma of my life" (88-89). Though the episode is intended to be humorous, Israel's "better" accommodations in Paris are stripped bare by a controlling, condescending and hypocritical Franklin who always advocates for simplicity and pecuniary frugality, prompting Israel to observe: "[e]very time he [Franklin] comes in, he robs me... with an air all the time, too, as if he were making me presents" (69).

The shrewd Franklin indeed "helps himself" to Israel's clandestine courier services as well as to the accoutrements of his bedroom—including denying the lonely Israel the sexual availability of a French prostitute who doubles as a chambermaid—though he does not guarantee

an opportunity for passage back to the United States for his accidental agent (54). Also noteworthy is the fact that the business-savvy “sage,” unlike Sir John or King George, presumes upon and conscripts the services of Israel, securing his risky labor against only the conditional “promise” of offering future assistance as part of his “official duty as agent” of the United States.<sup>25</sup> At the same time he expresses far more “ethical” concern that Israel deliver money, which Franklin forcibly “lends” him, to a random soldier’s widow, and also that he reimburse the Parisian boot-black whose box Israel demolished in suspecting him to be a spy (54-56). For Franklin, depersonalized, faceless Others, as representative “abstractions” as Castronovo would put it, make more of an ethical demand on him than does one with whom he converses, for it is through interpersonal dialogue that Franklin coerces and acquires—or “robs”—Israel’s labor, placing the onus of duty on the disadvantaged Other as opposed to responding to an individualized subject. As an example, within the same paragraph where Franklin “selflessly” deflects Israel’s “over-gratitude” for what he characterizes as “simply doing part of [his] official *duty*” (54, *emphasis mine*), he proceeds to place Israel in his literal debt within the confines of an impromptu labor-loan contract, which money Israel then returns to him. Nevertheless, the affective transaction delineating Israel’s new-found duties has already been consummated: both Israel as agent and the labor-value he represents are now under Franklin’s control. Franklin then lectures Israel on the merits of “pecuniary” prudence while issuing a series of presumptive commands (55-58), reinforcing Israel’s Otherness, material dependence and inferiority. In the last analysis, Benjamin Franklin and the mercenary privateer John Paul Jones, the closest adherents to Poor Richard’s admonition as individualists, capitalist entrepreneurs and egoists, fare better than anyone in the novel. Unlike Israel and those concerned for the welfare of Others,

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<sup>25</sup> John Bryant states in *Melville’s Comic Debate: Geniality and the Aesthetics of Repose* that “[the character of] Franklin is Melville’s first substantial confidence man” (162).

Franklin and Jones each “help themselves” to a lion’s share of the fame, patriotic heroes in what would prove to be the winning cause. Or, as John Bryant summarizes, “[a]s confidence men, Franklin and Jones are all-too successful; they characterize the glory of America’s shallow pragmatism and predatory power. Israel’s schemes also succeed but afford him little more than subsistence and anonymity. For him, the confidence game erodes identity... Israel’s confidence game makes him a ‘nobody’” (163).

But there is more to Poor Richard’s motto than just an ironic critique of American narcissism and pragmatism, for it speaks to the Free Soil platform of the 1850’s in light of the Compromise of 1850. As ideologues with a certain perspective on American history, Free Soilers, similar to anti-slavery Whigs, sought the demise of slavery not so much as an abstract moral Good or a tangible Good for slaves, but rather as a step to creating a modern, industrial capitalist society. In their view, the United States’ place in history was at stake in the debate, and the institution of slavery was an obstacle to progress.<sup>26</sup> I posit that Melville’s portrayal of the practical and business-savvy Franklin in *Israel Potter* reflects a similar ethos. That is, Franklin does not respond to the imprisoned, impressed and fugitive Israel as an *individualized* Other in need of help, but rather does so as a means to an end: the yeoman’s wellbeing ensures his valuable labor for *Franklin’s* “progressive” agenda.

Sir John and King George, by contrast, profit nothing by their beneficence towards Israel, though their ruling status implies that they require nothing. Of more interest in this comparison, however, is the fact that Israel is more confined by his urban-dwelling American “allies” than his elite British patrons in the country. Even when he returns to London as a Hebrew-like brick-maker, his quality of life is worse than when employed as a field and yard worker in the *rural*

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<sup>26</sup> See Alan Brinkley’s overview of the Free Soil movement and the emergence of the new “cotton” South in *American History: A Survey* (452-57).



environs of Sir John and King George. Subtly lodged within this narrative dichotomy is the agrarian South's rebuttal of the Free Soil agenda: the North's industrial economic vision would lead to miserable urban wastelands for "free" white workers and emancipated blacks who, Southerners felt, would fare better under the protective umbrella of legal slavery (Brinkley 456-57). Almost as if to reinforce this point, the fugitive Israel leaves Sir John's and the King's gardens only to encounter heartache, imprisonment and poverty in the urban environments of Paris, Boston and London—in metropolitan "liberty," ironically, Israel encounters his harshest confinement.<sup>27</sup> Extrapolated from Melville's model of the forced laborer and fugitive Israel Potter, a pro-slavery advocate could also assert that the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 not only protected the "property" of slave owners, but safeguarded the wellbeing of the slaves, who in their infantile inferiority were ill-equipped to care for themselves as freepersons in the North's urban-industrial centers, where *white* laborers were sinking into poverty and depravity.<sup>28</sup>

Despite his Jewish "Christian" name and peasant surname, Israel Potter functions as more than a representative model for factory laborers or slaves within an industrializing, urbanizing terrain. He is also a tragic figure who, though a "free" citizen, suffers as a result of a loss of autonomy, ironically at the hands of his country's "liberty-loving" authorities. The issue of autonomy was also at stake in the Kansas-Nebraska debate, packaged by Stephen A. Douglas and other Democrats as an issue of "popular sovereignty" (Brinkley 450-51). Like Southerners, pro-slavery Kansans felt confined by the prospect of other states or the Federal government

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<sup>27</sup> Not only is the London metropolis a site of confinement, but also one which strips away individuality, rendering the laboring Other a dehumanized drone, respecting whom one neither dialogues nor ethically responds. As Judith R. Hiltner explains, "London is 'the city,' depicted as a concrete embodiment of forces that deny unique meaning and value to the individual. What Melville emphasizes in his descriptions of London [in *Israel Potter*] . . . is the protagonist's sense of human insignificance and the corollary reduction of people to things in a setting where masses 'pour like an endless shoal of herring' or trudge like 'convict tortoises' (304).

<sup>28</sup> Caroline L. Karcher shows the amalgamation of the African American slave and the urban worker in antebellum America within *Israel Potter*: "Israel apparently stands for America's slaves, both black and white. Once again exemplifying Melville's unsegregated sympathy with the oppressed, Israel's experience suggests many parallels with the Negroes" (107).

restricting slavery's expansion into newly organized territories, though Franklin Pierce's administration was sympathetic to the pro-slavery regime in Kansas (Brinkley 451). With respect to Melville, Michael Paul Rogin concludes that

*Israel Potter* also inverted Stephen Douglas's use of the Revolution. Douglas invoked "our fathers, when they framed the Government under which we live" to justify popular sovereignty; the fathers, he argued, would have allowed the territories to vote for slavery. Douglas spoke, as an American democrat, for territorial self-government. He was actually a confidence man like Melville's Franklin, promoting a transcontinental railroad and advancing his Presidential ambitions. (229)

On the other end of the spectrum, Free Soilers and emergent Republicans saw the Kansas-Nebraska Act as not just a failure to contain slavery—as a step toward its demise—but as asphyxiating their urban, industrial vision of a modern republic in favor of the backward, feudal-agrarianism of the cotton South (Brinkley 452-53). If Melville's Benjamin Franklin represents Northern urban-industrial "progress" and the mercenary John Paul Jones unfettered modern capitalism, the imprisoned, impoverished Israel embodies Southern anxieties over a Free Soil future. Ironically, this "American" concern regarding post-Industrial Revolution urbanization and labor was shared by socialists and Marxists on *both* sides of the Atlantic.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> A supreme irony within *Israel Potter* is the layers of confinement exposed by three separate but related revolutions: the American Revolution, the Industrial Revolution and the Revolution of 1848. The world Melville portrays images a disillusioned vision of the American Revolution where the individual citizen becomes a bonded Other, exacerbated by the degenerate social conditions that follow the technological "progress" of the Industrial Revolution and contribute to the Revolution of 1848 in Europe, as well as the dehumanization of slavery. Far from addressing these socio-ethical ills, for Melville the American Revolution offered no unifying vision for a more just political alternative, as Paul Rogin notes in *Subversive Genealogy*: "Israel Potter, inverting the story of the American Revolution, moved from freedom to slavery. Mocking Franklin's autobiography of success, *Israel Potter* is a biography of failure ... In one decisive respect, however, the reopening of the slavery issue left *Israel Potter* behind. Melville made the Revolution a prison at the moment when eulogies of the fathers—by Douglas and Lincoln alike—

But if Benjamin Franklin is “meddlesome, condescending, and manipulative, exercising a form of power over Israel that is virtually impossible for him to resist” (Temple 10), the self-aggrandizing and “savage” (80) John Paul Jones is a virile, bold and strategizing warrior, in great measure the prototypical entrepreneurial American “man of action” in the mid-1800’s. Thus, his religious enthusiasm for Poor Richard’s motto is easy to fathom: “‘God helps them that help themselves.’ That’s a clincher. That’s been my experience. But I never saw it in words before... I must get me a copy of this and wear it around my neck for a charm” (79). John Paul Jones is hard to dislike in that the unfortunate Israel finds him an inspiring figure as a military leader, but also one who, like Sir John and the King, appears to take a personal interest in Israel after “liberating” him. However, there is a significant difference between this benefactor and the British: beneath Paul Jones’ popular charm is a pure mercenary, and so Israel is again made an implement of someone else’s agenda. For the privateer, the aim is more about fame, fortune and vengeance than the revolutionary effort (74).

In a way John Paul Jones is more Other than Israel, being likened to a swarthy Indian “savage” (72) in addition to having tattoos on his arm (81), as if he were a Pacific islander from Melville’s *Typee*. From this point of view, Levinas’ ethos of responsive duty for the Other ironically demands more of the Yankee Israel than *vice versa*. By contrast, Israel’s lack of pronounced differentiating Otherness evident in his dialogic encounters with fellow Americans—excepting his humbler social and educational levels—renders his latent claim to the ethical response of the “Other” beholding him less urgent than what was demanded of Sir John and the King, for whom Israel was Other not just in terms of social class and culture, but also in his slave-like vulnerability as a fugitive. Also in contrast to Israel’s dialogic experiences of

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were generating political disintegration rather than containing it. The stone sepulchers of the fathers were losing their power to domesticate American politics; they were also about to disappear from Melville’s fiction” (229).

Otherness, the exchanges between the strong-willed John Paul Jones and the wily Franklin model a discursive transaction of labor and compensation that inverts an ethos of inter-subjective responsiveness, as each endeavors to render the “Other” an agent of his own designs. The persuasive Franklin desires the captain to serve in a secondary role as a decoy to British privateers in a small vessel, while an indignant Paul Jones demands of Franklin the more prestigious, autonomous command of a larger ship to raid the British coast (74): “Doctor Franklin, whatever Paul Jones does for the cause of America, it must be done through unlimited orders: a separate, supreme command; no leader and no counsellor but himself... Why then do you seek to degrade me below my previous level? I will mount, not sink. I live but for honor and glory. Give me, then, something honorable and glorious to do, and something famous to do it with” (74). Though mutual Others in terms of age, temperament and appearance, Franklin and John Paul Jones confront one another as equals within a common hierarchy and political cause, each claiming an official title—though Franklin is John Paul Jones’ nominal superior—and attempting to secure the “Other’s” acquiescence. Frustrated in his designs to re-obtain command of the *Indien*, John Paul Jones, ironically impressed by Israel’s non-flattering, “blunt” speech, attempts to requisition Israel’s services, a request that Franklin “bluntly” counters despite Israel’s willingness to comply: “Our friend here...is at present engaged for a very different *duty*” (75, *emphasis mine*). Franklin’s sense of loyalty and subordinate obligation is quite different from John Paul Jones’, and so these exchanges require unpacking.

On the one hand, Franklin, self-serving and egocentric in the extreme, understands his personal interest, being an American “Founding Father,” as bound to his nation’s fate, though viewing the “nation” as an idealized abstraction in his case leads to an ignorance of the real, particular person, such as Israel. On the other, John Paul Jones’ reflections, “I live but for honor

and glory... My God, why was I not born a Czar!" (74), in tandem with his desire for an autonomous "supreme command" (74), express a desire to be free of any ethical obligation to an Other or duty beyond securing his immediate good. Paul Jones understands the ethics of "autonomy" within the literal confines of the term's Greek etymology: like a Russian "Czar," he exists above "Others" and separately as a *law (nomos)* unto himself (*auto*). Also "blunt," Paul Jones thus enunciates his Otherness and what his martial labor entitles him to, embodying the individualism and self-reliance promoted by Poor Richard's motto. Each in their own way, both Franklin and Paul Jones serve as functionaries of the nascent American government while at the same time operating as agents of their own subjectivity.

Within the context of 1855, the polyphony of the competing voices of Israel, Franklin and John Paul Jones offers a glimpse into the text's conflicted engagement of antebellum politics, labor economics and the confining ethics of Otherness. Similar to Southern Democrats, John Paul Jones views his relationship to the "United" States as a contract of convenience ensuring self-interest, whereas Franklin embodies a Northern Whig/Republican view of the federated states as a unity of interdependent polities. In this regard, Israel's knee-jerk response to Paul Jones' invitation—"Fired by the contagious spirit of Paul, Israel, forgetting all about his previous desire to reach home, sparkled with response to the summons. But Doctor Franklin interrupted him" (75)—in conjunction with his happy, rural labor sojourns at Sir John's and Kew, signifies an working class preference for an autonomous, Jeffersonian paradigm of American polity and economy, as opposed to the urban totalization of the metropolitan Franklin.

But this polyphonic dialogue betrays ambivalence as well, for Franklin's overriding authority, as a "Founding Father," in re-establishing where Israel's primary duty lay, in addition to Israel's *and* Paul Jones' acquiescence, delineates the text's ideological trajectory by aligning

working class Otherness with the urban-industrial sphere. This ambivalence is reinforced by the fact that yeoman Israel, though opting at first for Paul Jones' Southern version of social economy, nevertheless "forgets" about returning home, though his origins are also rural. This contradiction speaks to the fact that, from a Whig, Republican or Free Soil perspective, there was no going back to Jefferson's or Calhoun's romantic, agrarian vision for the republic. Though John Paul Jones by happenstance "liberates" Israel following his re-apprehension by the British, while sailing back to the U.S. Israel is literally "ensnared" by a passing British vessel (175), returning him, the laboring Other, to captivity and later to the miserable London of the late 1700's, the proto-industrial metropolis where the proletarian worker "belongs" in a modern capitalist society.<sup>30</sup> Thus, Franklin's interjection proves prophetic, for Israel, like the yeoman Other he represents, has no agency in that his labor, duty and subjectivity are always-already defined and confined, as Gale Temple discusses: "Israel must ultimately accept the values Franklin imposes on him, for they have become part of the moral and economic foundation of citizenship in America. To reject Franklin's 'wisdom' would be tantamount to rejecting his very identity as a citizen and a patriot" (11).<sup>31</sup> Similar to the predetermined reality of the working

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<sup>30</sup> Gale Temple unpacks this circumstance in "*Israel Potter*: Sketch Patriotism": "Just as Israel cannot return home—for to do so would be to reach a point of self and systemic closure—so to must readers always remain in figurative 'exile' from the narratives of national belonging that ostensibly represent ideal forms of citizenship," then qualifying: to be in metaphorical 'exile; is not necessarily a bad thing, for such a condition enables readers to become collaborators in, even producers of, more ethical and pluralistic visions of American history. In the absence of patriotic affiliation, Melville suggests, we are more apt to relate to each other as equals, and to process global political change collaboratively rather than chauvinistically" (18). Temple's "readerly" analysis is creative in its global viewpoint, though I counter that her suturing of American patriotism with modern capitalist economics and hero-worship contradicts the logic of a disinterested ethical stance on the reader's part.

<sup>31</sup> Temple elaborates on this point, explaining that "Melville's novel implies that...subjects of American capitalism have little choice but to submit to it. As Israel's plight makes clear, for one to remain a viable human being in the midst of a society that sutures self-knowledge to the necessarily instable nineteenth-century marketplace, one must remain fragmented, in figurative exile from a fully self-actualized identity" (6). Temple adds: "despite the seeming despair of Melville's only serialized novel, the disruption and alienation of modern life portrayed in *Israel Potter* was also in some ways liberating for Melville, for it offered space for an unmoored, unaffiliated identity that could be meaningful and *ethical* in the absence of patriotic nationalism" (6, *emphasis mine*). This sense of the ethical and the "unmoored" identity implies the Levinas' imperative to be for the differentiated or "unaffiliated" Other. The ironic complication is that as an American yeoman/everyman, Israel is always-already "affiliated" with a working class totality, which renders him an abstracted Other while his uniqueness makes him a particularized subject.

class urban citizen, however, is that of the rejected non-citizen, the enslaved African American in the rural South. Neither worker would experience the human dignity with which Israel is treated while, ironically, laboring as a serf-like Other within the feudal confines of Sir John Millet's and George III's rural estates.

To return to John Paul Jones, in that he represents the autonomous Southern agenda, a circumstance typologically reinforced by his swarthy and sanguine nature, the captain is understandably taken with Poor Richard's individualistic motto to the extent that he decides to rename his cramped vessel *Duras* as the *Bon Homme Richard* in honor of the motto's author, in accordance with Israel's suggestion: "Being cribbed up in a ship named *Duras*! a sort of makes one feel as if you were in durance vile...call her *Poor Richard*" (152), to which the captain responds: "*Poor Richard* shall be her name, in honour to the saying, that 'God helps them that helps themselves,' as Poor Richard says" (153). The charm of the motto's self-reliant narcissism functions as an appropriate ethical frame in subsisting within the name of a solitary vessel appropriated by the *American* navy, as if being "cribbed up" in a wooden ship were somehow less confining if one could embrace a self-serving ethos of duty. The greater significance of the American ship's name is brought into relief during the epic battle with the British *Serapis*, where the narrator recounts the bloody naval encounter as a confused, claustrophobic and dialogic moment in which the themes of duty, mastery, servility, captivity, Otherness and allegiance come to a dramatic, if convoluted, climax. The death and destruction on both sides is so devastating that neither crew knows who is victorious and who surrenders (172). The narrator remarks, "[t]he belligerents were no longer, in the ordinary sense of things, an English ship and an American ship. It was a co-partnership and a joint-stock combustion-company of both ships; yet divided, even in participation" (167), later adding:

[t]he men of either [vessel] knew hardly which to do—strive to destroy the enemy, or save themselves. In the midst of this, one hundred human beings, hitherto invisible strangers, were suddenly added to the rest... Mutual obliteration from the face of the waters seemed the only natural sequel to hostilities like these. It is, therefore, honour to him as a man, and not reproach to him as an officer, that, to stay such carnage, Captain Pearson, of the *Serapis*, with his own hands hauled down his colours... In view of this battle one may ask—What separates the enlightened man from the savage? (170, 172-73).

Melville returns to the trope of Paul Jones' tattooing to highlight his "savage," diabolical ferocity (167, 171), implying that he would fight to the last man rather than surrender, even if capitulation was the humane moral imperative (Gilman 52).

Of greater interest, though, is the way Melville likens the fighting ships to a large business, suturing the "savage" metropolitan world of modern capitalism to a bloody battle where "invisible strangers"—anonymous laboring Others—are torn between two impulses, self-preservation and the martial duty to kill an enemy Others, competitors in the extreme.<sup>32</sup> Ironically, the mercenary Paul Jones commands a ship renamed in honor of a self-serving American ethos, and yet he would perversely accept his and his crew's destruction rather than submit to the *Serapis* (Gilman 51). Thus, the American captain answers the narrator's haunting question: unlike the "savage" example of Paul Jones, the ethical, "civilized" man does *not* "help himself" to the point of either his or an Other's destruction, regardless of the ambition or duty which calls him. This scene, enlivened by Melville's philosophical narration, anticipates the confused allegiances and ironically intimate "industrial"-scale slaughter of the Civil War.

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<sup>32</sup> Janis P. Stout follows this thread: "Melville's interpretation of the city as a constraint has intensified to a vision of the city as a prison [recall Franklin's 'imprisoning' Israel in Paris], and the sea, long emblematic of freedom, has become only a potential escape blighted and botched by man. A warship [is] imaged as a crowded city..." (169).



Following the battle, Israel, appearing destined to return to his homeland, is entangled on the boom of a passing British ship. By this ill-luck Israel is forced to resume a fugitive life of subterfuge and evasion: pretending to be a British sailor, he searches for sanctuary within the ship's watches. In a series of interviews, he passes from one stratagem of ubiquitous falsehood to another, yet is always rebuffed, "thrust from one floating world, where he is known and admired, to one in which he is a complete stranger" (Temple 12). Within these dialogic encounters, Israel, fearing apprehension and literal confinement, is unable to individuate himself as a real person. Thus, he is incapable of eliciting succor from the "Other" sailors *as* a particularized Other, in that his dialogic counterfeit has, ironically, already incarcerated his true self within an auto-generated totality. In this way, Israel attempts to shield himself with a generic non-identity of linguistic-cultural sameness that draws only contempt and annoyance from his would-be peers. The humorous exchanges Israel has on the British ship illustrate this, in addition to Melville's quasi-satiric rendering in this dialogic episode of a monologic "polyphony," wherein Israel, as a subject of politico-cultural Otherness, performs a multitude of generalized idiolects to conceal, ironically, his actual national differentness.

The episode highlights the working class subject's problem within the antebellum urban sphere, represented by the social microcosm of the ship: the laborer's isolating alienation and dehumanizing anonymity. Israel cannot assume an actual name, and his repeated expulsion from each group betrays a dialogic inability to solicit ethical responsiveness as a differentiated Other. However, as Janis P. Stout suggests, Melville's ethical commentary here transcends theoretic, politico-cultural or socioeconomic concerns and focuses instead on the interpersonal, dialogic dimension: "In the late work... Melville is less concerned with social injustice such as poverty and class hostility, and more concerned with failures of communication and compassion between

individuals [or Others]” (172). Yet she concedes that the confining, modern urban topography contributes to these “failures”: “Because there is no escape from the city walls, isolation becomes an inevitability” (172). I add that in a pragmatic industrial age of commodification and totalization, Poor Richard’s proverb epitomizes the individualistic, self-serving ethos eschewing dialogic, inter-subjective responsibility for the absolutely Other that Melville critiques.

The contrasting experiences that Israel endures localize the ethical stakes of *confinement* in a post-1848 and post-Kansas-Nebraska Act United States. As Anne Baker alludes, Israel is often confined as a slave, despite being white *and* an American citizen (10), albeit a traitor from the British perspective, though King George concedes that he is “an honest rebel” (38). Granted, a sociopolitical context assigns one a legal, totalized status within a locale: the Dred Scott Decision in 1857 would bring this question to a head. But the text’s climate inflects more than Melville’s treatment of Israel’s hybrid identity. On the level of inter-subjective ethics, Israel’s implementation by his “revolutionary” comrades engages the antebellum conversation surrounding the Compromise of 1850 and the Kansas-Nebraska Act, considered by pro-slavery advocates as circumventing unjust Federal “confinement,” yet condemned by Free Soilers as immoral, orchestrated attempts to perpetuate slavery. That is, to what degree did the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the preceding Fugitive Slave Law contribute to a “modern” ethical environment where working class citizens, and *not* just African slaves, were expected to function as dutiful implements of a larger political and economic mechanism?

Though Melville was not pro-slavery, *Israel Potter*’s dialogues betray his ambivalence toward this question. If the repudiation of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the Fugitive Slave Law and the confinement of Southern slavery to follow were to facilitate the expansion of Northern urbanization, industrialization and the totalization of “free” laborers, white *and* black, it would

be difficult to discern the moral superiority in the Free Soil platform over the Cotton South's agrarian model. But in between these two confining economic paradigms ambivalently represented by Melville lies the potential for ethical redemption in telling an alternative, and better, story of individuated Otherness and inter-subjective dialogue, which the ironic, creative destabilization of narrative polyphony actualizes. I thus keep Melville's ambivalence *and* irony in view as I shift to "Benito Cereno," focusing on the questions of Otherness, interpersonal ethics and antebellum politics more within the socioeconomic context of Southern slavery.

## II. "Benito Cereno"

The surreal, claustrophobic and façade-ridden world of the *San Dominick* appears at first to have little to do with Southern labor and economics, other than the fact that as a slaver, the ship's "cargo" of enslaved Africans feeds the New World's massive plantation economy of the 1790's. Rather, for antebellum readers, "Benito Cereno"'s most apparent concern is the general anxiety over slave insurrections that many held, particularly in the South, since such had precedents in the U.S., Haiti, and on a number of slave ships.<sup>33</sup> But if we read the novella through the trifocal lens of labor economics, Levinasian alterity ethics and dialogic inter-subjectivity, a more complex picture of the text's sociopolitical unconscious emerges. Wedged between a maritime analogue to manifest destiny and the Monroe doctrine on the one hand and an allegorical disparagement of Southern slavery on the other is an ironic antebellum anxiety over socioeconomic order and hierarchical control. Melville's attacks on the autocratic

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<sup>33</sup> A salient facet of this anxiety is the fact that the ringleader Babo and the rebel slaves he commands harbor designs on Amasa Delano's "Yankee" vessel, the *Bachelor's Delight*, in addition to the Spanish slaver they have already seized (256), for as Dana Luciano writes in "Melville's Untimely History: 'Benito Cereno' as Counter-Monument Narrative", "Melville's readers in 1855... would likely have had in mind other slave uprisings on U.S. soil, from Gabriel's Rebellion to Nat Turner's abortive revolt; the alternation and invention of detail in 'Benito Cereno' deliberately invite other events, such as the Haitian revolution and the Amistad incident, into its historical overlay as well" (47). As I discuss, however, another fear represented by this plotted aggression deals with the possible destabilizing spread of ethno-racial, socioeconomic and labor-functional disorder, latent in the antebellum South, to the urban-industrial North.

“tyranny” and “despotism” of cramped ships within his fiction and his representation of the vessel-as-polity signals not just the psychological processing of his traumatic seafaring experiences, but also a “Cooperian” fixation on sociopolitical stability and hierarchical models of governance.<sup>34</sup>

I contend that whereas Melville struggled with the moral/ethical implications of Southern slavery and its possible expansion, issues of socioeconomic order and political stability also loomed large for him as sectional tensions rose in the 1850’s. As Maurice S. Lee cautions, we ought not “limit [Melville’s] social concerns solely to the subject of slavery” (496), for “abolitionists and slaves are not the only parties suppressed” in the novella (498). He resumes:

we should note that by 1855 few Americans could describe their political scene without dwelling on the more and more prevalent themes of fragmentation, degeneration, and apocalypse. This was especially true after Webster and Clay followed Calhoun to the grave, as bloodshed in Kansas came to prefigure a widely anticipated war, and when the Whig collapse of 1854 prompted cries from Northern observers that “we are to have political chaos—‘confusion worse confounded’”... In its leaderless, violent, fractious confusion, “Benito Cereno” is timely indeed... In many ways, “Benito Cereno” is a cunning critique of a nation founded on a diverse and often incompatible body of political thought... This narrative crisis is also manifest in the antebellum era, where studies of political

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<sup>34</sup> Geoffrey Sanborn notes in *Whipscars and Tattoos: The Last of the Mohicans, Moby-Dick, and the Maori* that both Cooper and Melville, while fixated on the ordering binary of savagery versus civilization, exhibit “revolutionary” sympathies in their works as well, championing noble, indomitable, independent figures, such as Magua or Queequeg, who resist structural oppression yet who also represent, in their intrepidity, ideal leaders. I argue that Sanborn’s reading of Cooper and Melville reflects their ambivalence with respect to governing order; they do not reject structure or hierarchy *per se*, but nonetheless stress the importance of the *right kind* of leadership in “civilized” society, as opposed to tyranny. See Sanborn’s chapters on Cooper (37-72) and Melville (93-131).

discourse discuss *profound linguistic anxieties at the center of the national debate*. (505, *emphasis mine*)

Amongst Lee's observations, most crucial is how he sutures text, contextual "discourse" and multi-vocal "linguistic anxieties." I posit that "Benito Cereno" offers an allegorical psychological insight into the Free Soil movement which, as Sean Wilentz explains, was not a monolithic ideology or ethos but a convenient polyphonic alliance of diverse antislavery voices who, beyond halting slavery's expansion, sought to wrest power—votes—from influential pro-slavery Southern Democrats (617-28): the issue of slavery provided the political adhesive. But if Northerners in general and Free Soilers in particular saw slavery as a moral cancer "divisive enough to sever the bonds of Calhoun's union, to dissolve Van Buren's party connections, and to assemble platforms so evasive and specious [i. e. Free Soil]" (Lee 505), national "chaos" and "leaderless, violent, fractious confusion" emblemized by "cacophonous political conventions" (Lee 505) was the greater bogeyman.

For Free Soilers, the urban-industrial vision of economy and labor represented not just a lucrative alternative to Southern agrarianism and its quasi-feudalism, but also a more stable socioeconomic structure. In sum, the inter-subjective, "ethical" concern that paternalistic Northerners shared respecting Southern slave culture—and slaves—was not only that slavery was neo-feudal, an immoral system of labor, or that it was powerful enough to threaten the future of urban industrialization. It was also a fear of the South's inherent weakness and the "chaos" that would ensue in the U.S. following a systemic collapse of the South's slave-dependent economy.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, while first appearing counterintuitive, the abolition of slavery and

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<sup>35</sup> I hold that the chronicle of African slave rebellions in the New World, Haiti being the preeminent example, justified the apocalyptic fears of many within the antebellum U.S. regarding slavery, North *and* South. In connection with "Benito Cereno," Carolyn L. Karcher captures the fearful antebellum perspective on slavery's imminent collapse: "Even if we succeed in putting down more revolts—and there are bound to be more—sooner or

socioeconomic reordering of Southern culture in favor of the urban-industrial model, far from seeking to destroy boundaries of race, class and labor within American society as Southerners feared, would be the best means to preserving them long-term: legal segregation—Jim Crow—would endure until 1964, and de facto labor, economic and racial divides persist over fifty years later. As is the case on board the “leaderless, violent, fractious” *San Dominick*, from a Northern perspective the American South blurred necessary distinctions between race and labor-function, a perception to which Captain Delano’s “Yankee” observations—and mastering designs—regarding the slaves *and* crew of the Spanish slaver attest.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to sectional tensions over slavery and States’ rights, advances in communications, transportation, factory technology and “industrial”-scale plantation production were drastically affecting the U.S.’s social topography overall in the mid 1850’s. Also impacted was discourse on labor ethics, featuring contested visions of labor in an expanding American economy, Free Soil versus pro-slavery. That said, the Compromise of 1850 and its Fugitive Slave Law occupy a large portion of “Benito Cereno’s” political unconscious (DeLombard 35) in terms of the allegorical interplay between the *San Dominick* and the *Bachelor’s Delight* and their crews. The two ships, as modern political microcosms, signify contrasting socioeconomic visions of the nation: not imperial Spain versus the American republic, but the agrarian, slave-dependent

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later we will succumb to our own inner rot” (140). She claims, as do I, that the text shows how “the perpetuation of slavery spells apocalyptic destruction for America...that unless slavery were abolished, the irreconcilable conflict between a white master class blinded with racism and a black slave population seething with hatred would culminate in the ruin of the flawed republic [Melville] loved” (109, 158). Similarly, Robert S. Levine writes in *Conspiracy and Romance*: “While Northern celebrants of ‘free labor’ saw themselves as words apart from Southern enslavers, they too remained fearful about the prospect of black violence, for it was a tenet central to antislavery writing that the presence of chattel slavery in republican America only exacerbated potential for a ‘war of extermination’ between the races. Furthermore...Northern elites possessed their own related fears of insurrectionary violence...not of the black slaves, but of the urban poor, especially Catholics and other European immigrants, who likewise were feared as incipient revolutionaries” (167). I posit that for many Americans in the 1850’s, one form of “insurrectionary” violence would stimulate the other.

<sup>36</sup> Jeanine Marie DeLombard discusses the blurring of race and labor categories in “Salvaging Legal Personhood: Melville’s *Benito Cereno*,” arguing that the “contractual” relationship of the African slaves with Benito Cereno post-“uprising” opens up an unstable, liminal space between slaves and “free” contract laborers (40-49).

South versus the industrial, “free” labor North (Lee 500). Below I sketch the contours of this allegorical contrast.

The *San Dominick* and its *nominal* commander, Don Benito, are depicted via the normative gaze of the Yankee captain as being in a state of deterioration and “debility” (168),<sup>37</sup> mere shades of a once-glorious imperial past fallen into a condition of “faded grandeur” (164).<sup>38</sup> By contrast, the *Bachelor’s Delight* of Duxbury, Massachusetts, is described as a large “general trader...with a valuable cargo” (160) characterized by a “quiet orderliness” (172). Furthermore, the forlorn Spanish slaver and the tattered remnants of its crew and human “cargo” appear stagnant, as if the doldrums encountered after the slave mutiny left the vessel and its remaining complement in suspended animation, a “whitewashed monastery” with “Black Friars pacing the cloisters” (163). The “hatchet-polishers” and “oakum-pickers” proceed monk-like with their “monotone”-ous work and “chant” (166-67), just as the collared Atufal “must” appear every two hours before Don Benito in a timeless rhythm (183), these “rituals” all being a part of Babo’s façade. Nevertheless, just as the crippled *San Dominick* drifts at the mercy of the weather, time and its slave mutineers, the Southern society that the Spanish ship and its inhabitants represent likewise sought to raise a cloak of normalcy to mask from the Northern Other its socioeconomic helplessness, moral/ethical contradictions and underlying sense of impending crisis.

In addition, the cryptic phrase scrawled on the *San Dominick*’s hull, “Follow your leader,” provides the key to unlocking the polyphonic significance of “Benito Cereno’s”

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<sup>37</sup> With respect to Don Benito, Carolyn L. Karcher writes: “the character type on which Melville models him is to be found...in the contemporary plantation myth; for Don Benito corresponds in almost every respect to the literary stereotype of the southern gentleman” (136).

<sup>38</sup> Dana Luciano affirms that “by the nineteenth century viewers were inclined to see ruins in accordance with their own sense of history, framed by a progressive view of civilization in which the cyclical rise and fall of great powers drove humanity upward... Accordingly, the ruined ship, for Delano, testifies to...his own ascendancy, as a hard-working American, on the world-historical stage” (41). I argue that the “ascendancy” that Delano’s triumphant gaze speaks to is not limited to an Anglo-American “rise” at the expense of a European colonial “decline,” but rather the industrial North’s eventual domination of the agrarian South.

contextual anxieties, in particular the U.S.'s sectional tensions and unstable social, racial and labor-functional boundaries. As a command, albeit an ambiguous one in that addressor *and* addressee are obscured, an assertion of hierarchy is implicit. Yet, the slogan's author, the slave "leader" Babo, ironically destabilizes it in that the translation of the Spanish *jefe* is "boss" or "chief" in a *labor* context, akin to a foreman, as opposed to "leader" in a political or martial sense, which in Spanish is rendered as *caudillo*, *guía* or *líder*. This word is more fitting for the militaristic leadership role that Babo assumes as the instigator of a mutiny, despite his claim to having been a "slave" to both blacks and whites (183). Further complicating this picture, the "leader" of Captain Delano's boarding party yells the same slogan when taking control of the *San Dominick* (237), also deploying the ship's motto during a military-like action, though again, the specific "leader" is unclear, the subjectless motto inviting an "Other's" appropriation.

But just as the imperative motto does not enunciate one specific "leader" that its implied reader must "follow," likewise the narrative fomenting ambiguity, for it presents not one would-be "leader," but three (Lee 502): Benito Cereno, Amasa Delano and Babo, the "captain of the [rebel] slaves" and the mutiny's architect (222). Furthermore, the economy of labor on the *San Dominick* is confusing. The "inverted hierarchy" (Lee 498) of the ship's "leadership" after the insurrection manifests a drastic reordering and a subterfuge. This is mirrored by the ship's division of labor, turned upside-down post-revolt, a destabilized economic structure with a sham production system.<sup>39</sup> In a scene that reveals this blurring of labor roles with Africans operating as overseers of *white* menials, Delano observes "a sailor seated on the deck engaged in tarring

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<sup>39</sup> Maurice S. Lee notes too that "in 'Benito Cereno' revolution brings only new oppression. Melville does challenge race relations by inverting color supremacy, but *class consciousness* remains largely inchoate, even if Melville bemoans the ambivalence of antislavery and *labor reform*" (504, emphasis mine). I counter that the confusion of labor roles amongst crewmen and slaves raises the issue of proper class boundaries, not just within an ethno-racial hierarchy as it pertains to the Southern plantation system, but also respecting the North's "modern," industrial economy, where the type and location (factories and surrounding slums) of labor did as much to denote socioeconomic boundaries, social immobility and physical confinement as race did in the American South.



the strap of a large block, a circle of blacks squatted round him inquisitively eyeing the process... The mean employment of the man was in contrast with something superior in his figure. His hand, black with continually thrusting it into the tar pot held for him by a negro, seemed not naturally allied to his face” (196). Like the tarring sailor, the “oakum-pickers,” the “hatchet-polishers,” the group of African women and children and the remnants of the ship’s original crew—including officers forcibly disguised as common seamen—all “perform” a counterfeit function, as do “captain” Don Benito, the “obsequious” Babo and the chained, mute “king,” Atufal. The assertive, self-reliant Yankee is the only one on board the *San Dominick* whose actions and words are somewhat genuine. Ironically, though, this maritime prototype of Poor Richard’s mercenary proverb, due to his situational ignorance and his willful, and avaricious, self-delusion, also misreads the situation and overestimates his agency, despite Don Benito’s coolness. But, as Dana Luciano puts it: “Delano’s approval of himself makes up for the Spanish captain’s indifference” (41).

Yet even if the Yankee captain has less power than he assumes, his endeavor, and through him, the narrator’s, to subdue the literal cacophony of languages/voices on the Spanish ship speaks to the antebellum “linguistic anxieties” that Lee spotlights. Such being the case, the attempted muting of the polyphony on the *San Dominick* adds another ironic wrinkle to the text’s discourse. Beyond the West African dialects that the slaves spoke, the concluding deposition affirms that “the negro Babo understands well the Spanish” (249) in addition to other African slaves whose Spanish was “tolerable” (203), just as the Delano, a native speaker of English, knew enough Spanish to “converse with some freedom” with Don Benito (168).<sup>40</sup> Of course,

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<sup>40</sup> Gavin Jones marks the significance of this linguistic phenomenon in “‘Dusky Comments of Silence’: Language, Race and Herman Melville’s ‘Benito Cereno’”: “alongside the employment of African languages in the tale, there is equal evidence for the African manipulation of a European language: a manipulation that has even more terrifying

both Melville and the historical Captain Delano relate their narratives in English, translating, paraphrasing and editing the Spanish sources as they see fit. When an old Spanish sailor tries to converse in secret with Delano in limited English, the narrator re-appropriates the “Other’s” attempted dialogue, framing and paraphrasing in standard English the imperfect English which the sailor would “confine” with his native tongue: “While Captain Delano stood watching him, suddenly the old man threw the knot towards him, *saying in broken English*—the first he heard on the ship—*something to this effect*: ‘Undo it, cut it, quick.’ It was said lowly, but with such condensation and rapidity, that the long, slow words in Spanish, which had preceded and followed, *almost operated as covers to the brief English in between*” (202, *emphasis mine*). The Spanish sailor uses English as a covert idiom, masked by proximate Spanish utterances in that many of his slave captors know Spanish, though inexplicably Delano, who speaks *both* languages, can make no response: “knot in head, Captain Delano stood mute” (202).

But if only (Yankee) English can provide a “normative” discursive frame for reestablishing the categorical Otherness of Spaniards, as proxies for American Southerners, and slaves speaking Spanish and West African dialects, then it is curious that, as an empowered Northerner, Captain Delano is incapable of *any* utterance in ethical response to a differentiated Other. However, if we reground this reading of “Benito Cereno” within the context of the North-South debate, the significance of the Yankee Delano’s bizarre linguistic incomprehension comes into focus. Maurice Lee explains:

By 1855, the North and South preferred different dictionaries, read different textbooks, and had become largely separate literary markets, while the slavery “dialogue” had entered a stage where the most compelling political topic was at

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implications for the whites on board the ship” (40). I add that this “manipulation” of language by non-white Others is likewise “terrifying” from the mastering Northern perspective that Delano embodies.

what point endlessly repeated arguments must finally give way to war. In “Benito Cereno,” Melville predicts that language will not solve sectional conflict, that whether mistranslated, ignored or suppressed, words will eventually end in deeds, (499)

that is, “cutting the [political] knot” binding North and South. Though the Spanish sailor speaks in “broken English” according to Delano’s Yankee ear, it is as if Delano is incapable of comprehending or responding to the “Other’s” command to untie the knot, rejecting his language *and* authority. Likewise, Lee also adds: “More than most of his peers, Melville implicates both North and South in sectional misprision... We can even argue that ‘Benito Cereno’ anticipates a revisionist version of the [Civil] war, one that blames not the ethics or economics of slavery but the inability of two alien cultures to *talk* over differences peaceably” (499, *emphasis mine*).

This sequence also indicates that the narrator assigns to the Yankee captain the sole, ethical responsibility for mastering the text’s discourse “as a dominant narrative perspective” and embodiment of “the law” (Pahl 179n8), regardless of what spoken language is implied. The interpersonal demand belongs to Delano, to whose voiced initiative “Others” must respond, not *vice versa*. Thus, the dialogic interplay the reader encounters throughout Melville’s novella, a limited third-person narrative, is filtered through Delano’s Yankee perceptions of linguistic, cultural and ethno-racial difference.<sup>41</sup> Delano’s mediation as a narrative conduit is reinforced by the fact that, whereas Spanish would have been the *lingua franca* on the *San Dominick*, Melville’s English “translation” standardizes the dialogues, the accompanying action and the

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<sup>41</sup> Paul Downes notes in “Melville’s *Benito Cereno* and the Politics of Humanitarian Intervention” that though it is difficult to “identify a position of narrative authority or culpability with any one individual...without Delano there is no perspective on these events at all. Without Delano the third-person narrative voice is nowhere” (481).

narrator's commentary.<sup>42</sup> The ambivalent, bilingual exception is the motto on the bow. First given in Spanish—"Seguid vuestro jefe"—but restated in English near the conclusion, it is appropriated as a martial rallying cry by the "leader" of Delano's boarding party prior to capturing the *San Dominick*, a symbolic act of cultural-linguistic domination. Babo's and Don Benito's "Spanish" dialogues, however, are always narrated in English.

Ironically, Babo, Don Benito and the rest of the *San Dominick*'s diverse company, all figures of differentiated Otherness, in a literal manner of "speaking" are linguistically totalized. That is, they are confined by the narrator's dominant, hegemonic discourse as routed through the internal voice and evaluative Yankee perspective and of Delano, "the embodiment of white oppression" (Pahl 172).<sup>43</sup> The "Spaniard," though, is voiceless, "apathetic and mute" from the beginning of the narrative (171): "His voice was like that of one with lungs half gone—hoarsely *suppressed*, a husky whisper" (169, *emphasis mine*). What he does manage to say is a product of Babo's "suppressive" ventriloquism, the mutiny's enigmatic "leader" also becoming silent when captured, thereafter "[meeting] his voiceless end," beheaded and burned (258). In an ambivalent peripatetic maneuver, the narrator exerts final mastery over the mysterious African who had manipulated Don Benito's discourse (256), ironically ventriloquizing through a re-Othered subject reduced to silence, stripped of agency by force of narrative description: "Seeing all was

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<sup>42</sup> Gavin Jones comments that there are levels of linguistic representation within the text, even if for practical reasons: "We might conclude that the narrator is simply ignoring the specifics of African language; that he is avoiding the problem of having people speak in little-known African tongues by displacing African speech altogether, replacing it with the tale's supposed English translation of Spanish" (43). He later goes further: "'Benito Cereno' acts to blur the linguistic differentiation between African and European speech" (43), a statement which reinforces the text's polyphonic character, in that the Delano-flavored narrator expends significant space reestablishing the ethno-racial, social and functional categories of Otherness that Melville's novella blurs.

<sup>43</sup> Contradicting the notion that the non-white Others on the *San Dominick* are linguistically assimilated by the narrator, Gavin Jones writes: "Instead of implying racial sameness, Melville clearly demarcates ethnic boundaries, dividing the slaves into several groups...moving toward a vision of increased cultural heterogeneity" (40-41). However, the mastering ethno-racial, social and labor-functional categorization that the narrator employs via Delano's Yankee gaze operates as a form of textual totalization in that the individual non-white Other remains undifferentiated on the ethical level, even as a unique person meriting moral/dialogic responsiveness.

over, [Babo] uttered no sound, *and could not be forced to*. His aspect *seemed to say, since I cannot do deeds, I will not speak words*" (258, *emphasis mine*).

To return to Don Benito, when asked to elaborate on his ship's misfortunes, the "Spaniard" refers to his own "muted" plight as "[p]ast all speech" (209), remaining "speechless" and "incoherent" at the moment of Babo's capture and his deliverance (232-33). The narrator adds: "the Spaniard's melancholy sometimes ended in muteness" even when he spoke with the American captain as a "free" man (258). With regard to Delano, after boarding the *San Dominick* the narrator describes the following muddled scene: "[Delano] was at once surrounded by a clamorous throng of *whites and blacks*, but the latter outnumbering the former more than could have been expected, negro transportation-ship as the stranger was. But, *in one language*, and *as with one voice*, all poured out a common tale of suffering" (165, *emphasis mine*).

Melville's mastering representation of dialogic polyphony—one language and one voice, the narrator's English—"speaks" not just to an ethical response to undifferentiated Others' "common tale of suffering," but to a meta-textual desire to reassert a stable social order. If the narrator's English uni-vocality "speaks" to an attempt at narrative mastery, then Melville's chosen construction of linguistic consonance amongst the mixed "throng" of whites and Africans in the first place is as ambivalent and ironic as it is illogical. Furthermore, it signals an uneasy preoccupation with sociolinguistic blurring, emphasized by the fact that such is Delano's first impression upon boarding the "unreal" Spanish vessel (166), and one quite unnerving for the regimented Yankee. The narrator explains: "Here it may be observed that as, on the first visit of the boat, the American had not permitted *his men* to board the [*San Dominick*], neither did he now; being unwilling to add to the *confusion* of the decks" (208, *emphasis mine*). However,

Delano would in the end order these same crewmen to seize control of the Spanish ship, thus mastering its sociolinguistic “confusion.”<sup>44</sup>

This sociolinguistic blurring also runs concurrent with a blending of races and laborers on the Spanish slaver, as the narrator remarks: “the *work* of hoisting in the casks was resumed, *whites and blacks singing at the tackle*” (207, *emphasis mine*). Or, as Gavin Jones surmises, “[t]he linguistic logic of the tale is equivocal: it tends to equate racial groups, thereby confusing the racist hierarchy upon which Delano’s ideology depends” (48). On one level, the limited narrator’s deployment of Delano’s internal English monologism is ironic, for the narrator explains in English that Delano converses with Don Benito and Babo in Spanish while rendering their dialogues in English. Also, as a descriptive channel Delano’s internal voice exerts a normalizing mastery over the narrative which confines various groups of Others within their totalized ethno-racial and labor-functional categories, as exemplified by the racial descriptions of the “oakum-pickers” and the “hatchet-polishers” (166-67). Nevertheless, polyphonic discourses erupt within Melville’s dialogues which resist categorical confinement insofar as they re-announce the ethical imperative to respond to the individualized speaking Other as a subject of racial, social or labor-functional hybridity. Such an eruption occurs prior to the shaving episode, where Babo proposes: “master can talk, and Don Amasa can listen, while Babo here lathers and strops” (210). Babo, secretly orchestrating all on the *San Dominick*, “performs” menial labor as a faithful servant. At the same time, he subtly “masters” the dialogue between the Yankee and Spanish captains via his vocal interjection, masked as selfless responsiveness to the needs of “Others,” Delano and Don Benito submitting to the “slave’s” verbal coercion.

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<sup>44</sup> Gavin Jones marks the interrelation between linguistic multi-vocalism and confusion within the text: “A situation of increased linguistic variety would inevitably create a *chaos* of incomprehensibility on board the ship” (41, *emphasis mine*). And, as Maurice Lee notes, the specter of “chaos” is one of the principal North-South anxieties operative throughout “Benito Cereno” (505).

As this example shows, the question of overt versus covert motivation and the presence of competing layers of intentionality erupt during these polyphonic dialogues. At first, Delano boards the *San Dominick* “to render whatever assistance might be in his power” to a vessel in apparent distress (167). He then assumes a patronizing attitude towards the “invalid” Don Benito (171) and the “curious” Spaniards, in addition to the frequent racist observations he makes respecting the African slaves. Like the ship’s intermingled personnel, Delano’s “ethical” intentions towards Don Benito and the *San Dominick* are also mixed, for as the captain of a commercial vessel with a “privateer’s-man” first mate, his calculations include a mercenary element, as “Don Benito’s” offer of reward for the *San Dominick*’s recovery suggests: “The more to encourage the sailors, they were told that the Spanish captain considered his ship as good as lost; that she and her cargo, including some gold and silver, were worth more than a thousand doubloons. Take her, and no small part should be theirs. The sailors replied with a shout” (235). The text never clarifies whether this “offer” of salvage rights issues from Don Benito or Captain Delano. If the latter, Delano’s inter-subjective response to Don Benito’s “off-white” Otherness<sup>45</sup> is not just condescending, but also predatory: “The imperialism American is almost too glad to take over for Don Benito... Melville suggests that selfishness lies at the core of human interaction” (Lee 501, 511). Thus it is Delano, and not Don Benito, that should be suspected of being a “plotting pirate” (232).<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Don Benito’s “precise and costly” clothing was part of Babo’s deception (258), in that he dressed his “master” to fit dandy stereotype of a young Spanish gentleman, rendering him more culturally Other to the American Delano.

<sup>46</sup> Douglas M. Coulson argues that “[t]here are also suggestions that Delano’s original decision to investigate the *San Dominick* is motivated by the hope of commercial salvage gain” (29). Paul Downes too raises this question of Delano’s ethical motivation, opposing benevolent duty and aggressive “intervention”: “Melville’s story, I want to suggest, attempts to grapple with...the relationship between intervention that is ultimately ‘military’—backed by all the violence that political power is capable of exerting. Furthermore, Melville’s attempt to comprehend these dynamics proceeds, simultaneously, by examining the play of vulnerability and power that defines the story’s (insistently) American protagonist, the ‘generous’ Captain Amasa Delano” (473). I alter Downes’ assertion by referring to the Massachusetts captain as a *Yankee* “protagonist.”

Weighed against these circumstances is the fact that the “reality” Delano perceives proves illusive, and what he believes concerning the *San Dominick* and its remaining company is hubris-fed self-deception. As with much of what Delano assumes to be true, the myth of his own ethno-cultural superiority over Benito Cereno, his Spanish crew and the African slaves is constructed upon the presumption of Anglo-American power over the narrative’s actors and incidents. But Delano’s “control” of the *San Dominick*, like Don Benito’s, is nominal, the American captain being the willing dupe of Babo’s pantomime: his agency is just as confined as that of his Spanish counterpart. It is only when Babo fails to contain the information regarding the mutiny, therefore relinquishing control of the narrative as well as Don Benito, that Delano is able to gain actual control of the *San Dominick*, literally invading the ship and subduing it by force. The story ironically comes full circle: the Spanish slaver, at first confining its human cargo, experiences a revolt whereby its Spanish masters become *de facto* prisoners of the “fugitive” African slaves, who are in turn violently recaptured and re-confined by the mercenary Yankee Delano and his crew.<sup>47</sup>

To situate this *peripeteia* within Melville’s historic surroundings, Delano’s ultimate domination of a traumatized slave-polity as imaged by the *San Dominick* is ironic not just because a *Yankee* recaptures “fugitive” slaves after offering to purchase one (194-95), but more subtly so in that his smaller vessel, the *Bachelor’s Delight*, is a sealer (161). Thus Delano and his mercantile ship, at first glance representing the Northern, Free Soil industrial counterpart to the South’s agrarianism and “feudal” hierarchy emblemized by the Spanish slaver, also signify a socioeconomic paradigm of labor both Other and inferior to the South’s plantation system: as literal hunters, they rate as more primitive than agrarians within Crevecoeur’s “progressive”

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<sup>47</sup> Carolyn L. Karcher contextualizes the *denouement* of “Benito Cereno”: “this ominous ending may also expose the ‘compromise’ the North had recently made with slavery, by reaffirming her commitment to suppressing insurrections and recapturing fugitives, as a futile attempt to postpone the day of reckoning” (140).



developmental model of civilization. That said, does the Yankee Delano's mercenary, "will to power" gaze (Pahl 174) warrant an assumption of superior Otherness as compared to the "off-white" Spaniards when Delano and Don Benito were at the mercy of Babo and the African mutineers all along? True, Delano's self-serving grandiosity, camouflaged as disinterested benevolence toward an Other in need, indicates that in assuming tactical command of the ship, the Spanish Others on the *San Dominick* ought to "follow" their new "leader" and his modern, Free Soil ethos, for as Dana Luciano posits, "[Delano's] sympathy-inspired good works operate as the means for his own self-consolidation" (41).<sup>48</sup> I submit, though, that on this point Melville remains ambivalent, for as the *San Dominick's* ambiguous motto implies, the binary of "leader" and "follower," like that of mastery and duty, remain undetermined, fluid within the text *and* in the antebellum United States. For instance, the usurping Delano muses that after being "restored to health" Don Benito "should also be restored to authority," but only following the American captain's "dutiful" paternalistic intervention (193). As we see in several dialogues, scenes of confinement and attempted subjugation of Others fail to contain the narrative's ambivalent, polyphonic discourses on mastery and inter-subjective duty. This problematizes ethical or ideological readings of "Benito Cereno" that suggest the text functions as mere critique of European colonialism, Southern slavery and ineffectual tyrannical governance. Rather, the text manifests a dialogue within a dialogue<sup>49</sup> during Delano's stunted interactions with Don Benito and Babo, as his initial thoughts of benevolent duty toward a particularized Other evolve into a

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<sup>48</sup> In "The Gaze of History in 'Benito Cereno,'" Dennis Pahl affirms Delano's desire to "domesticate" the *San Dominick* (175), "forcing" the "signs he sees...to become an integral part of his own system of truth, of his own 'natural' view of the world, his own ideology" (174). Pahl adds: "All this naturalization, or domestication, of the world around him serves Delano well as a way to construct a self that would have complete dominion over all those he considers Other," including Benito Cereno (176).

<sup>49</sup> Lee also writes: "the most provocative readings of 'Benito Cereno' see it as 'a discourse about discourse' (497).

paternalistic concern for restoring social order (Nelson 4), followed by manipulation, coercion, conquest and plunder.

This metamorphosis commences soon after Delano witnesses the scuffle between the Spanish and African youths. Delano remarks to Don Benito, “Had such a thing happened on board the *Bachelor’s Delight*, instant punishment would have followed” (179), while musing in silence: “Is it...that this hapless man is one of those paper captains I’ve known, who by policy wink at what by power they cannot put down? I know no sadder sight than a commander who has little of command but the name” (179). Granted, Don Benito was not in “command” at all, hence the black youth’s bold attack on his Spanish counterpart; still, Delano’s unspoken judgment in response to his vocalized query inaugurates a new pattern of thought for the Yankee captain. The *San Dominick* is not just a stricken Spanish vessel with a starving, dehydrated crew in need of assistance, but a dysfunctional social economy where blurred racial, hierarchical and labor divisions have become unstable, “like a slumbering volcano” (192), “ethically” demanding the re-imposition of order.<sup>50</sup> Douglas M. Coulson also affirms this: “Delano finds the relationship between the Spaniards and slaves on the *San Dominick* deeply disturbing” (2).

Responding to the racially confused scene before him, the unwitting Yankee captain challenges his Spanish counterpart with unsolicited advice on the correct management of his African “laborers”: “I should think, Don Benito...that you would find it advantageous to keep all your blacks employed, especially the younger ones, no matter at what useless task, and no matter what happens to the ship...I find such a course indispensable. I once kept a crew on my quarter-deck thrumming mats for my cabin” (179). As Delano becomes more ill-at-ease on a “strange craft” with “strange folks” (205), the benign managerial suggestions to a fellow captain mutate

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<sup>50</sup> Even the ship’s name, “*San Dominick*,” connotes sociocultural hybridity. A purely *Spanish* rendering of it would be “*San(to) Domingo*,” the appellation “*Dominick*” being an inexplicable Anglicization adjoined to the Spanish equivalent of “saint,” suggesting that the *colonial* vessel was always destined for Anglo-American appropriation.

into designs on assuming control of the Spanish vessel through any “helpful” pretext. Don Benito’s Otherness likewise devolves in Delano’s Yankee estimation from European peer to incompetent and treacherous “Spaniard.” Delano muses: “[h]ow unlike we are made! ...these Spaniards are all an odd set; the very word Spaniard has a curious, conspirator, Guy-Fawkish twang to it...” (181, 206). The narrator then grants further access to Delano’s thinking: “he would spare three of his best seamen for temporary deck officers... On some benevolent plea withdrawing the command from [Don Benito], Captain Delano would yet have to send her to Concepcion, in charge of his second mate... Such were the American’s thoughts... There was a difference between the idea of Don Benito’s darkly pre-ordaining Captain Delano’s fate, and Captain Delano’s lightly arranging Don Benito’s” (177,193). Despite his involuntary part in Babo’s subterfuge, Don Benito is less the “conspirator” than the opportunistic Yankee. In paranoid instances of auto-projection, the American captain suspects the “curious Spaniard” of scheming to use the African slaves to kill *him* and steal *his* ship (203-04), though in the end this stratagem was Babo’s, not Don Benito’s (256).

As the tense dialogue unfolds amongst the three would-be “leaders” of the *San Dominick*, Don Benito, Captain Delano and Babo, these suspicions and covert motives come to the fore, fueling the text’s ethical polyphony. Despite the novella’s title, the majority of the narrative surrounds *Amasa Delano*’s actions and thoughts (Goldberg 6) and the sectional anxieties they represent on a contextual plane. The chief ambivalence is Delano’s emblematic ethical conundrum, similar to that of the industrial Free Soilers in the 1850’s. The Yankee captain is caught between conflicting ethical impulses: his obligation to assist an individual Other; his duty as an officer to restore a segregated social order and functional labor economy within a disintegrated hierarchy; and his mercenary interest as the captain of a Yankee commercial vessel

to appropriate the assets of a vulnerable ship. The text's dialogues delineate this trajectory of ambivalent thought.

Towards the conclusion of Amasa Delano's "strange" sojourn aboard the *San Dominick*, the text's conflicted preoccupation with the ship's confused categories of race and labor emerges through the American captain's spoken *and* unspoken discourses with Don Benito, in particular as the focus of his musings shifts to assuming control of the "Other's" vessel. After Babo feigns being cut on the cheek by his "master," a disapproving Delano reflects, "this slavery breeds ugly passions in man" (218), whereupon he minimizes his initial ethical response to Babo's apparent mistreatment: "But a sort of love-quarrel, after all" (218). Upon the appearance of the "mulatto" cabin steward, an African with a European "physiognomy," Delano ruminates on the subject of racial hybridity in the context of slavery (219), noting to Don Benito:

I am glad to see this usher-of-the-golden rod of yours; the sight refutes an ugly remark once made to me by a Barbadoes planter; that when a mulatto has a regular European face, look out for him; he is a devil. But see, your steward here has features more regular than King George's of England; and yet there he nods, and bows, and smiles; a king, indeed—the king of kind hearts and polite fellows. What a pleasant voice he has, too? (219).

Yet Delano's rhetoric shifts again, as he hedges:

But tell me, has he not, as far as you have known him, always proved a good, worthy fellow? ... Come, for the reason just mentioned, I am curious to know... For it were strange, indeed, and not very creditable to us white-skins, if a little of our blood mixed with the African's, should, far from improving the latter's

quality, have the sad effect of pouring vitriolic acid into black broth; improving the hue, perhaps, but not the wholesomeness. (219)

Don Benito then affirms enigmatically: “not to speak of negroes, your planter’s remark I have heard applied to the Spanish and Indian intermixtures in our provinces. But I know nothing about the matter” (220). In addition to Delano’s alloyed response to the presence *and* notion of the “adulterated African,” next to whom he renders the “full-blooded” African Babo inferior and “jealous” (219), his paranoid distrust of the “Other” captain, akin to his latent and then overt concern over the “intermixture” of his ship’s social and labor roles, concretizes around the idea of hybridity. The language characterizing Delano’s growing, albeit ambivalent, suspicions of Don Benito is telling: “if the whites had dark secrets concerning Don Benito, could then Don Benito be any way in complicity with the blacks? But they were too stupid. Besides, who ever heard of a white so far a renegade as to apostatize from his very species almost, by leaguering in against it with negroes?” (201). But when Delano’s crew assaults the *San Dominick*, two Spanish gentlemen officers, made by the Africans to look the part of common sailors, are shot by the boarding party, who assume that they “in some way favored the cause of the negroes” as “renegade” seamen (253-54). Ironically, one of them yells “[d]on’t board” out of concern for the Americans’ safety (254) and not as an abettor of the mutineers, though as was the case with Delano on the *San Dominick*, these Spanish sailors are also unable to make their selfless warnings understood by any “Others” (252-53). Simply put, the remaining “Spaniards” on board the ship are too amalgamated with the Africans to be perceived by Delano’s crew as European confreres, a form of ethno-racial totalization that not even Don Benito escapes.

This ethno-racial Othering of the “Spaniard” Don Benito occurs early in the text, a sense of uncanny alienation which increases during the course of Delano’s interior monologues. Don

Benito is characterized as a “*dark Spaniard* . . . the central hobgoblin of all” (193, *emphasis mine*) and likened to a treacherous “Jew” (229),<sup>51</sup> losing credibility in the views of Delano and the narrator in presiding over a social economy where racial, labor-functional and linguistic boundaries have broken down.<sup>52</sup> Noting Babo’s “familiarity” with his “master,” Delano’s genial regard for Babo as “less a slave than a devoted companion” (169)—“[s]lave I cannot call him” (176)—alters as the narrator relates his changing affective response to their dialogic interactions: “the menial familiarity of the servant lost its original charm of simple-hearted attachment” (185). Delano later remarks to Don Benito: “your black here seems high in your trust; a sort of privy-counselor, in fact” (189), the Spanish captain explaining that “since losing his officers he had made Babo (whose original office, it now appeared, had been captain of the slaves) not only his constant attendant and companion, but in all things his confidant” (222). Of course, the “spectacle of fidelity . . . and confidence” that first characterizes the “beauty of that relationship” between Don Benito and Babo is a charade, Babo commanding as the “leader” of both slaves and Spaniards post-mutiny.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> María de Guzmán reasserts the Otherness of Don Benito for Delano, noting that “within the [1800’s] Anglo-American imaginary . . . ‘Spain’ and ‘Spaniards’ meant African, Asian, Middle Eastern, and ‘Indian’” (64).

<sup>52</sup> De Guzmán likewise comments that “[‘Benito Cereno’]s determinism is projected into the future in the service of an Anglo-American white-supremacist manifest destiny intolerant of any complicity between black and Spaniard and focused on an image of Spanish rule as enabling not only complicity between, but miscegenation of, master and slave, white and black. Such fears of a hybrid empire where power relations are not clear between blacks and whites on account of ‘familiarization’ (in all senses of that word), blackmail, and so forth are expressed in [the novella’s] passages” (63). I add that the parallel here with my argument is that the “Anglo-American” fear of a “hybrid” Spanish empire to the “south” is an analog to Yankee fears pertaining to a miscegenation-prone American South, whose slave-powered plantation economy, like that of the Spain’s American empire, was more closely connected to the commerce and cultures of the Caribbean and the Southern Hemisphere than the North.

<sup>53</sup> Melville’s use of the word “mutiny” before any other term to characterize what had occurred on board the Spanish ship is significant (235), for a “mutiny” connotes an overthrow of the lawful commander(s) on the part of crewmen or officers, persons within the formal chain of command. With respect to slave uprisings, the term “insurrection” or “rebellion” is more common, and accurate, in that such “persons” exist outside of the polity, legally excluded, while still remaining subject to its social governing structures. Thus, the fact that the text uses “mutiny” voices a certain ambivalence; that is, even as racial, sociolinguistic or laboring Others, the African slaves on the *San Dominick* at some point prior to the “mutiny” merited status *within* the social economy/governing structure of the ship’s polity; as Benito Cereno’s deposition reads, “all the negroes slept upon deck [with the sailors], as is customary in this navigation, and none wore fetters, because the owner, his friend Aranda, told him that they were all tractable” (241), though his text is also ambivalent, for the first word it employs in reference to the slave mutiny is “revolt” (241).

I posit, though, that the confusion of labor-functional roles presents a “spectacle” of social disorder more ominous for the Yankee Delano than the interracial “familiarity” and interchangeability of Spanish “whites” and Africans suggest by themselves. Delano observes after boarding the *San Dominick* that “either a white, mulatto or black” relayed “formal reports” to the Spanish captain, and that “[w]hatever special orders were necessary, their delivery was delegated to [Babo], who in turn transferred them...through runners, alert Spanish boys or slave boys” (170-71). The narrator then expounds on the Yankee captain’s analysis:

Wanted to the quiet *orderliness* of the [*Bachelor’s Delight’s*] comfortable *family of a crew*, the noisy *confusion* of the *San Dominick’s* suffering host repeatedly *challenged* his eye. Some prominent breaches, not only of discipline but of decency, were observed. These Captain Delano could not but ascribe, in the main, to the absence of those subordinate deck officers to whom, along with *higher* duties, is intrusted what may be styled the *police department* of a populous ship...the old *oakum-pickers* appeared at times to *act the part of monitorial constables* to their countrymen, the blacks... What the *San Dominick* wanted was, what the emigrant ship has, stern superior officers. (172, *emphasis mine*)

I conclude from these descriptions that Captain Delano fast comes to associate his duty towards the Spanish ship and “Other” captain with the restoration of a proper social order, including strict labor divisions within the ship’s economy. This above alleviating the hunger and thirst of the ship’s company, a circumstance to which Melville devotes far less space than to the “confused” social and functional roles alternately occupied by Spaniards, Africans and mulattos. The narrator mentions that the “oakum-pickers” had assumed the “higher” law-enforcement role that deck officers perform, those gentlemen functionaries on the *San Dominick* being forced to don

the authority-less guise of inferior seamen and menial workers, no longer the ship's official "leaders," roles that Babo appropriates for himself and his deputies.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, the comparison to an "immigrant ship" reinforces the anxiety over ethno-racial and social confusion, for such vessels by design host a diversity of ethnicities, sociolinguistic groups, classes and laborers, signifying a literal polyphony within a single confined space. Babo, referring to Atufal's chain restraints, vocalizes the socially-blurred, functional symbiosis on the *San Dominick* which so unnerves the Yankee captain: "The slave there carries the padlock, but master here the key" (184), each individual's implement being useless without the "Other."<sup>55</sup> Dennis Pahl comments on Delano's Northern "inquietude" respecting the role-blurring and the social, functional interconnectedness of the microcosmic *San Dominick's* "Southern" slave culture: "Delano tries to deny the facts to which the images before him plainly attest: that the master's identity is inextricably bound up with that of the slave's... Thus, the image of the incapacitated Cereno leaning on the slave Babo mirrors... a relationship of interdependency that would make the identity of master and slave, of self and other [indiscernible]" (177).

The concluding dialogue between Delano and Don Benito encapsulates the anxiety and ambivalence the text manifests respecting inter-subjective ethics and the social duty of categorizing Others on ethno-racial and labor-functional planes. The narrator initially represents the final discourse between the two "leaders" as one amongst friends and peers: "the *two*

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<sup>54</sup> Dennis Pahl argues that "the blacks here are anything but a faceless, homogenous group; they are themselves broken down into their own order of masters and slaves... Commanding the other slaves with absolute rule, and manipulating most of the events Delano witnesses, Babo is thus cast as no less a self-possessed authority figure than is Delano... In their own ways, both Babo and Delano represent the Law with regard to their own respective 'others' over whom they rule" (178-79). I counter that what Delano perceives, as relayed through the limited narrator, is a spectacle of ethno-racial, social and functional "confusion," if only to the extent that the new "absolute rule" that Babo and his lieutenants have imposed represents a hierarchical, social ordering literally *and* figuratively unrecognized by the Yankee captain and the political society he represents.

<sup>55</sup> Luciano notes the passage's irony and dialogic polyphony: "Babo's skill as ironist enables him to locate freedom within the very rituals of slavery, as his inversion of the 'significant symbols' of padlock and key demonstrates; *his subterfuge evokes a duplicity of meaning from even the most single-minded commentary*" (52, *emphasis mine*).



*captains* had many cordial conversations—their *fraternal unreserve* in singular contrast with former withdrawals” (255, *emphasis mine*). Yet the conflicted dialogue which follows is different, as Don Benito accuses Delano, the distrustful “rescuer” and paternalistic usurper of the “Other’s” vessel, of succumbing to his own totalizing gaze:

you were with me all day; stood with me, sat with me, talked with me, looked at me, ate with me, drank with me; and yet, your last act was to clutch for a monster, not only an innocent man, but the most pitiable of all men. *To such degree may malign machinations and deceptions impose. So far may even the best man err, in judging the conduct of one with the recesses of whose condition he is not acquainted.* But you were forced to it; and you were in time undeceived. Would that, in both respects, it was so ever, and with all men... (257, *emphasis mine*)

Here Melville anticipates through the voice of an Other, Don Benito, Levinas’ ethics of alterity, in suggesting the moral subject’s duty to understand the individuated Other’s “condition.” Yet Don Benito’s loaded speech also demonstrates the tragic and violent degree to which Delano’s mastering optic has totalized Don Benito’s Otherness, as he vocally reflects back the normative, dehumanizing gaze of the Yankee Other, to whom the “Spaniard” appeared a “monster.”

More significant is Don Benito’s ambiguous, ambivalent language: we are left to infer to who belong the “deceptions and machinations” and who the “best man” is who “errs” and “judges” the “Other”; Delano, Don Benito...or Babo? On the obvious level, Delano is implied. However, Delano does not directly respond to Don Benito’s charges, but reasserts the “dark Spaniard’s” ethno-racial Otherness, asking, “what has cast such a *shadow* upon you?” (257, *emphasis mine*), to which the “Other” captain replies in the generic: “The negro” (257),<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Respecting this particular dialogue, Catherine Toal observes in “‘Some Things Which Could Never Have Happened’: Fiction, Identification, and ‘Benito Cereno’” that Don Benito’s Spanish “off-whiteness” manifests itself

whereupon the narrator terminates the dialogue without additional clarification: “There was silence... There was no more conversation that day” (257-58).<sup>57</sup> This anticlimactic, amputated dialogue reprises the unnerving and literally “unspeakable” subjects of disordering miscegenation and racial “intermixture” on Southern plantations illustrated by the discourse on treacherous mulattos. The earlier cryptic dialogue is cut short by Don Benito, who concludes the conversation by claiming to “know nothing of the matter” (220). In sum, neither the narrator’s commentary nor the framed final dialogue specifies who judges whom, and whose is the greatest “machination”; likewise, Don Benito is unable to reorder his own social, labor-functional and ethno-racial alignments, remaining an ambivalent hybrid to the end.<sup>58</sup> Even at the dramatic moment of his “deliverance” from the *San Dominick*, the Spanish captain appears indecisive, telling Captain Delano prior to jumping into his launch: “I can go no further; here I must bid you adieu” (231). He later explains his ambivalence as an inner “conflict” between self-preservation and duty to an Other: “Don Amasa, I know not whether desire for my own safety alone could have nerved me to that leap into your boat, had it not been for the thought that, did you, unenlightened, return to your ship, you... would never in this world have waked again” (256). Here Don Benito does “follow” the Yankee Captain who he calls his “best friend” (231), though as the narrative concludes, the “leader” who he “follows” to his grave is the “negro,” Babo (258).

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ironically in a repudiation of the evil or “black” imperial conduct of Euro-Americans, “reflect[ing] ‘whiteness’ back to itself” (63): “Early champions of Cereno are keen to point out that, since the two speak in Spanish, his answer, ‘the negro,’ also means simply ‘blackness’ or metaphysical ‘evil,’ accepting a dubious ‘tautology’ that overlooks the Spaniard’s own spurious translation: having seen a display of the horror of ‘whiteness,’ he reacts with a demonization of ‘blackness’ so confined within the identity and interests of his race that, when shown its true color, he sees only the Other” (56).

<sup>57</sup> At this moment of honesty between Don Benito and Delano, it is telling that the conversation fails. Maurice S. Lee offers a plausible, albeit pessimistic, explanation: “private relationships do not flourish when public masks are ostensibly dropped, and language falters even at the moment we seem free of devious discourse” (511).

<sup>58</sup> I argue Don Benito was always a hybrid figure, if only on a functional level, in that he did not own the slaves he was transporting; they belonged to Don Aranda. Nevertheless, Don Benito owned the *San Dominick*. At least in an administrative capacity, “Captain” Benito Cereno occupied a middle ground between the African slaves and their actual Spanish proprietor, not a slave himself, but still “laboring” *for* a slave-owner, much as an overseer, a role sometimes occupied by mulattos on Southern plantations.

Despite his official exoneration before the tribunal for the loss of his ship, “Captain” Benito regains neither his health nor his command prior to his death. I interpret this to mean that Don Benito’s true ethical offense, as the ship’s legal authority, was not the loss of the *San Dominick* itself, but rather the disordering relaxation of the ship’s social, racial and labor-functional boundaries that preceded the “mutiny.” It is for this unspoken crime that the Spanish captain—like the “Other” commander, Babo, and the two Spanish sailors killed during the *San Dominick*’s recapture—is punished, now confined in a terrestrial monastery as opposed to the seaborne “cloister” of the *San Dominick*, condemned within and by the narrative.

But the text’s “voice” remains ambivalent and “inconclusive,” in Shari Goldberg’s words (1), respecting the ultimate ethical significance of the “captains”—Benito Cereno, Amasa Delano and Babo—and the strained interpersonal dialogue they share for much of the narrative. I posit that the diminutive Babo functions as Don Benito’s externalized homunculus within the *San Dominick*’s unstable slave polity, reminding his charge as a coercive voice of conscience where their joint loyalties must lie as implicated agents of slavery: “what Babo has done was but *duty*” (176, *emphasis mine*). Yet once removed along with his “master” from the confinement of the Spanish slaver’s chaotic social context and re-confined to the compartmentalized environs of the Yankee vessel, Babo relinquishes the power and desire to speak. Menacing Babo’s singular influence over his “master” is the rival, paternalistic discourse of the Yankee captain. That said, it appears that it is *Delano* that Babo attempts to kill when he “follows” Don Benito into the launch, as if *he* were the greater enemy all along: “with the dagger presented at Captain Delano’s heart, the black seemed of purpose to have leaped there as to his mark” (232). Of course, the industrial North that Delano and the *Bachelor’s Delight* represent, despite being sealers,

threatens to confine the perpetuation and mobility<sup>59</sup> of the disordered, hybridized slave culture that Babo's rule signifies, and of which the "dark Spaniard" and his crew become implements.

The chief textual ambivalence in this regard lies in the ethical decisions, actions and dialogues of Captain Delano and Don Benito. Should one characterize Delano's dialogic responsiveness to the enfeebled Spanish captain and "dutiful" overtures of assistance as exhibiting a genuine, selfless concern for an individualized Other? Or, is the Yankee captain more about confining and immobilizing as an undifferentiated totality a confused slave economy of "intermixing" classes of laborers and races, with an eye to securing his own financial self-interest? As to Don Benito, does his confined discourse speak of abject victimization and supplication, or to complicity in, and failed leadership of, a slave culture that has rendered him just as categorically Other as the Africans and mulattos that become his masters and "leaders"?

An illuminating statement from Captain Delano in his final dialogue with Don Benito illustrates this ambivalent dilemma and the text's polyphonic nature overall. Reflecting upon their narrow escape from the *San Dominick* in the *Rover*, Delano remarks, "you have saved my life, Don Benito, *more* than I yours; saved it, too, *against my knowledge and will*" (256, *emphasis mine*). This statement proves true, in that Don Benito's death soon follows. I insist, however, that this statement is true on a figurative level, providing redemption from the totalized ethical confinement that the text dialogically constructs, as well as from its antebellum political, socioeconomic and ethno-racial commitments. Despite Don Benito's hybrid Otherness and the debilitated slave economy he typifies, Delano's remark voices another peripatetic moment,

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<sup>59</sup> The fact that the Spanish slave ship functions practically as a vehicle of human mobility and metaphorically as a representation of Southern slave culture is significant, in that the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854) authorized the "mobilization" of Southern slavery into new western states, based on Stephen A. Douglas' interpretation of "popular sovereignty". The Yankee Delano and his crew, while fulfilling their duty to apprehend "fugitive" slaves, likewise "arrest" the literal, autonomous movement of the slave ship, thereby figuratively confining and mastering the ethno-racial, social and labor-functional disorder of slavery.

exposing an ironic symbiosis between the culture/ideology—Free Soil and pro-slavery—that each character represents. Even as Delano’s endeavors to totalize and master, according to a normative Yankee gaze, the confused economy of “helplessly mixed in” (234) races and labor functions over which Don Benito and Babo preside, the “dark Spaniard’s” voluntary leap of faith, now in complicity with the Yankee captain, not only saves Delano’s ship from the “Other’s” social confusion, but engenders the Yankee’s domination the *San Dominick*.

Thus, Delano’s self-effacing words to Don Benito are not just a gesture of gratitude, but suggestive of the redemptive ethical possibility, in Levinas’ parlance, of being for the differentiated Other, even an individual that society would totalize. He also voices that unique Other’s own reciprocal duty to respond for the Good of still “Other” particularized individuals. The irony here is that in each acting for the Good of the “Other,” both captains “follow their leader,” the antebellum racial and social class discourse whose ethos of Anglo-American mastery demands the re-confinement of the African slaves and “intermixed” Spanish sailors, Levinas’ third party Others, within their proper social, ethno-racial, labor-functional totalities. Indeed, socioeconomic/labor hierarchies had to be reinforced if Northern industrialism was to realize its commercial manifest destiny, even as Southern agrarianism and slavery threatened to defy sectional confinement and expand west following the Kansas-Nebraska Act.

In “The Fugitive Slave Law” Ralph Waldo Emerson writes: “Are you *for man and for the good of man*; or are you for the hurt and harm of man? It was the question whether man shall be treated as *leather*? Whether the negro shall be, as the Indians were in Spanish America, a *piece of money*? Whether this system, which is *a kind of mill or factory* for converting men into monkeys, shall be upheld and enlarged?” (758, *emphasis mine*). He concludes: “as the Turks say, ‘Fate makes that a man should not believe his own eyes.’ But the Fugitive Law did much to

unglue the eyes of men, and now the Nebraska Bill leaves us staring. The Anti-Slavery Society will add many members this year. The Whig Party will join it; the Democrats will join it. The population of the free states will join it. I doubt not, at last, the slave states will join it” (768). Emerson’s language highlights the stakes of my discussion of *Israel Potter* and “Israel Potter,” suturing the ethical questions surrounding slavery, labor, race and interpersonal responsibility, framing the moral controversies of the day. Emerson blends the dehumanizing system of Southern slavery—referring to “men” as “leather” and “monkeys”—with the mercantile greed of Spanish colonialism and the degrading, oppressive mechanization of the Northern “factory” which also turns workers “into monkeys.” Still, Emerson was optimistic that a diverse American populace would embrace an “Anti-Slavery” ethos. I add along with Emerson that slavery was not the only form of antebellum totalization that needed to end, as a *white* Ishmael rhetorically suggests in *Moby-Dick*: “Who ain’t a slave?”

This conflation of antebellum socio-ethical concerns with respect to the ethical demand of the individualized Other, whether a Northern “wage slave” or the African American bonded in the South, is dialogically operative in *Israel Potter* and “Benito Cereno.” But as polyphonic texts, they remain ethically ambivalent regarding “free” labor *and* involuntary servitude, as Carolyn Karcher attests (128). Melville’s discourse, shaped within the crucible of socioeconomic, intersectional tensions, fluctuates between incisive social/ethical critique and a desire for order and stability, that is, social “confinement.” If *Israel Potter*, like *Moby-Dick*’s Ishmael, suggests that in a modern, manufacturing America anyone can become a “slave” or a “nobody,” Amasa Delano demonstrates the mercenary extremes to which otherwise altruistic persons will go to perpetuate a totalizing hierarchy of “captains” and laboring Others when social disorder, functional confusion or ethno-racial hybridity threatens their privileged positions.

Just as the mottos of *Israel Potter* and “Benito Cereno” champion selfish individualism and the submission to a preexistent social economy, together they offer, in a complementary polyphony, a glimmer of ethical redemption. If the connotation of “God help them that help themselves” is “confined” only to mercenary self-interest, “Follow your leader” voices the necessity of a transcendent ethos free of individualism. Likewise, the authoritarian Spanish motto, when tempered by Franklin’s common sense self-interest, invites submission to a liberating inter-subjective ethos where persons identify their own Good in responding to the differentiated Other. In doing so, they resist any political, socioeconomic structure that would prevent the subject from seeking to “help her or himself.” I argue that *Israel Potter* and “Benito Cereno” interrelate like their mottos. The polyphonic dialogues within and between these texts form the edge of a redemptive horizon, even if Herman Melville could neither see beyond his antebellum discourse nor embrace the republic’s ethical duty—North *and* South—to respond to the unique Otherness of the urban laborer and the African American slave, despite the social upheaval that such would demand.

In the third and final chapter, I continue this discussion on the ethics of Otherness in conjunction with the representation of hybridity within late antebellum American fiction. Engaging novels by Harriet E. Wilson and Fanny Fern, I add neglected voices to this ethical literary conversation on inter-subjective responsiveness: those of laboring women Others. Whereas in Melville I apprehend hybridity as it pertains to identity, particularly in terms of language, race, ethnicity, social class and labor-function, with respect to Fern and Wilson I focus on a complicating rhetorical dimension of character hybridity: the dialogic blurring of the melodramatic archetypes of the heroine and villainess. As we will see, the hybridizing of these archetypes also confuses the Selfsame/Other binary as well as their ethical positions, introducing

the polyphony of ambivalence and irony into sentimental discourses whose moral didactics “ought” to appear without ambiguity. The interpersonal ethics of Fern and Wilson are anything but monologic.



### CHAPTER 3:

#### Alterity, Compassion and Ethics: Female Antagonists as Sympathetic Others

##### in Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall* and Harriet E. Wilson's *Our Nig*

Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall: A Domestic Tale of the Present Time* (1854) and Harriet E. Wilson's *Our Nig: Sketches from the Life of a Free Black* (1859) are autobiographical sentimental novels that scandalously call attention to unspeakable elements in Northern antebellum society, specifically: gender and class discrimination, racism, poverty, the victimization of children and family dysfunction. Utilizing conventional types within domestic settings, both narratives present suffering female characters who struggle to survive amidst a repressive culture and vindictive persecutors. A number of critics, such as Jennifer Larson, Karen A. Weyler, Gale Temple and David Dowling, have hailed these works as boldly critiquing the labor injustices of modern American capitalism.

At times, however, recent readings of *Ruth Hall* and *Our Nig* are incomplete and overly dependent on binary thinking, focused as they are on unearthing and championing female protagonists and representative authors emblematic of the period's most oppressed and totalized Others, particularly women of racial minorities.<sup>1</sup> Feminist critic Nancy Armstrong writes:

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<sup>1</sup> Lisa Elwood-Farber's article, "Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig*: A Look at the Historical Significance of a Novel that Exposes a Century's Worth of Hypocritical Ideology" is a case in point. Elwood-Farber becomes so engrossed in valorizing Wilson and Frado that she misreads the text, missing key elements in her analysis. To point out only two examples, though the title to her article refers to Wilson's text as a "novel," she later writes that the "book...is supposed to be a *fictional third-person autobiography*" and that "Wilson's greatest tormenter in the novel, Mrs. B, has a history of abolitionist activity in her family tree" (472, *emphasis mine*). For one thing, "fictional third-person autobiography" is a contradiction in terms, indicating that dealing with the issue of the text's genre is essentially ignored by Elwood-Farber. As Jill Jones points out in "The Disappearing 'I' in *Our Nig*," "[t]he body of *Our Nig* is not simply in the third person, but is *so* steeped in the conventions of the sentimental novel that it seems to belie any claim to autobiography" (14). Furthermore, Elwood-Farber's characterization of the fictional "Mrs. B" *would* be accurate if she were referring to the historical Mrs. Hayward of Milford, Connecticut. Though Mrs. Belmont is

The rhetoric of victimization has worked its way into the heart of literary critical theory and will remain there, I am sure, to generate re-readings of texts by, for, and about women for a number of years to come. Powerful academic women will continue to insist on the powerlessness of women... *But it should not prevent us from undertaking other projects that go beyond the work these women have already done...they have also opened the way for new methods and research...* (255, *emphasis mine*).

I follow Armstrong's methodological lead and argue that if we look at Fern's and Wilson's texts more closely, resisting the novels' attempts to invoke sentimentality and liberal sympathy, we see women protagonists who, while experiencing oppression and cruelty nevertheless adopt a mercenary, will to power ethos to survive.<sup>2</sup> Ironically, this selfish individualism also characterizes the dehumanizing socioeconomic structures of the antebellum American culture which has rendered them voiceless, powerless and categorically Other. That both Ruth and Frado, like the actual authors, turn to writing as a means to make a life and garner voices counter to the repressive hegemonic discourse testifies to this.

What I propose is that if we begin reading from the position that Frado and Ruth function as models of disadvantaged female Others who endure incredible adversity in their quests for survival and self-empowerment, we find polyphonic narratives that offer within their dialogic structures *another* ethical counter-discourse. Susan K. Harris posits that

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based on Rebecca Hayward, as Barbara A. White establishes in "'Our Nig and the She-Devil: New Information about Harriet Wilson and the 'Bellmont' Family" (29), in Wilson's fictional account, no mention is ever made of Mrs. Belmont being an abolitionist.

<sup>2</sup> My understanding of this term is based on the existential concept of the will to power expounded by Friedrich Nietzsche in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (226-228) and further refined by Jean-Paul Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*, that is, the sense of an autonomous individual's will-to-power as the appointment one makes, and keeps, with him or herself (467-72). Fern's and Wilson's heroines texts model this modern, individualist ethos.

[i]n nineteenth-century women's literature, in fact, the putative authorial voice, heard through the strong narrative persona, sounds the note for the cover story [the author's culturally "acceptable" intent], and this is the voice that most first-time readers hear. Subsequent readings reveal other voices, however, in addition to character, plot, and thematic variations, that function to undermine the narrator's authority. ...the novels contain thematic and structural tensions that prevent them from achieving thematic closure. (33)<sup>3</sup>

The ethical ambivalence evident in the melodramatic, dialogic interplay between Frado and Ruth and their female nemeses indicates the "carnavalesque" emergence of rival "undermining" voices. Furthermore, I argue that in their struggle for autonomy in a republic that would deny them dignity as full citizens, both characters, as thematized Others, nevertheless suggest an imperative ethics of duty for the radical "third party" Other, those antagonists—"persecutors" in Levinas' diction—who, in addition to the sociocultural discourse which necessarily informs their material context, are most responsible for their oppression.

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<sup>3</sup> Harris opens the door to this sort of "polyphonic" formalist reading of domestic/sentimental fiction in *19<sup>th</sup>-Century American Women's Novels: Interpretive Strategies*. She writes: "I see these as having a common structural overplot; I am most interested, however, in the way the overplot functions to disguise multiple hermeneutic possibilities. ...I see these novels as being open to different interpretations by different groups of readers; ...I do not see this as a strategy in a war between female demons and male victims. ...my discussion is predicated on the assumption that nineteenth-century readers were as capable as we—perhaps more so—of bringing more than one interpretive strategy to the texts they read" (13). Harris implies, as do I, that contemporary readers of nineteenth-century women's fiction ought to be open to multiple "interpretive strategies" and thus multiple interpretations. The challenge, as Harris explains, is that "as readers, with a wealth of reading (that is, of absorbing literary conventions) behind us, we bring to each new text only those expectations that have been created by other texts. The first reading involves having those expectations aroused and either fulfilled or disappointed... The *re*-reading, however, focuses on the division within the text itself, discovering that there is no such thing as a stable identity... What a text, employing narrative conventions and reflecting cultural codes, *thinks* it is saying (or pretends to be saying) and it may be saying to some readers are not necessarily the same thing" (31, 33). Much of the tension that my "re-reading" of Fern and Wilson highlights arises from this textual "division" between melodramatic expectations of characters within the sentimental genre and the dialogic-polyphonic complications which subvert the rhetoric of archetypal totalization and the interpersonal ethics implicit within it.

As did many critics of slavery, such as Frederick Douglass in *My Bondage and My Freedom*,<sup>4</sup> both Fern and Wilson delineate the contours of a unique “third party” Other who Levinas describes as the totalized “persecutor” (*Otherwise than Being* 111) ironically also victimized by the morally desensitizing societal structures of which they have become agents. I posit that within a fictional discourse inflected by an interrogation of social injustice, this “third party” Other functions as a pariah-figure beyond sympathy, even within their family and social class. Despite melodramatic, dialogic rhetoric to the contrary, the sentimentalism of *Ruth Hall* and *Our Nig* gestures beyond the psychological and physical violence done to their protagonists, suggesting the possibility of compassion<sup>5</sup> for the persecutor as an individuated Other. Yet, according to Jane Tompkins, “[t]he power of the sentimental novel to move its audience depends upon the audience’s being in possession of the *conceptual categories that constitute character and event*. That storehouse of assumptions includes attitudes toward the family and toward social institutions; a definition of power and its relation to individual human feeling; [and] notions of political and social equality” (126-27, *emphasis mine*). To clarify this point regarding

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<sup>4</sup> For example, see Douglass’ description of the change in the personality of his mistress, Mrs. Auld, as she is forced to uphold slavery’s systemic prohibition against teaching slaves to read, contrary to her natural inclination (153-55).

<sup>5</sup> The Latin root of this term formed from the words *cum* (“with”) and *passio* (“suffering”) signifies the state of “suffering in solidarity” *with* another—or *the* Other (Bakhtin, *Art* 48). Therein lies the basis of human sympathy and empathy, that is, the ability for the subject to identify with or take on the pain of an Other, if only vicariously. Thus, the affective core of all “successful” sentimental narratives depends upon the ability of its poetic mechanisms to elicit this sensation from the reader or auditor. In *Hard Facts: Setting and Form in the American Novel* Philip Fisher explains the key role of compassion in sentimental fiction: “Compassion is, of course, the primary emotional goal of sentimental narration. Compassion exists in relation to suffering and makes of suffering the primary subject matter, perhaps the exclusive subject matter, of sentimental narrative. It is, as Rousseau calls it, a species-preserving feeling as opposed to those feelings which have only the individual’s own survival at their source” (105). Fisher also explains that “[t]he political content of sentimentality is democratic in that it experiments with the extension of full and complete humanity to classes of figures from whom it has been socially withheld. The typical objects of sentimental compassion are the prisoner, the madman, the child, the very old, the animal, and the slave [and, I would add, oppressed *women* as well]. Each achieves, or rather earns, the right to human regard by means of the reality of their suffering” (99), and therefore “[t]he sentimental novel [ideally] arouses and excites action toward that part of the public future that is still open to decision and alternatives” (18). The problematic figure of the “wounded persecutor” occupies a suggestive and interpretively fecund position of sympathy within antebellum sentimental narrative, particularly when considered from the vantage point of Levinasian ethics; that is, such characters, as dialogically individuated “third party” Others, also demand an ethical response from the moral subject, even that sympathetic protagonist who is simultaneously the object of *their* persecution, thereby warranting ethical responsiveness as a victimized Other as well (*Otherwise than Being* 111, 157).

“conceptual categories,” I will show how the concept of melodrama undergirds my understanding of novelistic sentimentality. Peter Brooks offers an explanation of the conventional use of melodrama, in which we see its rhetorical function in the sentimental novel:

The connotations of [melodrama] include: the indulgence of strong emotionalism; moral polarization and schematization; extreme states of being, situations, actions; overt villainy, persecution of the good, and final reward of virtue; inflated and extravagant expression; dark plottings, suspense, breathtaking peripety. The few critics who have given serious attention to melodrama have noted its psychological function in allowing us the pleasures of self-pity and the experience of wholeness brought by the identification with “monopathic” emotion... The term seems useful, even necessary, because it points...to a mode of high emotionalism and stark ethical conflict that is neither comic nor tragic in persons, structure, intent, effect. (12)

Brooks then sutures theatrical melodrama to nineteenth-century novels—by implication, the sentimental novel—adding that

[melodrama’s] polarization of good and evil works toward revealing their presence and operation as real forces in the world. Their conflict suggests the need to recognize and confront evil, to combat and expel it, to purge the social order... In considering melodrama, we are in a sense talking about a form of theatricality which will underlie novelistic efforts at representation—which will provide for the making of meaning in fictional dramatizations of existence. The nineteenth century novel needs such a theatricality...to get its meaning across, to invest in its renderings of life a sense of memorability and significance. (13)

Indeed, a glance at the plot schematics, particularly the dialogic interactions of the heroines and villains in *Ruth Hall* and *Our Nig*, reveals fidelity to the melodramatic formulae present within sentimental fiction of the period, including *peripeteia*.<sup>6</sup> Still, it is where Fern and Wilson *fail* to adhere to archetypal constructions of good and evil on which their rhetorical projects rest that the polyphony within each text erupts within the narratives' dialogic structure and amongst the "carnavalesque" interplay of competing discourses. Given the self-awareness with which both authors root their novels in the sentimental tradition, such conventional departures, from the vantage point of the genre's poetics, appear counterintuitive.<sup>7</sup> But it is precisely in this discursive space opened by the creative destabilization of both genre and character archetypes that we encounter the demand for an alternative ethical reading of these texts. Where the presumed totalization of the archetypal Other—heroine *or* villainess—is undermined, there emerges the text's dialogic capacity to imagine a dynamic human subject, alternately issuing, responding to and refusing to act for the Other.

Antebellum women's fiction, until comparatively recently, has been received and often dismissed as merely occupying the realms of melodramatic sentimentality and domesticity,<sup>8</sup> forming the 19<sup>th</sup> century's American counterpart to Great Britain's novel of "morals and manners," where idealized maternal women inhabit the sphere of the home as guardians of

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<sup>6</sup> Jill Jones also notes in that "[t]he melodrama, the appeal to the sentiments of the reader, is typical of sentimental fiction" (41).

<sup>7</sup> Operating within a particular convention or genre does not automatically determine the nature of the narrative structure or character development in every respect: such rules invite transgression, especially with respect to the moral-ethical expectations that surround the reading of the text. In *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* Cathy N. Davidson points out that "we regularly encounter in the very structure of the sentimental novel tensions and unresolved contradictions. There is often a glaring gap between the public morality officially espoused and the private behavior of the characters who voice or supposedly validate that morality. What is promised in the preface is not always proven in the plot" (215).

<sup>8</sup> William Spengemann explains in *The Adventurous Muse: The Poetics of American Fiction, 1789-1900* that "[w]hereas mill-run works in the genre normally begin in a perfect home that is invaded by antidomestic forces from without, the great ones begin with a domestic situation that is marred by a conflict between parental authority and youthful ambition or sentiment" (72). One could argue that both Fern and Wilson employ versions of both the "mill-run" and the "great" domestic formulae.

virtue, dependent femininity and familial stability.<sup>9</sup> A deeper textual analysis of Fern's and Wilson's ethical dimensions, though, requires that we probe beyond the genre's conventional ethics. Of course, the character of Ruth subverts many of these Victorian values and gender binaries in that she is individualistic, self-reliant, assertive and, perhaps most shocking of all, content to pursue her family *and* professional life without remarrying (Warren xxii).<sup>10</sup> Wilson's rambunctious Frado, by comparison, too is strong-willed, intelligent, and emotionally resilient in the face of oppression and physical abuse, seeking as well independence from a domestic context where being an abandoned child, a female and a mulatta has rendered her triply inferior in the eyes of her white "caretakers." Also like Ruth, Frado by implication<sup>11</sup> turns to writing as a way to escape poverty. In both novels, neither sentimentality nor domesticity offer happiness, security or moral edification for women or anyone else.

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<sup>9</sup> In *All-American Girl: The Ideal of Real Womanhood in Mid-Nineteenth Century America* Frances B. Cogan discusses the presence of polyphonic discourses at the intersection of moral didacticism and the depiction of gender roles in domestic fiction: "Didactic literature by its very nature evaluates the world and presents its message straightforwardly, even stridently. [...] Once could make the case (and many have) that this direct didacticism, especially in the case of domestic novels, is simply a stalking-horse for darker, more rebellious and contradictory feelings. I acknowledge that such a subtext is indeed possible... [D]omestic novels...tend to reveal interesting contradictory attitudes underneath the apparent support for the traditional restrictions on the woman's sphere" (12). She later adds: "As a result of such didactic fiction and advice texts...ideals of fragility clashed with ideals of competence, pious self-sacrifice with survival, and the popular middle-class reader was left with two countering class images of women's nature, capabilities, and goals to study and possibly emulate" (18). The contrast between Ruth and Mrs. Hall in *Ruth Hall* is an excellent example of an ambivalent "clash" of feminine "ideals."

<sup>10</sup> Joyce W. Warren writes in her "Introduction" to *Ruth Hall and Other Writings*: "Ruth Hall gains power and control over her environment, but her influence extends into the world outside of the home. The domestic values of love and harmony which seem to be extolled at the beginning of the novel gradually give way to a cynical realism as the heroine evolves from a trusting innocent into a hard-headed business woman...She learns that if she is to survive, she cannot retreat from the unpleasantness of a moneyed society, but must adapt herself to it... Finally, Fanny Fern's portrayal of her heroine departs from most woman's fiction in her encouragement of self-assertion as a positive virtue...Once she enters the male-world of competition, she needs that individualistic self-assertion American society encouraged in men" (xxiv-xxv). These alternate "virtues" that Ruth acquires, and which dilute her sentimental claim to sympathy as a helpless victim, she ironically learns from her chief antagonist, Mrs. Hall.

<sup>11</sup> In "Renovating Domesticity in *Ruth Hall*, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, and *Our Nig*" Jennifer Larson infers a narrative amalgamation between Harriet Wilson and the autobiographical protagonist Frado at the text's conclusion, deducing that Frado, like Wilson, employs her literacy to become a writer as a means to support herself. Larson writes: "In the text's key turning point, Frado—like Ruth [Hall]—discovers how the written word can be a valuable expression of freedom... Discovered in conjunction with her work as a seamstress, the written history of the book inspires Frado and names her plight and her opposition to and conflict with her society. This inspiration soon comes to fruition through authorship... But as it appears in Frado's text, knowing that writing a personal narrative would have been a possible way for her to make money, we can also read the 'useful article' as a written history of her own (the one we hold in our hands)" (553).

Though *Ruth Hall* undercuts many of the literary conventions of the “woman’s” sentimental novel<sup>12</sup> as Susan K. Harris notes, *Our Nig* borrows *and* departs from the American slave narrative tradition, although, technically, Frado was never a “slave” in the strict sense of the term. Despite building off of different literary conventions and reflecting contrasting experiences of disadvantaged female Otherness, both texts contain a didactic dimension that lauds individualism and interpersonal distrust. They deplore a social reality where women of supposed greater power, those who “ought,” though their own feminine experience, to be more sympathetic<sup>13</sup> not only fail to respond to the needs of the differentiated Other, but inflict further suffering on marginalized persons already reduced to poverty. Thus, these novels evidence an ethical polyphony: that is, must the Other always look toward herself first for sustenance in a hyper-competitive American culture, or does there still exist the possibility of selfless relationship amongst radical Others? This ethical conundrum is brought into relief through the dialogic structure of each text, in addition to the conventional liminality of the novels themselves<sup>14</sup> and the hybrid dynamism of the protagonists and the antagonists.

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<sup>12</sup> Nina Baym prefers the term “woman’s fiction” as opposed to “sentimental fiction” in that, from her “the term ‘sentimental’ is used to imply that a work elevates feeling above all else” (*Women’s Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-1870* 24-25). In that I am using the terms “sentimental” and “sentimentality” more in connection with the rhetorical functions of melodramatic archetypes, I too prefer to distance myself from defining the sentimental novel as a form solely preoccupied with gratuitous displays of “feeling.”

<sup>13</sup> Lori Merish offers a perspective in *Sentimental Materialism: Gender, Commodity Culture and Nineteenth-Century American Literature*: “Specifically, as codified within...nineteenth-century domestic fictions, sentimental sympathy prescribed forms of paternalism—specifically, of ‘benevolent’ caretaking and ‘willing’ dependency—suited to a liberal-capitalist social order that privileged individual autonomy and, especially, private property ownership... Critics of sentimental literature have often pointed out that sympathy in these narratives are children, slaves, the poor, the disabled; and in sentimental narratives, it is the sympathy of the empowered for the disempowered, the ‘strong’ for the ‘weak,’ the fully human for the dehumanized, that is enlisted as socially and ethically salient...satisfaction and ethical value lie in the voluntary, unregulated, deeply felt exchanges of interpersonal life” (3). I counter that the absence of this sort of relationship between Fern’s and Wilson’s protagonists and antagonists speaks to the similar absence of a more pronounced “power” divide between them. Or if, as Merish argues, “sentimental sympathy can seem to neutralize the relations of political inequality it upholds” (3), does its lack indicate the lessening of such a “relation” of “political inequality,” between Selfsame subject and Other? I argue that *Ruth Hall* and *Our Nig* answer in the affirmative.

<sup>14</sup> Many critics have noted that both *Our Nig* and *Fanny Fern* straddle several genres; however, I focus on their formal relationship with the conventions of sentimental and domestic fiction, though Wilson borrows archetypal elements from the slave narrative tradition as well.



I want to argue, then, that whereas a significant amount of recent scholarship on Harriet Wilson and Fanny Fern treats the socioeconomic, racial, cultural, political, and gender issues that these novels touch, such interventions suggest yet fail to address a more nuanced ethical dimension. Wilson's and Fern's texts, within their polyphonic dialogic structures, offer unexpected ethical alternatives to the myopic familial and cultural discourse(s) of their "antagonists." As opposed to championing more sanitized models of female self-empowerment amidst possibilities of extra-domestic mobility within a diversifying, modernizing society, these novels depict protagonist-exemplars of a cynical, ultracompetitive attitude that responds neither to the needs of the radical Other nor to the moral demand to enter into relationship with an immediate "third party" Other. Intuitively, the representation of the protagonists' experiences of persecution and marginalization would suggest an empathetic response.<sup>15</sup> Instead, these "heroines" display an ethos of will to power ambition that totalizes persons, even friends and family, as either competitors to be vanquished or objects to be appropriated.<sup>16</sup>

Such a reading does not disregard discourses of racial prejudice, gender discrimination, class oppression or child abuse that are manifest in Fern's and Wilson's novels. Rather, what I

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<sup>15</sup> The fact that a significant degree of selfishness animates the action and thinking of both Ruth and Frado, despite appearances to the contrary, complicates these texts' relationship with more conventional sentimental and domestic forms (and ethics). As Mary Kelley writes in *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America*, "to tout the selflessly serving woman as a powerful figure of influence and control was to beg the issue and betray an underlying conviction that the opposite was the case. The insistent, urgent presentation of the woman as the glorified, ultimate practitioner of the ethic of selfless service stood instead as a transparent shield overlaying the always dependent and vulnerable figure" (277).

<sup>16</sup> Herein lay a great deal of the rhetorical risk in Fern's and Wilson's novels, written as they are for public consumption. Harris explains the bind of nineteenth-century women novelist who would venture such dynamism for their protagonist: "On the one, [women's] writings show an intense, almost paranoid awareness of the needs, the censures, of the 'public,' an entity conceived of as easily influenced by the written word. On the other hand, they are equally intensely aware of *other* possibilities for female protagonists than the ones they publicly espouse... They do, however, express fascination with deviant characters, ambiguous situations, and most of all, with heroic women... Within this context, women's novels function as a means of testing women's possibilities for alternative modes of being" (19). In "A Purchase on Goodness: Fanny Fern, *Ruth Hall* and Fraught Individualism" Gale Temple isolates this phenomenon, "fraught individualism," as suggesting that the "ideal citizen can and should be a paragon of individuality and beleaguered goodness in the midst of a corrupt social realm," adding that it "connects femininity and gentility to a competitive ethic of market-oriented acquisitiveness" (136).

want to show is that the fundamental destabilization in these texts of the melodramatic archetypes of the heroine and villainess reveals an ethical counter-discourse that not only runs contrary to conventional didactics associated with antebellum women's novels, but one which exposes a new frontier for criticism of sentimental fiction. Within a popular literary field as well as national dialogues that had become dependent on the rhetorical use of archetypes,<sup>17</sup> Wilson and Fern demonstrate that categorical totalities of Otherness can be subverted by not only the textual representation of racial, gender or class hybridity, but also by ambivalent discourses that foil the narrative's overt design to secure sympathy for the protagonist and antipathy for her nemesis. The result is the uncontainable emergence within *Our Nig* and *Ruth Hall* of a depolarized ethical discourse of compassion, camouflaged beneath antebellum sentimentality.<sup>18</sup> In spite of rhetoric justifying their heroines and damning their villainesses, the prevailing message in both novels is that injustice, as in "real" life, only begets further moral tragedy. Such immorality develops within the unfortunate subjects that endure it an ethical disdain for the Good of the individualized Other and extolls mercenary survival, hierarchical power and vengeance.

### I. *Ruth Hall*

The verbal exchanges between Ruth and Mrs. Hall are significant for their ethical ambivalence. Almost from the beginning, Fern's rendering of Ruth's and Mrs. Hall's diction establishes a contrast, differentiating the voices of the adversaries and reinforcing the conflict of their ethics and agendas. Mrs. Hall's language is curt and commonsensical, similar to the

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<sup>17</sup> As Stephen Hartnett explains in "Fanny Fern's 1855 *Ruth Hall*, The Cheerful Brutality of Capitalism, & The Irony of Sentimental Rhetoric," "Americans relied upon a variety of sentimental forms to make sense of modernity by appealing to the immediacy of emotions" (3). He later adds: "the principles of sentimental discourse—immersion in the world of emotion, seeing history through personal experience, saturating the text with relentlessly intense prose and marked by exclamation points, tears, grueling repetition, and melodramatic emplotment—were employed in response to many of the era's most pressing political crises" (10).

<sup>18</sup> Or, as Larson argues, Fern and Wilson (and Harriet Jacobs) "reveal still more innovative ways in which women, black and white, moved beyond the seemingly stifling conventions of the sentimental and domestic novels while still working within their confines" (539).

overbearing Ben Franklin in *Israel Potter*, whereas Ruth's betrays a romantic affect indicative of "gentility" (Hamilton 101), establishing her as the (naïve) social superior of her mother-in-law.<sup>19</sup> In their initial exchange, Ruth shows her lack of domestic industry and romantic indolence, remarking: "I was just thinking whether I was not glad to have [Harry] gone a little while, so that I could sit down and think how much I love him," to which Mrs. Hall responds by shifting the conversation to practical matters: "I suppose you understand all about housekeeping, Ruth?" (19). Ruth's answer completes the contrast of the two in terms of upbringing, class, and frugal sensibility,<sup>20</sup> highlighting their experiential, socioeconomic disjunction: "No... I have but just returned from boarding school" (19). To this, Mrs. Hall comments, "It is a great pity that you were not brought up properly... I learned all a girl should learn, before I married... I would advise you, too, to lay by all your handsome clothes... I never had a pair of silk stockings in my life; they have a very silly, *frivolous* look" (19-20, *emphasis mine*).<sup>21</sup> As Gale Temple notes, "[t]he markers of Ruth's consumption are insignificant and frivolous when considered solely for

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<sup>19</sup> This is consistent with Merish's critical observations as well. She explains that in many works of domestic fiction, "'virtuous' middle-class women are identified through a class-inflected symbolics of differentiation, and are constructed in opposition to female characters notably lacking in the interior, emotional endowments of domestic womanhood" (14). Ironically Mrs. Hall, though lacking "interior, emotional endowments," remains more committed to the domestic sphere than the independent, business-savvy Ruth, complicating this archetypal binary.

<sup>20</sup> Warren notes in *Fanny Fern: An Independent Woman* that the text's polyphonic language, Ruth's in particular, evolves during the course of the novel: "In the first part of the novel, the prose often takes on the sentimental rhetoric of the [antebellum] period... Yet after Ruth's husband dies and she is thrust out on her own, these phrases disappear, and Fanny Fern consistently uses staccato prose... The earlier prose reflects the young heroine's state of mind—innocent and trusting in her idyllic bower—whereas the later writing conforms to her disillusionment and realistic determination to succeed on her own" (135). Such a shift in idiolect also betrays a "carnavalesque" interplay of ethical discourses, as the young, romantic Ruth evolves into a shrewd, self-reliant mercenary.

<sup>21</sup> Joyce W. Warren claims that "Fanny Fern, unlike less sensitive writers who make minority groups and the uneducated classes the butt of their humor, always directed her satire at pretentiousness and pomp. Her sympathy is with decent people, whatever their race, religion or social status" (xxviii-ix). She later adds: "[Fern] advocated practical, comfortable dress for women and plenty of fresh air and exercise... She undercuts the idealized portrait of happy submissive wives" (xxxiii). I counter that this assertion is not without exception in *Ruth Hall*, and even underscores the text's irony. In this case, the dialogue between Ruth and Mrs. Hall showcases the latter, the "villainess," as the one without "pretention," a character who advocates for simplicity, activity and *not* for wives' "happy submission." Furthermore, the novel *does* poke fun at "minority groups and the uneducated classes" through the satirized figures of Mrs. Jiff, Mrs. Skiddy and Bridget. If, as Nancy A. Walker claims, "the implied narrative stance is... that of Fanny Fern" (47), the rhetorical alignment here of her ethics with the voice of Mrs. Hall as opposed to Ruth's, indicates a certain hesitancy.

their usefulness. They are vital, however, when considered from the perspective of the social realm, for they serve to distinguish Ruth as superior to ‘enemies’ like the boorish, absurdly practical Mrs. Hall” (137). In addition to enunciating this class tension, though, the early monologues of and dialogues between Ruth and Mrs. Hall spotlight the sites of contestation between the two, the domestic space and Harry’s affections (and later their children). Even after Harry and Ruth move to their own house in the idyllic countryside, Mrs. Hall attempts to exert control over the couple’s home, instances of emotional aggression that characterize her relationship with Ruth for the balance of the novel.

Yet the text offers the potential for a different reading of Mrs. Hall and her contentious relationship with Ruth. Mrs. Hall and Ruth initially form an amalgamation, first in that they share a surname, affection for Harry and briefly a common dwelling. More significantly, though, Mrs. Hall’s Poor Richard-esque salvos of unsolicited practical advice to the young Ruth ironically anticipate the transformative travails that Ruth experiences after Harry’s death; her lack of basic skills in domestic economy, business or manual labor puts the upper-middle class “boarding school” Ruth at a disadvantage once she has fend for herself. Even though Mrs. Hall does not assist Ruth much through her brief time of poverty, her initial admonitions regarding frugality are not just mean attacks on Ruth’s impracticality, but would have served Ruth well if she had heeded them. For example, Mrs. Hall reflects, “Harry has his fortune to make, you know. Young people, now-a-days, seem to think that money comes in showers, whenever it is wanted; that’s a mistake; a penny at a time—that’s the way we got ours; that’s the way Harry and you will have to get yours,” then adding: “And Ruth, if you should feel the need of exercise, don’t gad in the streets. Remember there is nothing like a broom and dust-pan to make the blood

circulate... ‘Waste not, want not.’ I’ve got that framed somewhere. I’ll hunt it up, and put it on your wall. I won’t do you any harm to read it now and then” (21).<sup>22</sup>

Though first appearing obnoxious, the shrewd pecuniary sense of which Mrs. Hall speaks becomes the cornerstone of Ruth’s successful professional and financial rebirth, whereas the young newlyweds’, particularly Harry’s, inability to prepare for financial apocalypse (Larson 543) is prognosticated by Mrs. Hall’s cynicism. I venture that Mrs. Hall, far from feeling only Oedipal jealousy towards Ruth as a rival for her son’s affections, tries to help the young couple avoid disaster in drawing from her practical knowledge—a pessimism which, again, is vindicated. Rather, one might claim that it is the upper-class Ruth, immature, naïve, egocentric and quarantined from reality, whose myopia and personal stubbornness sabotage the potential for a beneficial relationship with her steely yet streetwise mother-in-law. As the forthcoming dialogues suggest, it is Ruth’s prejudices that render Mrs. Hall as Other, not just *vice versa*.

Mrs. Hall’s soliloquy following Harry and Ruth’s wedding offers a lucid rendering of her disapproval respecting Ruth in addition to introducing melodramatically the social class, ethos of duty and values that she represents. She muses:

I can’t say, though, that I see the need of his being married. I always mended his socks. He has sixteen bran new shirts, eight linen and eight cotton. I made them myself out of the Hamilton long-cloth. Hamilton long-cloth is good cotton, too; strong, firm, and wears well... As to Ruth, I don’t know anything about her. Of course she is perfect in *his* eyes. I remember the time when he used to think *me* perfect. I suppose I shall be laid on the shelf now... I can’t say I fancy [Ruth’s]

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<sup>22</sup> Temple explains: “At one levels, the conflict between Ruth and her mother-in-law indexes a shift in nineteenth-century American cultural values. Mrs. Hall is critical of Ruth’s indifference to the parsimony that supports Mrs. Hall’s own personal ethic—an older, ostensibly more practical value system that attached moral and ethical significance to self-abnegation, simplicity, and humility. Ruth represents a generational shift, for her sense of personal value and ethics is tied to the marketplace” (138).

family either. Proud as Lucifer, all of ‘em... The son, a conceited a jackanapes, who divides his time between writing rhymes and inventing new ties for his cravat. Well, well, we shall see; but I doubt if this bride is anything but a well-dressed doll... Had he married a practical woman I wouldn’t have cared—somebody who looked as if God made her for something...” (18)<sup>23</sup>

This monologue is meant to solidify Ruth’s position as an unfairly maligned, sympathetic figure,<sup>24</sup> in addition to establishing her mother-in-law as an uncharitable, meddlesome and jealous matriarch.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, her speech also reinforces her practical credibility, for her pejorative appraisal of Ruth’s family, as the novel’s events and descriptions show, proves accurate. Furthermore, Mrs. Hall’s sense of the young Ruth being “impractical” is likewise true to an extent, for though the narrator takes pains, almost as an overcompensation for her “villainess’s” evident practical attributes, to demonstrate Ruth’s near “perfection” as an exemplar of upper-middle class domestic taste, Ruth’s near-helplessness following Harry’s death and the family’s subsequent bankruptcy justify Mrs. Hall’s working-class trepidation. Finally, Mrs. Hall’s admission that she “mended [Harry’s] socks” as well as made his shirts reinforces her

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<sup>23</sup> Pride is one of the characteristics that complicates Ruth’s status as “pure” heroine. According to Linda Huf in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman: The Writer as Heroine in American Literature*, “pride is Ruth’s primary feeling and—if we would believe Fern’s reviewers—her principal failing” (24).

<sup>24</sup> Huf also remarks that “the woman’s artist novel... pits its protagonist against a sexually conventional foil. This frivolous friend or enemy, who embodies excessive devotion to the female role, serves to make the aspiring artist look, not unwomanly, but heroic by contrast” (7).

<sup>25</sup> Regarding melodramatic “type” characters in *Ruth Hall*, Julie Wilhelm notes in “An Expenditure Saved Is an Expenditure Earned: Fanny Fern’s Humoring of the Capitalist Ethos” that the “narrator implies that readers already know these types or can predict what they will say or do in response to a given situation [such as] the meddlesome mother-in-law... Mrs. Hall cannot recognize individual emotions and unique people because of her generic world view... Mrs. Hall cannot see past dominant cultural forms to appreciate nature and emotion—or, for that matter, daughters-in-law—in their particularity” (205, 206). Ironically, one could argue that Mrs. Hall is an archetypal projection of Fern’s own tendency to totalize Others by refusing individuals “particularity” and interpersonal ethical responsiveness. But Wilhelm adds a key caveat: “Nonetheless, the comical stereotypes and playful puns of *Ruth Hall* participate in a counter discourse that creates a space of resistance for the narrative and the reader. To some extent, all authors’ practices reveal contradictory impulses absorbed from their economic and cultural milieu, and Fanny Fern is no exception” (215-16). I would add that the creative destabilization of these melodramatic archetypes themselves *becomes* the “counter discourse.”

identity as not only frugal and industrious, but also as subservient and *déclassé* in comparison with her new in-laws, the “proud as Lucifer” Ellets. Mrs. Hall’s self-characterization also contributes to establishing her as, ironically, Ruth’s social inferior, rendering *her* Other in relation to Ruth and not *vice versa*, though Fern takes great pains to buttress Mrs. Hall’s agency and archetypal function as the oppressor.<sup>26</sup>

Still, Mrs. Hall’s credibility, that is, her working class status and the narrative’s initial ambivalence respecting her villainy, is not just the fruit of her being proven right through the story’s development or of performing menial chores, but is undergirded by her materialist ethos, individual initiative and familial sense of duty, all of which Ruth adopts.<sup>27</sup> During their initial exchange, Mrs. Hall suggests to Ruth: “[Harry] will occasionally offer you pin-money. In those cases, it will be best for to pass it over to me to keep; of course you can always have it again, by telling me how you wish to spend it” (20). Though this dialogue is meant to be satiric as well as illustrative of Mrs. Hall’s selfish, miserly tendencies,<sup>28</sup> it also speaks to a lack of confidence in Ruth (Harris 120), who has confessed to knowing nothing about housekeeping. From a certain perspective, Mrs. Hall’s offer to serve as Ruth’s financial steward and domestic mentor is neither

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<sup>26</sup> Warren explains Mrs. Hall’s greater narrative function as Ruth’s Other in *Fanny Fern: An Independent Woman*: “Ruth has developed her identity through a series of exterior signifiers or contacts with the world outside the self... However, when she goes outside her usual sphere, she redefines herself through contact with another ‘Other’: friends and relatives who are no longer friendly” (133). With respect to Levinas’ notion of the interpersonal ethical demand, Mrs. Hall functions as Other both as “exterior” antagonist to Ruth as well as embodying what Levinas terms the “third party” Other.

<sup>27</sup> Nancy A. Walker explains in *Fanny Fern* that in women’s “domestic” fiction, “Female strength is thus defined as self-denial: denial of any impulse that would lead to autonomy rather than connectedness, independence rather than familial duty” (42). Interestingly, *both* Ruth and Mrs. Hall alternately display via their dialogue these idealized virtues associated with exemplary women featured in domestic novels—“familial duty”—as well as tendencies towards “autonomy” and “independence.”

<sup>28</sup> Walker notes that Mrs. Hall’s “cautions and criticisms...are so exaggerated as to seem ridiculous” (49). I agree, but as I argue, such humorous “ridiculousness” also weakens Mrs. Hall’s status as the texts’ archetypal villainess.

uncharitable nor unedifying; later, Ruth sees the value in pecuniary mentorship in the business relationship she develops with Mr. Walter at the onset of her writing career.<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, Mrs. Hall's attempt to manage Ruth's money models another lesson for Ruth; that is, the importance for a woman, as family head and protector, of controlling monetary concerns. She exemplifies feminine self-empowerment and business aggressiveness that will be indispensable to a poor and abandoned Ruth. Later Mrs. Hall remarks to Ruth, "You keep a rag bag, I suppose...many's the glass dish I've peddled away my scissor clippings for" (20-21); and, after the birth of Daisy, she advises: "take care of the baby yourself; a nursery girl would be very expensive...I always took care of my babies" (27). Again, Mrs. Hall models industriousness and financial prudence in contrast to the young Ruth's more delicate, upper-middle class sensibility, employing and marketing her own craftsmanship as well as avoiding wasteful expense in favor of relying on her own labor and competence. Indeed, the description of the indolent, gluttonous Mrs. Jiff bears out Mrs. Hall's wariness of nannies (25-26).

In another instance of dialogic foreshadowing, Mrs. Hall exclaims to Ruth: "land's sake, child, you mustn't quote your father now you're married; you haven't any father," then adding: "Wives should be keepers of the home" (20). This first statement proves to be practically true, in that Ruth's father abandons her financially after Harry's death. Julie Wilhelm reads Mrs. Hall's second admonition as reinforcing the domestic side of the nineteenth-century male/female labor binary.<sup>30</sup> Yet, in the conversation over the "nursery girl" Mrs. Hall reinvests this traditional assertion with a strong sense of female agency: "If you hadn't made a fool of Harry, he never could have dreamed of [hiring a nursery girl]. You ought to have sense enough to check him,

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<sup>29</sup> Harris notes: "As with many other women's novels of the mid-nineteenth century, the unacknowledged model for the successful heroine's behavior is the lower-class woman, whose status frees her from the gender definitions and restrictions of the middle and upper-middle classes" (122). Though Harris is referring to Mrs. Skiddy, I argue that Mrs. Hall's "lower-class" tendencies establish her as this sort of mentor-figure as well.

<sup>30</sup> Wilhelm describes Mrs. Hall as "[t]he main representative of domestic ideology" in *Ruth Hall* (210).



when he would go into such extravagances for you, but some people *haven't* any sense" (27).

This statement prompts the question: who lacks "sense" here, Ruth or Harry, despite being "brought up sensibly" (19)? Mrs. Hall assumes that the younger Ruth possesses a certain modicum of "sensible" agency, in that she suggests that Ruth might "check" Harry, who though "taught economy" (19-20) is nevertheless capable of "extravagances" such as a nanny. Thus, Mrs. Hall's understanding of women as "keepers of the home" implies a more authoritative role than just serving as cook, maid and mother.<sup>31</sup>

Soon after the initial dialogues between Ruth and Mrs. Hall, though, we see more emphasis on the construction of Mrs. Hall's villainy. Almost as if Fern were aware of the rhetorical problem of her early depictions of the novel's antagonist, the narrator assumes centrality in Chapter XIV as a "knowledgeable" moral interlocutor and advocate for her heroine (Weyler 100), simulating a dialogue with Mrs. Hall as the latter, snooping through Ruth's and Harry's home, soliloquizes rhetorical questions to which the narrator responds (33).

Commenting on the expensive appearance of Ruth's parlor, Mrs. Hall snidely understates, "A few dollars laid out here, I guess," to which the narrator answers: "Not so fast, my dear madam. Examine closely. Those long, white curtains, looped up so prettily from the open windows, are plain cheap muslin; but no artist could have disposed their folds more gracefully" (33-34).

Regarding such episodes, Julie Wilhelm posits, "*Ruth Hall* alternates between the excesses of sentimentality and the concision of humor in chapters that, by turns, demand reader participation and expense. As the novel's sentimentality resists Mrs. Hall's penal statute by encouraging the reader to feel for Ruth in trying times, so, too, does humor resist this economy" (204). But humor and "softer" sentimentalism are not the only rhetorical elements in play here, for the narrator's language turns sarcastic: "But, my dear old lady, we beg pardon; we are keeping you

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<sup>31</sup> Again, see Warren (xxxiii).

too long from the china closet, which you are so anxious to inspect; hoping to find a flaw, either in crockery or cake. Not a bit! You may draw those prying fingers across the shelves till you are tired, and not a particle of dust will adhere to them...the silver might serve for a looking glass, in which you could read your own vexation” (34-35).<sup>32</sup> As is the case with Mrs. Hall’s previous dialogues with Ruth, the presentation is satirical, reinforcing Fern’s caricature of the busybody matriarch. Simultaneously, though, the semi-dialogic episode inaugurates Mrs. Hall’s transformation from humorous mother-in-law archetype to malevolent antagonist. Such an abrupt rhetorical, tonal shift is consistent with Fern’s style, as Ann D. Wood observes: “she had two selves, two voices, one strident and aggressive, the other conventional and sentimental” (18). Yet, the intrusion of the narrator here overstates the case, highlighting the artificiality of Mrs. Hall as a mere rhetorical construct. This indicates that Fern was preoccupied with micro-managing her audience’s (negative) “sentimental” response to Mrs. Hall, ensuring that the reader view Mrs. Hall not just as a satiric pest, but as a villainess, thus taking care that Ruth, the heroine, appear as a blameless victim.<sup>33</sup>

However, the result of this strategy is a sentimental backfire: in supplanting Ruth as interlocutor, Fern overplays her hand, framing Mrs. Hall’s “interior monologue” (*Fanny Fern*:

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<sup>32</sup> According to David S. Reynolds, such an “editorializing” use of narrative voice is consistent with Fern’s style. In *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* he writes: “Her most deadly stylistic ‘noose’ was her ability to shift tone and assume different guises rapidly. [Fern] was reportedly shifty and manipulative by nature... It was her combined manipulateness and her vindictiveness against family members that led to the writing of Ruth Hall” (404). In this example, the narrator attempts to “manipulate” the reader. I posit that it is too obvious to be effective rhetoric. Fern may have done better being more subtle.

<sup>33</sup> Harris remarks on the overwrought presence of the “sentimental” narrator: “I take Fern’s sentimental voice as a conscious creation. Rather than seeing it as a reflection of Ruth’s innocence, however, I suggest...that Fern used the sentimental mode against the subculture that mandated it as proof that the writer was a ‘true’ woman... Our interpretive conventions have been inadequate for assessing just how deliberately nineteenth-century women writers were capable of manipulating the writing conventions of their day” (12). I agree that Fern “manipulates” the “writing convention,” but only to create a sentimental straw (wo)man for her protagonist. This rhetorical device does not “reflect Ruth’s innocence” due to a lack of intent, but because Fern tries too hard to do so. Harris admits that Fern’s intent is about developing Ruth, though the surrounding “voices” are also potent “Fern’s own strategy is to orchestrate a variety of voices, all focused on the central character but all exhibiting their own will to power as they inscribe (and therefore define) the protagonist. The question of voice is at the heart of the novel” (114).

*Independent Woman* 136) with an overpowering commentary which, ironically, emasculates Mrs. Hall's discourse and behavior of any rhetorical value by hyper-stressing her archetypal villainy. This *faux pas* is brought into relief by the effusive depiction of Ruth's exquisite taste in *décor* and newly-acquired domestic frugality as prototypical, especially in characterizing Mrs. Hall's snooping venture as an "exploring tour" (33), a phrase which connotes visiting an immaculate museum exhibit. Regarding the narrator's depictions of Ruth's "taste," Temple remarks that "*Ruth Hall* continually positions Ruth's taste, gentility, and natural superiority as muted by her immediate community, which is flatly vilified as a set of jealous, competitive, clinging parasites" (146).<sup>34</sup> So the novel recedes back into melodramatic sentimentality, where a perfect, moral Ruth is authorized as beyond reproach, and her nemesis, Mrs. Hall, beyond redemption. Regardless of what else might occur respecting the heroine or villainess, the text's authorized rhetorical conclusions are beyond ambiguity. Put another way, even if Ruth is "martyred" by Mrs. Hall or public opinion, she is already redeemed, just as Mrs. Hall is already damned, as Susan K. Harris explains: "[i]f uncomplaining wives are martyrs, those who oppress them are tyrants. Certainly, Mrs. Hall is a tyrant..." (120). Thus, the reader's capacity to sympathize with the one and demonize the "Other" is, ironically, limited to an intellectual understanding of the narrative's rhetorical strategy, as opposed to a more affective experience.

Such a "static" state of affairs, I posit, is only rehabilitated by a humanizing complication of the principal characters, the dialogic deployment of an ironic *peripeteia*. In spite of Fern's rhetorical designs, this destabilizing counter-discourse erupts, eroding Ruth's moral purity and Mrs. Hall's status as an evil archetype. Lauren Berlant writes:

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<sup>34</sup> María C. Sánchez notes: "class is understood, both in Fern's novel and in my reading, through the individual markings of taste and style that manifest one's relation to a dominant culture... Ruth Hall is of the middle class, but more importantly, she 'has class,' it is Fern's construction of this elusive quality that I connect here to individualism" ("Re-Possessing Individualism in Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall*" 26).

Fern shows how the elasticity of sentimental form includes its diverse popular audience—by appealing to the “reality” that all women are genericized and therefore misapprehended in their very uniqueness... Nina Baym has suggested that the nineteenth-century American novel reproduced a contradiction in these terms with respect to the feminine subject. The novel increasingly promotes psychological complexity and depth of character, while insisting that women be drawn as a type. (444).

What emerges in *Ruth Hall*, then, is a flawed heroine and a nuanced, sympathetic villainess, who together undermine the persecutor/victim binary in that *both* figures suggest the moral agent’s duty to respond to the suffering Other—particularly where they fail to do so—as well as assuming the role of the maligned Other. Again, Chapter XIV offers a glimpse of this ironic counter-discourse during Mrs. Hall’s “exploring tour,” as the narrator’s language goes from sarcastic to vindictive, addressing Mrs. Hall in the second person: “You should see your son Harry, as he ushers a visitor in through the low door-way, and stands back to mark the surprised delight with which he gazes upon Ruth’s little fairy room [the ‘exquisite’ parlor]. You should see how Harry’s eyes glisten, as they pass from one flower vase to another, saying, ‘Who but Ruth would ever have spied *that* tiny little blossom?’” (34). When considered in tandem with Mrs. Hall’s earlier lamentation that she would be “laid on the shelf” once Harry and Ruth were married, the narrator’s uncharitable remarks seem malicious. They highlight an experience that would be painful for any mother, however flawed, in being reminded how her child now dotes on the *spouse*, the principal and victorious rival for the child’s affections.<sup>35</sup> Put colloquially, the narrator is twisting the knife, which was characteristic of Fern: “[t]he half-confused, half-

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<sup>35</sup> According to Walker, “Ruth’s mother-in-law...interferes in Ruth’s domestic life because she resents losing her son to another woman” (54).

deliberate union of the sentimental and the mischievously Satanic was to be Fanny Fern's trademark" (Wood 18). This circumstance makes Mrs. Hall's otherwise static character dynamic, just as the evolution of Ruth's mercenary tendencies augment her dynamism beyond being "merely" a heroine who, through hardship, becomes mature and self-reliant.<sup>36</sup>

However, the text's rhetoric evidences that the author is never comfortable with such an ironic polyphony; hence, the recurring attempts to contain it by "doubling down" on the archetypal characterizations of each figure. One of the best examples of Fern's attempt, through sentimental melodrama, to re-exert rhetorical mastery within the text's dialogic structure occurs following the death of Daisy. The narrative showcases a stark contrast between the responses of the sympathetic narrator and Ruth on the one hand, and those of the unfeeling Mrs. Hall on the other. Whereas Ruth laments, "There can be no sorrow greater than this sorrow," establishing the "appropriate" response to Daisy's death, Mrs. Hall meanly remarks to an empathetic Mrs. Jones: "It is *my* opinion the child's death was owing to the thriftlessness of the mother. I don't mourn for it, because I believe the poor thing is better off" (46). In addition to the fact that the narrative ascribes responsibility for Daisy's death to Dr. Hall's negligence as opposed to the perfect Ruth's "pattern" mothering (46), Mrs. Hall's bizarre yet outrageous lack of feeling respecting Ruth's and Harry's loss (and her own as Daisy's grandmother) as well as her refusal to "mourn" the death of the child "*itself*"—a notable semantic dehumanization—renders her a

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<sup>36</sup> In "Sara Parton's Ruth Hall and the Literature of Labor," Kristie Hamilton observes that Fern "escaped the contemporary censure of being classed a 'political writer' by creating a character, Ruth Hall, who embodied at once middle-class, 'feminine' respectability and American individualism... When read in the context of novels written by middle-class women and men, [Fern's] appropriation of heroic individualism for women becomes apparent, as does her accommodation of the domestic ideal within this new woman's story. [Fern's] novel thus clearly remains within the parameters of bourgeois literary conventions" (89, 95). Hamilton's evaluation of Ruth's hybridity is accurate, though I disagree with her conclusion that Fern escaped "contemporary censure," for Ruth's destabilization of the sympathetic heroine archetype did not evade public notice or critical disapprobation. Indeed, as Hamilton also adds, "the focus of the negative criticism by male and female critics was defined by assumptions about what a woman's novel should and should not do" (95), specifically in terms of how a "morally exemplary" female protagonist ought to be portrayed.

reprehensible foil to Ruth's sympathetic status as an unjustly treated, suffering victim.

Juxtaposed with the earlier, less malignant dialogic rendering of Mrs. Hall, these later attempts to demonize her and canonize Ruth ironically indicate Fern's desperate need for unambiguous archetypes to reinforce a rhetoric threatened by competing ethical discourses.<sup>37</sup>

Indeed, the initial plot establishes ambivalence with respect to Mrs. Hall: Fern's portrayal of the matriarch fluctuates between Dickensian satire, the meddling mother-in-law, and that of a tough but edifying mentor for the young heroine within a *Bildungsroman*. From the perspective of melodramatic sentimentality, however, Mrs. Hall becomes more problematic in the later narrative, for here emerges an awkward dynamism inconsistent with an otherwise static figure, as Fern attempts to solidify Mrs. Hall as the villainess. The sequence that commences with the Halls' quasi-adoption of Katy while Ruth and Nettie starve in urban poverty complicates Fern's earlier humorous presentation of Mrs. Hall as an overbearing matriarch, or her second, less endearing incarnation as a selfish busybody. Rather, what emerges at the novel's *denouement* is a third version of Mrs. Hall's character, foreshadowed by her inhuman reaction to Daisy's death. Here she falls in line with the malevolent wicked stepmother archetype often deployed in popular Gothic texts as well as children's fiction and fairy tales.<sup>38</sup>

Yet even in this extreme rendering, Fern's dialogic portrayal of Mrs. Hall as wantonly malignant fails, as the following alternately humorous, horrifying and bizarre episode shows, as

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<sup>37</sup> In *Fanny Fern: An Independent Woman* Joyce Warren offers another possibility respecting the rhetorical function of Mrs. Hall's "harsh" dialogue: "each time the author seems to indulge in a tender description of family life or death, the reader is snapped to a harsher reality... It is almost as if the first part of the book were written from two points of view: the perspective of the young Ruth and that of the cynical realist, Fanny Fern (or the disillusioned Ruth Hall indirectly commenting on her own prior experience)" (136). If such is the case, this dialogue is another polyphonic example of the author ironically using the voice of her antagonist for contrasting purposes: to establish Ruth as an ideal heroine and sympathetic victim while also spotlighting the younger Ruth's practical *naïveté* and emotional weakness. Harris also comments on this phenomenon: "The alternation of voices, each revealing a worldview that contradicts the worldview of its opposing voice, is continued in the voices of other characters...each of whom reveals her- or himself as she or he defines Ruth" (116).

<sup>38</sup> For example, Giambattista Basile's *Cinderella, or The Little Glass Slipper*.

she attempts to force Katy to descend into the flooded, rat-infested cellar. The dialogue between Mrs. Hall and Katy showcases this “carnavalesque” interplay between humor and horror:

“Come here, Katy; Bridget is as contrary as a mule, and won’t go into the cellar to get those hams...so you must go in and bring them out yourself. Climb up on those barrel heads, and then feel your way along to the further corner; go right down the cellar stairs now, quick.”

“Oh, I cannot! I *dare* not!” said Katy, trembling and shrinking back, as the old lady pushed her along toward the cellar-door.

“I’m *so* afraid...oh, *don’t* make me go down in that dark place, grandma.”

“Dark, pooh!...what are you afraid of? rats? There are not much more than half-a-dozen in the whole cellar.”

“Can’t Bridget go?...oh, I’m *so* afraid.”

“Bridget *won’t*, so there’s an end of that, and I’m not going to lose a new girl I’ve just got, for your obstinacy; so go right down this minute, rats or no rats.”

“Oh, I can’t! if you kill me I can’t,” said Katy, with white lips, and clinging to the side of the cellar-door.

“But I say you shall,” said the old lady, unclenching Katy’s hands; “don’t you belong to me, I’d like to know? and can’t I do with you as I like?” (184)

Mrs. Hall’s nonchalant, minimizing remarks underplaying the ordeal of navigating the dungeon-like cellar connote satire in over-determining Mrs. Hall’s role as the wicked stepmother, in that an archetypal villain understating or ignoring the sublime has long been a staple of western humor in fiction as well as burlesque theater.

Yet the episode soon turns sinister in gesturing toward the popular Gothic and slave narrative genres, where the antagonist attempts to inflict a horrific act of cruelty on a powerless victim with whom the audience is supposed to sympathize. The narrator adds pointed descriptions of the action, emphasizing Mrs. Hall's brutal coercion of Katy, whom she objectifies as "her" possession with whom she can "do with" as she pleases, much like the archetypal, sadistic slave mistress bullies her domestic slave.<sup>39</sup> Ironically, the actual servant girl, Bridget—dialogically offset from the other characters by her idiolectal rendering as working-class Irish—resists Mrs. Hall's summons to descend into the dreaded cellar, expressing fearlessness, confidence and defiance as she claims her labor value within a domestic "seller's" market. In a bizarre sense, Bridget serves as foil and Other to Katy *and* her mistress, in that Katy, even in the midst of her terror before the dangerous cellar, like her grandmother requests that "Bridget go" instead, only to identify again with servant-Bridget in refusing to obey their common mistress's command. Just as the scene displays a fluctuation between the humorous and the horrific, it likewise communicates instability respecting Katy's position in the Hall's household: is her position that of an authoritative family member or servant? Her status as a child renders problematic any claim to a power position within the family, as was the case with children during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the end, however, Fern ensures that Katy's Otherness and lack of agency emerges as the dominant markers of her identity. Whereas Bridget is able to assert her autonomy in direct defiance of her mistress *and* Katy, confirming her higher market value, as a child Katy is unable to withstand her grandmother's domination alone. Thus, only the melodramatic reappearance of the financially-empowered Ruth at the episode's *crescendo* is able

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<sup>39</sup> I discuss further this conventional archetype common in the slave narrative tradition in the next section's discussion of Mrs. Belmont in Wilson's *Our Nig*.



to thwart Mrs. Hall's child cruelty, as her entrance into the dialogue alters the power dynamic, rendering Mrs. Hall as the weaker, Othered party.

Even after Ruth's triumphant rescue of her daughter from the Halls with her newly acquired wealth—depicted as an actual bag of coins (185)—she nevertheless tells her daughters that Mrs. Hall, despite her sadistic behavior, ought to be pitied. Thus Ruth humanizes her as a harmed Other who warrants sympathy from those she had persecuted, but who now, by virtue of Ruth's fiscal *renaissance*, inhabit a more fortunate social position than the miserly villainess. After “receiving the fainting form of her frightened child” (184), Ruth engages in a climactic dialogue with her in-laws:

“Doctor! Doctor!” said the old lady, trembling with rage; “are you master of this house or not?”

“Yes—when *you* are out of it,” growled the doctor; “what’s to pay now?”

“Why, matter enough. Here’s Ruth,” said the old lady, not noticing the doctor’s taunt; “Ruth interfering between me and Katy. If you will order her out of the house, I will be obliged to you. I’ve put up with enough of this meddling, and it is the last time she shall cross this threshold.”

“You never spoke a truer word,” said Ruth, “and my child shall cross it for the last time with me.”

“Humph!” said the doctor, “and you no better than a beggar! The law says if the mother can’t support her children, the grand-parents shall do it.”

“The mother *can*—the mother *will*,” said Ruth. “I have already earned enough for their support.”

“Well if you have, which I doubt, I hope you *earned it honestly*,” said the old lady. (184-85)

This dialogue is illuminating, in that her character as villainess again is problematized via the statements themselves as well as their fluctuation in tone. The campy spousal banter between the Halls weakens the horror of the preceding cellar incident, as did Mrs. Hall’s humorous understatement remarks at the episode’s outset.

Furthermore, polyphony is evident within the dialogue, where Mrs. Hall appeals to her husband, as “master,” to “order” Ruth to leave, as if her matriarchal authority were insufficient, to which the Doctor “taunts” her, implying that *she* is in charge of their home. However, this banter gives way to the real battle—Ruth’s and her in-laws’ rival claims to Katy. This crucial episode, while on the one hand seeking to establish Ruth as the heroic, morally-vindicated mother settling accounts with her nemesis and rescuing her child, on the other ironically reinforces the constructive side of the earlier mentor relationship, in that an older Ruth—now “a shrewd, bitter, business-oriented and aggressive woman” (Wood 21)—has learned Mrs. Hall’s self-reliance. Just as Mrs. Hall uses her financial superiority to leverage the acquisition of “Harry’s” daughter, Ruth now turns the tables on Mrs. Hall, employing her own will to power ethos to repossess Katy: “‘See here Katy;’ and Ruth tossed a purse full of money into Katy’s lap. ‘You know, mother said she would come for you *as soon as she earned the money*’” (184-85, *emphasis mine*). As far as the actual storyline is concerned, this last statement is true. But, on a deeper level, Ruth’s demonstrative explanation to her daughter indicates a further truth: gaining money and autonomy were always the higher priorities, a circumstance reinforced by Ruth’s

self-satisfied gesture of throwing the money pouch on top of her daughter, literally submerging Katy *beneath* her mother's greater mercenary objective.<sup>40</sup>

The epilogue to this melodramatic climax puts this sequence into better relief. Upon arriving at Ruth's hotel, Katy, her younger sister Nettie and their mother have the following illuminating conversation, which I need to quote at length to demonstrate its perversity:

"Why! What a great, big mark on your arm, Katy...how *did* it come?"

"Hush!" replied Katy; "grandma did it. She talked very bad about mamma to grandpa, and I started to go up into my little room, because...I *couldn't* bear to hear it; and she called to me, and said, 'Katy, what are you leaving the room for?'...mamma teaches us always to tell the truth, so I said, 'because I cannot bear to stay and hear you say what is not true about my mamma.' And then grandma...seized me by the arm, and set me down, oh, *so* hard, on a chair; and said, 'but you *shall* hear it.'...I *could not* hear it, so I put my fingers in both ears; and then she beat me, and left that place on my arm, and held both my hands while she made me listen."

During this recital, Nettie's eyes glowed like living coals...she clenched her little fists and said:

"Katy, why didn't you strike her?"

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<sup>40</sup> Walker picks up on a rhetorical inconsistency that the "money purse" episode exemplifies: "Given Fanny Fern's suspicion of the morality of material success, Ruth's own ultimate success might seem ironic or even hypocritical" (57). Ironic, yes, but it also highlights the text's ethical polyphony rather than hypocrisy. Or, as Hamilton suggests, "[i]t would be a mistake...to pretend that *Ruth Hall* is not a novel about possessive individualism or to fail to suspect that...[Fern] reinforces a socioeconomic and indeed a literary paradigm that identifies success and happy endings with capital" (102). Harris also remarks: "though the sentimental narrative voice stresses Ruth's parental anxieties, the iconoclastic voice emphasizes Ruth's evolution into a professional writer whose own voice is at least as business oriented as it is parental" (123). Gale Temple muses that "[g]oodness and citizenship in *Ruth Hall* are informed by an ethos of consumerism... Ruth's authenticity and uniqueness are indeed indexed by her ability seamlessly to display the way she has fulfilled her very specific needs, desires and aspects of self. Bad characters [i.e. Mrs. Hall], conversely, are portrayed as stingy, gauche yet overly concerned with social decorum, and they are unabashedly mean-spirited, competitive and exclusionary" (135).

[...] “Oh, Nettie, she would have killed me! When she got angry she looked just like that picture of Satan we saw once in the shop window.”

“Katy, I *must* do something to her...she *shan't* talk so about mamma. Oh, if I was only a big woman!”

“I suppose we must *forgive* her,” said Katy thoughtfully.

“I won't,” said the impulsive little Nettie, “never—never—never.”

“Then you cannot say your prayers,” said the wise little Katy; ““forgive us, as we forgive those who have trespassed against us.””

“What a pity!” exclaimed the orthodox Nettie; “don't you wish that hadn't been put in? What *shall* we do, Katy?”

“Nettie,” said her mother, who had approached unnoticed, “what did you mean when you said just now, that you wished you were a big woman?”

[...] “you won't love me, mamma, but I will tell you; I wanted to cut grandma's head off.”

Little Katy laughed outright... Ruth looked serious. “That is not right, Nettie...your grandmother is an unhappy, miserable old woman. She has punished herself worse than anybody else could punish her. She is more miserable than ever now, because I have earned money to support you and Katy. She *might* have made us all love her, and help to make her old age cheerful; but now, unless she repents, she will live miserably, and die forsaken, for nobody can love her with such a temper. This is a dreadful old age...”

“I *think* I'll forgive her... Didn't you ever wish, Katy, that she might fall down stairs and break her neck, or catch fever, or something?”

“Oh, mother, what a funny girl Nettie is!” said Katy, laughing until the tears came... “...Oh, how grandmother *would* have boxed your ears, Nettie!”

The incorrigible Nettie cut one of her pirouettes across the room, and snapped her fingers by way of answer to this assertion. (191-92)

This sequence, like others that precede it, is alternately humorous, sublime, didactic and sentimental, especially in that children account for the majority of the dialogic motion, serving as ventriloquists for the author’s own ambivalences. In relating her experience of abuse by her grandmother, Katy demonizes Mrs. Hall as capable of cruelty towards children. In response, Nettie, described as being like her mother in appearance *and* temperament (186), expresses through a series of horrific images her wish that harm befall Mrs. Hall as punishment for her mistreatment of Katy, even decapitation. That such sadistic vengefulness is routed through the voice of an “innocent” little girl renders them both humorously endearing and shocking. Furthermore, as if to sanitize Ruth from any moral taint with respect to Nettie’s violent discourse, Katy and Ruth each rebuke Nettie, the former reinforcing the Christian duty to forgive, and the latter explaining that Mrs. Hall too has suffered misery and deserves pity. But Ruth’s magnanimity fails in comparison with Katy’s, for Ruth’s tone shifts from compassion for a “miserable” Other to vengeful blame and self-righteous indignation at the prospect of Mrs. Hall experiencing a “dreadful old age.”

Ruth’s ambivalence mirrors the discursive instability of the narrative at its conclusion, as the text again shifts course with regarding its ethical appraisal of Mrs. Hall. Though Katy claims the moral high ground of compassionate forgiveness, even this “decisive” resolution mirroring the text’s supposed moral stance pertaining to its antagonist—a rendering of Mrs. Hall as deserving of “Christian” sympathy, despite her maliciousness—soon falters. The “forgiving”

Katy later relays to her sister more tales of her grandmother's abuse, featuring a pathos-ridden account of how Mrs. Hall took away her kitten (196-97). Ironically, his final attempt to categorize Mrs. Hall as villainess creates a double-bind. The text, in its self-awareness of its conventional sentimental roots, tells the reader how he or she "ought" to feel about Mrs. Hall. Nevertheless, the narrator's affective heavy-handedness, ventriloquizing Ruth's daughters in order to add melodramatic ballast, comes across at best as ridiculous in its over-determinedness (Hartnett 1), at worst as manipulative. In other words, how could the proper "sentimental" reader contest the voices of suffering children in contemplating an empathetic response to Mrs. Hall? The fact that Katy suggests forgiveness serves as a potential rhetorical fig-leaf for the text: in raising the ethos of forgiveness through Mrs. Hall's child-victim, Fern leaves reader-juror with the impression that Mrs. Hall has been given a "fair" hearing, and so one should feel comfortable condemning her as a criminal given every benefit of the doubt.

María Sánchez asserts that "Fern's novel is itself obsessively concerned with cultural divides and the ways in which they classify persons" (27); yet, she also cautions: "*Ruth Hall* is far more complex, ambivalent and subtle...concerning its depictions of a feminine individualism and sentimentalism's allure, than it has been given credit for" (28). I posit that just because a text is "obsessively concerned" with the "classification" of individuals, it does not necessarily follow that its project succeeds. As Sánchez's reading too suggests, the novel's "ambivalent" use of sentimentalism—at times manipulative, at times indicative of a character "complexity" beyond that of melodramatic archetypes—signals an ethical polyphony that challenges the conventional antebellum reader's expectations of the text, in particular regarding its "typical" protagonist and antagonist. The character of Ruth is problematic as a purely altruistic heroine due to her de facto "endorsement" of "possessive individualism" (Sánchez 25)). But as Sánchez

also remarks, “it is necessary to remember that Ruth, as a proper lady and no-account daughter, is surrounded by textual Others” (42). To the extent that Mrs. Hall, in addition to Ruth, Katy or Mrs. Leon, lays claim through her dynamism to the status of individuated Other, warranting ethical responsiveness as one also marginalized and totalized, Fern spotlights a counterintuitive rhetorical “dynamism” within antebellum sentimental fiction that, like her own writing, “is not so much sentimental as dialectical and ironic” (Hartnett 2).

## II. Hybrid Archetypes

In terms of any joint discussion of Fern and Wilson and the conventions which they gesture toward and resist, their points of congruity and departure are not difficult to observe; rather, it is their “categorical” ambivalence that is important. *Ruth Hall* commences as a novel of sentimentality, domesticity and matrimony and “scandalously” evolves into a lesson to women on the virtues of individualism, Emersonian self-reliance and financial independence, rejecting the marriage plot *denouement*<sup>41</sup> as a young woman’s *Bildungsroman* or “*Kunstlerroman*.”<sup>42</sup> Wilson’s *Our Nig* also appears to follow a conventional formula, the antebellum slave narrative model, though the story is not related in the first person, nor is the protagonist a “slave,” but a mulatto child abandoned by her pauper family and left in the cruel hands of a wicked stepmother. Thus Wilson’s novel also aligns with the popular Gothic genre as well as with “the ‘overplot’ of nineteenth-century women’s fiction” (Gates x), exhibiting traces of the fairy tale according to

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<sup>41</sup> Hamilton notes that Fern “devotes the first third of *Ruth Hall* to the deconstruction of the middle-class ideal of love and marriage... By its very nature, [Fern’s] novel becomes a critique of antebellum sentimental fiction that conventionally concluded with the marriage or projected marriage of the heroine” (96).

<sup>42</sup> See Huf (151). Huf notes as well that “[t]he woman artist who refuses to be at the beck and call of everybody, who puts work before relationship, considers herself a monster... More and more artist heroines are refusing to be selfless, sacrificing, self-effacing. They are declining to give priority to the needs of others—refusing to serve others in the name of compassion and love” (150, 151-52). She later adds: “women are increasingly creating artist heroines who are daring to be selfish” (157). Fern’s rendering of Ruth, despite her unconventionality, is also unapologetic in her individualistic, professional life choices. As I argue, Ruth’s career eclipses her daughter as her highest priority, which from a traditional perspective compromises her “heroic” altruism and moral purity.

Helen Frink (184).<sup>43</sup> Essential to note with both texts, however, is that their *unconventional* narrative hybridity mirrors that of their authors and main characters; just as Ruth, Frado, Mrs. Hall and Mrs. Bellmont resist totalizing categorization within their textual descriptions and dialogues,<sup>44</sup> likewise do their unique host-texts defy convenient labels that would confine them, along with their authors, within a single, static literary genre.<sup>45</sup>

Though they might appear as typical melodramatic heroines and villainesses at first appraisal, the hybrid singularity of the main characters in each novel renders any archetypal description of them difficult to sustain.<sup>46</sup> To begin with *Ruth Hall*, though some critics have characterized Ruth as oppressed both as a woman and as a member of the working poor, the reality is that she, even in the midst of her temporary poverty, maintains her identity as a member of the Anglo-Saxon, upper-middle class Yankee establishment. Ruth is a “genteel citizen” (Temple 132), having noteworthy connections, refined tastes, and a private education. She only endures “genteel” poverty for a few years, given the cold shoulder by her relations, though the Halls and her father do provide a meager allowance for her sustenance. Once her writing career

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<sup>43</sup> Jane Tompkins explains in *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* that “a novel’s impact on the culture at large depends not on its escape from the formulaic and derivative, but on its tapping into a storehouse of commonly held assumptions, reproducing what is already there in a typical and familiar form. The text that becomes exceptional in the sense of reaching an exceptionally large audience does so not because of its departure from the ordinary and conventional, but through its embrace of what is most widely shared” (xvi). Perhaps *Our Nig* failed to reach a larger audience in part because it straddled too many “familiar forms,” whereas Fern was able to subsume *Ruth Hall* more completely within the “convention” of the woman’s sentimental novel. Still, these antebellum authors’ engagement of popular conventions—particularly archetypes—shapes the rhetorical terrain upon which their didactic discourses rely.

<sup>44</sup> For example, regarding just the novels’ villainesses here, Huf claims that within earlier women’s fiction “heroines often had ultra-conventional stepmothers or aunts, who, because of their extreme femininity, provided inadequate role models” (155). As in case of Mrs. Hall and with respect to Mrs. Bellmont, Fern’s and Wilson’s “stepmother” figures are anything but “ultra-conventional” or exemplars of “extreme femininity.”

<sup>45</sup> Lauren Berlant discusses at length the linkage between Fanny Fern and antebellum African-American female authors in that they both employ sentimental forms and female archetypes while also subverting such conventional roles for women in their narratives. See “The Female Woman: Fanny Fern and the Form of Sentiment” (429-54).

<sup>46</sup> With respect to archetypal villain(esse)s in drama and sentimental and Gothic fiction, Peter Brooks argues that “[m]elodramatic good and evil are highly personalized: they are assigned to, they inhabit persons who indeed have no psychological complexity but who are strongly characterized. Most notably, evil is villainy; it is a swarthy, cape-enveloped man with a deep voice. Good and evil can be named as persons are named” (16-17). Despite Fern’s and Wilson’s attempts to create this “melodramatic moral universe” with villainous archetypes, their antagonists—like their heroines—do not lack psychological complexity, though they do function within this conventional stereotype.



takes flight, with significant help from Mr. Walter, Ruth is in better socioeconomic position—quite rich—than before Harry’s death: famous, morally vindicated, professionally esteemed and financially independent. Admittedly, during the antebellum period adult women could not vote or, if married, administer property in many circumstances (Baym 40). Still, having an abundant income, in addition to remaining single, grants Ruth a level of autonomy beyond that of the affluent housewife of the period. And though her femininity, temporary impoverishment and maltreatment by her relations and acquaintances create the context of Ruth’s totalized Otherness, her success fuels her agency, eliminating the vulnerability of the *bona fide* Other.

The abusive situation of Wilson’s Frado is more severe than the genteel poverty briefly endured by Fern’s Ruth. Still, her claim to absolute Otherness is precarious. Though viewed as “black” and treated by Mrs. Bellmont like a domestic slave in the antebellum South, she is nevertheless sent to school for three years and learns to read. Furthermore, she enjoys friendly relations with core members of the Bellmont family who advocate for her and condemn Mrs. Belmont’s cruelty, though with little success. Thus, Frado occupies a liminal space between black indentured servant and white family member, a source of confusion and familial tension that is never resolved prior to her leaving the Bellmonts, as Barbara Krah notes: “Frado remains a liminal figure, caught between the worlds of black and white, and yet part of neither” (473). Also, the fact that Frado possesses sufficient legal autonomy to leave the Bellmonts at age eighteen sets her apart from Harriet Jacobs or Frederick Douglass. Finally, unlike slaves in the South, the Frado turns to employing her craftsman skills as way to dignify and financially support herself and, by implication, she “markets” her school-acquired literacy<sup>47</sup> to fashion a self-narrative for publication to supplement her income.

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<sup>47</sup>Again, see Larson (553-54).

More problematic from an identity standpoint, however, is the convoluted status of Fern's and Wilson's antagonists. In both novels, the chief persecutors are women, who manifest an inexplicable antipathy towards the respective heroines. As Nancy A. Walker suggests regarding the socio-/psychological dynamics of *Ruth Hall*, the introduction of an "alien" female within the family who could become a mother's rival for the affections of a favored son could account for such extreme hostility (54), just as the cruel, hypocritical racism of Mrs. Belmont was not unheard of in "abolitionist" northeastern states, a reality that forms the didactic objective of Wilson's autobiographical novel (3, 129). I argue, however, that there is a more profound dynamic in play in these novels, one that stems from the unstable hierarchical positions of Mrs. Hall and Mrs. Belmont, a circumstance which complicates the ethical Selfsame/Other relationship between the heroines and their persecutors. Just as Ruth and Frado, as hybrid figures, are never entirely Other, neither do Mrs. Hall and Mrs. Belmont inhabit a position of absolute power as their superiors. The result is the dialogic representation of persecution and resistance between "differing non-Others" who are, ironically, both empowered and disempowered subjects.

What accounts for an added dimension of hybridity regarding these heroines and their antagonists is their shifting ethical positioning. With respect to the protagonists, their will to power motivations, while not rendering them unsympathetic from a sentimental point of view, nevertheless weaken their claim to a status of complete victimization. Within each text's dialogues, not only personal ambition, but also a malicious desire for vengeance animates Ruth's and Frado's thought, a circumstance which, far from representing them as unworthy subjects, humanizes them with a greater degree of realism, creating psychological depth and believability.

Thus, I claim that despite the authors' rhetorical aims, their protagonists are not always moral exemplars of a selflessness, forgiveness and compassion.

But just as the protagonists are not all good in attitude or deportment, the villainesses are likewise more dynamic than the authors themselves "intended." Of course, the rhetoric of the novels' conclusions at first suggest otherwise: in retribution for their vindictiveness, Mrs. Hall and Mrs. Bellmont becomes social pariahs and an objects of vengeance whose eventual moral defeat "ought" to provide righteous satisfaction for the reader as for the other characters. In short, the narrators attempt to convey that "justice is done."<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, Wilson's and Fern's dialogic polyphonies point to a counter-discourse that ironically positions the texts' presumed villainesses as sympathetic Others as well, individualized persons for whom one has an ethical duty to respond. Thus, I posit that Fern and Wilson offer a double admonition: just as one has the ethical duty to respond to the oppressed, categorized Other as a unique subject, likewise one must resist the tendency to demonize, and thereby totalize, the persecutors when their hybridity destabilizes any simplistic evaluation of their identity or agency.

In the end, neither Fern nor Wilson depicts a strict binary of angels and devils, oppressors and oppressed, the powerful and powerless. These novels do demonstrate through their dialogic structures, however, the rhetorical importance of voiced, external corroboration in maintaining an authorized binary of sympathetic victims and damnable villains. To turn again to Armstrong's discussion of the domestic novel, she notes the failure of this binary already in earlier British fiction, though her thinking is applicable to antebellum American novels:

the opposition of angel and monster...provided a means of oppressing other  
oppositions...the novel exercised tremendous power by producing oppositions

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<sup>48</sup> Nina Baym comments: "The novels of Southworth, Hentz, Holmes, and Marion Harland all permitted their heroines to triumph in satisfying ways over their enemies, thereby indulging the readers' wish for revenge" (252).

that translated the complex and competing ways of representing human identity into a single binary opposition... By thinking in such oppositions, we ourselves have come to inhabit a political world composed not of races, classes, or even genders, but of individuals who in varying degrees earn or fail to earn our personal trust and affection. As the world around us acquires psychological complexity, political conflicts tend to appear simpler still. (253)

With respect to Fern's and Wilson's novels, the polyphonic "failure" of this affect-laced "oppositional" structure speaks to a greater rhetorical ambivalence and "complexity" on the late-antebellum American scene as well. In a nation suffering from increasing socioeconomic, political, regional and cultural polarization, typecasting villains and sympathetic Others, winners and losers, etc. within public discourse was, ironically, also becoming more difficult. As we saw in the case of Melville's "Benito Cereno," defining agency, identity and moral allegiance within a divided United States had become complicated by the 1850's. Likewise within *Ruth Hall* and *Our Nig*, the hierarchical disparities in power and the differences between persecutor and Other are far less quantitatively and qualitatively distinguished than they first appear.

Yet even where the protagonists' and antagonists' hybrid identities, social alignments and interests would seem to intersect, the novels manifest an absence of compassion and solidarity between them,<sup>49</sup> indicating that an ethos of duty can only be deployed safely for an Other *so* unique that their radical differentness quarantines the absolutely Other from having any relation with Selfsame subject. This suggests, as a paradox, that the moral agent's recognition of racial,

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<sup>49</sup> Hamilton writes that Fern "reveals middle-class women to be generally isolated and competitive with each other—an irony surprising only in light of antebellum ideologies of gender that projected the reverse as the ideal *and* the actual. Acting upon individualized self-interest, a number of women characters in *Ruth Hall* reproduce and facilitate the oppression of other women. Ruth's mother-in-law, for instance, consistently seeks to undermine her; Ruth's friends do not wish to 'lose caste' by helping her when she is poor; and her female cousin chooses to take advantage of Ruth's poverty, rather than aiding her" (103). Similar phenomena are evident *Our Nig*. Hamilton also observes this continuity between Fern and Wilson respecting their incorporation of "economic issues" (107; n. 14).

social, cultural or gender singularity operates as a form of depersonalizing totalization: responsibility for the Good of this radical Other is always assumed at a safe, impersonal distance. By contrast, the hybrid Other that is like and *unlike* the Selfsame, and in relation to whom the Self exists in closer proximity, becomes either an object of appropriation or a “quasi-Other” with whom the Selfsame subject competes for affective control over a vulnerable “third party,” exemplified by Katy in *Ruth Hall* and the invalid James in *Our Nig*.<sup>50</sup> The result is a modern will to power ethos clandestinely packaged either as resistance to oppression or benevolent concern for a sympathetic, suffering Other. Furthermore, I maintain that the dialogic hostility that Wilson’s and Fern’s vindictive matriarchs manifest toward the protagonists stems not only from unresolved Oedipal tensions, but also from a fundamental envy over the fact that Ruth’s and Frado’s liminality frees them, ironically, from the confinement of social conventions that their antagonists must endure.

Thus, to reduce the moral ballast of these novels to a mere elaboration of antebellum ethical discourses on race, class and gender would be to miss something far more profound in Wilson’s and Fern’s texts. Rather, what is embedded within their melodramatic dialogues is a counter-discourse that exceeds Emersonian self-reliance, individualism and modern capitalist materialism, one that anticipates Nietzsche’s will to power ethos and Jean-Paul Sartre’s master-slave dialectic. Frado and Ruth, as “heroines,” do not just overcome oppression, but ironically, as hybrid *and* representative Others, emerge as the successful agents of a new, prevailing mercenary mindset. In contrast, Mrs. Hall and Mrs. Bellmont, emblematic of the previous

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<sup>50</sup> The “third party” Other is an important ethical concept here as it was in Cooper. Linda Bolton writes: “[t]he third party, as Levinasian ethics reminds us, is the Other to whom I have not chosen to obligate myself. She [or he] is the Other who stands invisibly beside and behind the Other whose face I have learned to recognize and whome I may be willing to admit into the narrative of history where the rule of ‘sameness’ [or ‘totalization’] prevails” (14). I argue that the protagonists’ objectification of these vulnerable figures, sentimental archetypes often depicted as children or the infirm (Fisher 102), renders them less as particularized persons to whom one is obligated out of a sense of compassion, and more as generic rhetorical commodities.

generation's insular ethos of familial duty, ironically become Othered not so much as immoral villainesses who must be castigated but also as hybrid, marginalized "persecutors" that champion anachronistic bloodline allegiance and cultural homogeneity within a modernizing, pluralizing American society also characterized by increasing socioeconomic mobility. The concluding section explores this ethical dynamic within Wilson's text in greater depth.

### III. *Our Nig*

If Fern's "carnavalesque" dialogic representations of protagonist and antagonist defy archetypal categorization, complicate the melodramatic good/evil binary and send mixed signals respecting the "proper" affective responses that "ought" be triggered by these characters, Wilson's *Our Nig* pushes this ambiguity further, for "[u]nlike the moral stereotypes of the domestic or seduction novel, Wilson develops plot situations and characters with realistic ambiguities" (Dorani 215). As P. Gabrielle Foreman and Elizabeth J. West affirm (314, 3), Wilson's novel exists as a hybrid text straddling several popular literary conventions: whereas *Ruth Hall* blends elements of the journalistic sketch, the sentimental novel and autobiography, Wilson employs elements of the (auto)biographical slave narrative, the "conversion narrative" and the popular Gothic novel (Mitchell 8) in addition to nods towards sentimental plot devices. R. J. Ellis posits that "the novel establishes a liminal dialogue between [these] genres" (164), a phenomenon he characterizes as "generic polyphony" (183). Not surprisingly, then, Wilson too creates a version of the wicked stepmother villainess (Frink 184), though Mrs. Bellmont exhibits a sadistic cruelty surpassing that of her counterpart in *Ruth Hall*. But despite Mrs. Bellmont's abuse of Frado, the heroine, one can detect cracks within the villainess's "static" construction. The social-dialogic interplay between Frado, Mrs. Bellmont and other characters evidences a counter-discourse that problematizes Frado's claim to the status of sympathetic victim as well as

positioning Mrs. Bellmont as a liminal Other, an individuated subject also warranting interpersonal, ethical responsiveness. R. J. Ellis argues,

[t]he reader is compelled to address the underlying economic realities that cause Mrs. B., the resistant victim of gender politics, to become the racist victimizer, in a fundamental recasting of sentimental generic patterns,” also adding: “Northern racism...in differing ways and to differing degrees it...maims the lives of Mrs. B., Mary, Samuel [Frado’s deceiving husband], Seth, Jim, Mr. Bellmont and even Frado’s would-be, but ineffective, supporters. (124)

Even the selfish, vicious Mrs. Bellmont makes a sentimental demand on the compassion of her fellow characters and the reader.

When considering the polyphonic instability of *Our Nig*, then, the question of the audience comes into play, as Wilson’s “Preface” specifies that the narrative is directed to the author’s “colored brethren universally for patronage” for her and her child’s sustenance (3). That said, the selections within the “Appendix” indicate that the intended audience is white Northerners.<sup>51</sup> Ellen Prato Fiorito notes, “[t]here is, seemingly, a fundamental contradiction between Wilson’s Preface in which she addresses her story to her ‘colored brethren’ and her appeals, or stance, towards her audience within the principal text of the novel” (41). Though my focus is not Wilson’s audience *per se*, that Wilson, unlike Fern, addresses two contrasting reading publics has a bearing on how the reader comprehends her rhetorical strategy and the interpersonal ethics it suggests. For a free African-American readership in the North, Mrs. Bellmont’s role as the villainess would function through this audience’s experiences of *Northern*

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<sup>51</sup> “Margaretta Thorn” admonishes: “I have long since learned that *we* are not to look at the color of the hair, the eyes, or the skin, for the man or woman; their life is the criterion we are to judge by. [...] I hope those who call themselves *friends of* our dark-skinned brethren, will lend a helping hand, and assist our sister, not by giving, but by buying a book” (138, 140, *emphasis mine*). Her rhetoric indicates that the audience is *not* African American.

racism and the hypocrisy of “professed abolitionists.”<sup>52</sup> A white Yankee reader, however, might have seen in Mrs. Bellmont a Northern version of the vindictive Southern “mistress” stereotype (Carby 44-45) encountered in Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative* and Harriet Jacobs, especially in that *Our Nig*’s ironic subtitle reads: “*Sketches from the Life of a Free Black, in a Two-Story White House, North. Showing that Slavery’s Shadows Fall Even There.*” Nevertheless, for both prospective audiences, Wilson’s narrative rhetorically functions through the assumption that the reader, white or black, has familiarity with popular sentimental and Gothic genres and the narrative formulae and character types they employ.<sup>53</sup>

Likewise, Frado resonates in different ways with contrasting readers as a character who “remains almost as elusive as her creator Wilson, who plays with conventional feminine roles without definitely choosing one as a framing identity for her protagonist” (Krah 466). For an antebellum white audience, Frado would assume the role of the slave narrative’s “tragic mulatta” or minstrel stereotype, whereas contemporary African American readers would view her as the “trickster figure of African-American tradition folklore” (Krah 474).<sup>54</sup> Again, though, sentimental and Gothic conventions serve as a genre bridge of sorts, in that *both* cultural facets

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<sup>52</sup> Following Frado’s departure from the Bellmonts’ farm and the death of her husband (128), the narrator offers the following harangue regarding Frado’s subsequent “strange adventures”: “Watched by kidnappers, maltreated by professed abolitionists, who did n’t want slaves at the South or niggers in their own houses, North. Faugh! to lodge one; to eat with one, so admit one through the front door; to sit next one; awful!” (129).

<sup>53</sup> According to Claudia Tate, “[b]lack writers apparently appropriated many sentimental conventions to give expression to their social concerns and to demonstrate their intellectual competence in terms that the dominant culture respected. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. also comments in the “Introduction”: “[i]t is equally clear that the author of *Our Nig* was a broadly read constituent of nineteenth-century American and English literature... True., the structure of the novel would suggest that Mrs. Wilson not only read a number of popular, sentimental American novels but also patterned her fiction largely within the received confines of that once popular form” (xxxix).

<sup>54</sup> As Peterson explains, Wilson “told her life story by means of multiple outside perspectives on her fictionalized self, Frado, in an effort perhaps to accommodate her double audience of both black and white readers. According to these outside perceptions, Frado is not socialized into the feminine graces of traditional tragic mulattas. Instead, like Stowe’s Topsy, she is depicted as a ‘wild, frolicky thing’ (18) whom white readers might well have viewed with condescending mockery rather than identification but in whom black readers might well have recognized a figure of resistance. Indeed, Frado is repeatedly represented as a figure of minstrelsy through which the dominant culture constructed and economically exploited black stereotypes. She performs, for example, for her schoolmates by puffing on a cigar and hiding it in the teacher’s desk... And she performs again for Jack Bellmont when, in order to eat from Mrs. Bellmont’s plate, she has her dog wipe it clean” (166-67).



of Frado's heroism, like Mrs. Belmont's villainy, are refined by these generic literary conventions to which the well-read Wilson was beholden.<sup>55</sup> It is this familiarity with popular genres that hybridizes the text's classification *and* Wilson's assumed readership—*Our Nig's* protagonist, antagonist, audience(s), author and the narrative itself share a destabilizing hybridity, as R. J. Ellis and Carla L. Peterson note.<sup>56</sup> I contend that the unstable dialogic representation of the text's archetypes voices ambivalence respecting Wilson's interpersonal ethical rhetoric. Furthermore, I argue that the central forum for this ethical polyphony is the narrator's alternating sympathetic and antipathetic renderings of Frado and Mrs. Hall in tandem with the characters' particularized dialogue.

Though Mrs. Belmont and Frado qualify as the text's villainess and heroine, upon closer inspection the relationship between the two characters in terms of their mutual Otherness is not shaped just through the empowered/disempowered binary that characterizes the interactions between Mrs. Hall and Ruth in Fern. In the latter case, there is a clear power disparity between Mrs. Hall and Ruth that shapes the affective terrain of the narrative,<sup>57</sup> whereby Ruth triumphs and Mrs. Hall is "justly" punished at the novel's peripatetic climax (Frink 188)—both are alternately winners and losers. By contrast, and ironically despite heightened dialogic

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<sup>55</sup> Again, Peterson explains, "[i]n order to interest a good publishing house while remaining faithful to their ideological agendas, African-American writers had to produce commodities that would please both a white audience, unfamiliar with African-American culture, and a black readership seeking to imagine community. As they charted new terrain within the tradition of American fiction, these writers inherited novelistic conventions from the dominant discourse that ultimately revealed themselves inadequate to express their concerns. Subverting, revising, and adapting these conventions while simultaneously introducing 'denied knowledges' from their native traditions, African-American writers created hybrid forms of novelized discourse" (151).

<sup>56</sup> Peterson speaks to the "political" implications of such narrative hybridity: "The history of African-American writers' tentative shift from autobiography to novel, from first- to third-person narration, is fully inscribed in the [text] of *Our Nig*... It suggests the degree to which autobiography in general—and the slave narrative in particular—already contains within it subversive fictional techniques, and it underscores the extent to which the grammatical choice of person, like that of genre, is not a purely formal act, but a profoundly political one. It points, finally, to the presence of yet another liminal space created and occupied by antebellum black women..." (151-52). Also see R. J. Ellis' discussion of character hybridity regarding Mrs. Belmont and Frado in *Harriet Wilson's Our Nig: A Cultural Biography of a "Two-Story" African American Novel* (112-118).

<sup>57</sup> Such a power disparity between "authority figures" and the "socially weak" is a plot staple of sentimental fiction, according to Peterson (168). See also Fisher (102) and Baym (37).

melodrama, Wilson's does not manifest an obvious winner and loser in the battle between Frado and Mrs. Bellmont. True, Mrs. Bellmont often possesses a greater degree of agency compared to Frado, a circumstance exploited through coercive threats and physical abuse. But Frado is never isolated in the way that Ruth is. That is, "this brazen young girl" always has "an audience of sympathetic listeners and watchers who are able to bear witness to her suffering and who help to validate her voice" (Green145), advocates who, though inadequate to assist her at times, at others do intervene on her behalf. For example, when Mrs. Bellmont and Mary object to Frado's attending school, "Mr. Bellmont declared decisively that she *should* go to school... The word once spoken admitted of no appeal...the word became law" (30-31). Similarly, when Mrs. Bellmont expresses a desire to whip Frado for being "saucy" (47), her husband responds in a "determined" and "decisive" manner: "'You shall not strike, or scald, or skin her, as you call it, if she comes back again. Remember!'" and he brought his hand down upon the table"' (47). Later, following an incident where Frado deliberately "insults" Mrs. Bellmont before the rest of the family by having her dog, Fido, lick her mistress's plate rather than eat off of it (46),<sup>58</sup> James comes to Frado's aid: "James sought his mother [Mrs. Bellmont]; told her he 'would not excuse or palliate Nig's [Frado's] impudence; but she should not be whipped or be punished at all You have not treated her, mother, so as to gain her love; she is only exhibiting your remissness in this matter'" (72). The narrator then characterizes Mrs. Bellmont's clandestine response: "She only smothered her resentment until a convenient opportunity offered. The first time she was left alone with Nig, she gave her a thorough beating, to bring up arrearages; and threatened, if she ever exposed her to James, she would 'cut her tongue out'" (72). In this way, the narrator compensates for whatever villainous capital Mrs. Bellmont may have lost in the previous

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<sup>58</sup> Another "trickster" rendering of Frado. William L. Andrews writes, "the slave trickster is to be interpreted as a kind of culture hero for a black community that asserted itself through 'puttin' on old Massa' [or 'mistress']" (265).

sequence's revelation of her familial alienation and lack of supreme agency respecting her treatment of Frado. Thus, like the other benevolent and appalled members of the Bellmont family, "Wilson clearly hoped that she would have a similarly sympathetic readership for her controversial book" (Green 145).

Yet despite this episode of "unexposed" abuse, the dying James reinforces his moral support for Frado within the family: "I took the opportunity to combat the notions [Frado] seemed to entertain respecting the loneliness of her condition and want of sympathizing friends I assured her that mother's [Mrs. Bellmont's] views were by no means general...that she was not unpitied, friendless, and utterly despised..." (75-76), whereupon the narrator adds, "With all his anxiety for his family, whom he might not live to protect, he did not forget Frado. He shielded her from many beatings..." (76). On the one hand, James' *and* the narrator's use of the pejorative "Nig" in reference to Frado preserves a sense of her categorical Otherness and oppression, thereby semantically retaining the reader's sympathy for her. On the other, this circumstance of non-isolation mitigates Frado's victimization: the fact that other members of the family, particularly the sons and Mr. Bellmont, almost always ally with Frado against Mrs. Bellmont inscribes the wicked stepmother as a marginalized Other who is unable to evoke the sympathetic responsiveness from even her relations (with the exception of the vindictive Mary) that Frado elicits with impunity.

Whereas Frado's tearful outbursts and tales of suffering extract compassionate statements such as "Poor thing" (46) from almost everyone she encounters during the narrative (excepting Mrs. Bellmont and Mary)—call-and-response sequences that model how the reader "should" respond to Frado—Mrs. Bellmont receives no such affective support from her family. After her husband prevents her from whipping Frado, Mrs. Bellmont emotes: "'Oh dear! I did not think it

would come to this; that my own husband would treat me so.’ Then came fast flowing tears, which no one but Mary seemed to notice” (47-48).<sup>59</sup> Of course, her vicious nature offsets whatever sympathy the family—or reader—might feel for her. But the fact that the villainess sheds tears in addition to the heroine, as she does again upon hearing the news of daughter Mary’s death (107), breaks a conventional norm for the antagonist archetype within sentimental fiction, where the maligned heroine repeatedly sobs while the villainess seldom expresses tender emotions.<sup>60</sup> The occasion of Mrs. Bellmont’s tears is also significant here, for as Philip Fisher explains, “[i]t is particularly important for sentimentalism that there be two victims rather than one...mother and child tied by the quintessential bond of feeling, maternal love. The primary victim is not the child who undergoes physical destruction, but the mother who must be present when all that she values most is torn from her and destroyed. Even worse, she will survive the event and be marked by it permanently” (106). Yet if Mrs. Bellmont’s tears humanize her as a sympathetic Other, rhetorically destabilizing her role as antagonist, the novel’s conclusion’s brief treatment of her melodramatically overstates her “expected” narrative castigation: “As age increased, Mrs. B. became more irritable, so that no one, even her own children, could remain with her; and she was accompanied by her husband to the home of Lewis, where, after an agony in death unspeakable, she passed away” (130). As in *Ruth Hall*, the narrator’s design is that the (vengeful) reader “ought” to garner a sense that “justice is done,” Mrs. Bellmont’s physical suffering and death being fitting recompense for the abuse inflicted on Frado. But the reference

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<sup>59</sup> Cassandra Jackson touches on Mrs. Bellmont’s Otherness in “Beyond the Page: Rape and the Failure of Genre”: “Wilson portrays Mrs. Bellmont as one who callously abused Frado and yet repeatedly characterizes herself as the victim of abuse. When her husband or her sons criticize or merely refuse to participate in her maltreatment of Frado, Mrs. Bellmont repeatedly frames herself as their victim. [...] Wilson’s depiction of Mrs. Bellmont exposes what Karen Sanchez-Eppler calls ‘patterns of exploitation, appropriation, and displacement’ that often characterizes the relationship between feminism and abolition” (162).

<sup>60</sup> William C. Spengemann explains: “The ability to cry separates the good characters from the heartless villains, and ‘pellucid drops of sympathy’ validate every event in the novel. Like pornography, the baldest sentimental fiction pays minimal attention to those situations which serve merely to link one titillating passage with the next, conserving its energies for details descriptions of often sketchily motivated sentiment” (88).

to her total estrangement from her children, in addition to her “irritability” and “unspeakable agony,” portrays a figure that, if not a victim in the mold of Frado, is still Othered by social marginalization and constricted agency (Ellis 111) even within her own household.

In contrast to *Ruth Hall*, though, Wilson’s text features no melodramatic climax depicting Frado’s final “victory” over her nemesis. Later in the narrative, Frado simply threatens to cease working for Mrs. Bellmont if she continues beating her, experiencing “[h]er triumph in seeing [Mrs. Bellmont] enter the door with *her* [Frado’s] burden” (105), though this accelerated episode does not hold the same peripatetic, sentimental gravitas seen in Ruth’s “rescue” of Katy at the conclusion of *Ruth Hall*. Rather, Wilson hurriedly relates Frado’s departure from the Bellmonts’ upon coming of age, her failed marriage to an impostor posing as an ex-slave lecturer, the births of her children, and her continued poverty and deteriorating health. The reader only learns in passing of the deaths of Mrs. Bellmont and other members of the family. Furthermore, we are never left with the assurance encountered in *Ruth Hall* that all will turn out well. Frado’s fate, for good or ill, remains undetermined, as the character by implication fuses with the persona of the “Preface,” supplicating the readers’ aid for an unfortunate Other, just as the “invalid mulatto” and “stranger” protagonist receives succor from a woman to whom she relates her “sorrows” in the previous chapter (124): “Still an invalid, she asks your sympathy, gentle reader. Refuse not, because some part of her history is unknown, save by the omniscient God. Enough has been unrolled to demand your sympathy and aid” (130). I add that Frado’s hybrid identity as a mulatta in the North establishes her as the Other of her “colored brethren” to whom she appeals in the “Preface” (3), as well as the implied white audience that emerges from the endorsements in the “Appendix” (133-40). All in all, Frado *and* Mrs. Bellmont coexist as suffering, (sym)pathetic figures as well as persons with malicious dimensions, as I will discuss.

The literal polyphony of voices, the narrator's as well as the various characters', resists the typecasting of Frado within a single conventional role, as R. J. Ellis maintains: "*Our Nig* locates Frado precisely on the border between servant and slave" (169). Wilson's contradictory, ironic title anticipates the narrative's dialogic polyphony or "deliberately constructed double-voiced representation" (Tate 39), playing with the reader's latent genre expectations and juxtaposing the racist epithet "Nig" in the main title with the term "Free Black" in the first subtitle. In the extended subtitle, the description of the setting, "a Two-Story *White* House, North" (*emphasis mine*), is contrasted with the "blackness" of the protagonist as well as "shaded" by an implicit association with Southern bondage in that "Slavery's Shadows Fall Even There," that is, in the "free" North. Claudia Tate notes the "self-reflexive irony" as well as the rhetorical barbs loaded into the lengthy title (40) as a narrative framing device which highlights the text's attack on the racism of Northern abolitionists.<sup>61</sup> But the ironic title announces several competing literary conventions as well: the words "Nig" and "Slavery" evoke the popular genre of the slave narrative; the image of an edifice associated with horrific trauma raises the "specter" of the Gothic novel;<sup>62</sup> the term "Sketches" resists any reflexive categorization of the work as either a biographical slave narrative, an autobiography, a history or a sentimental *Bildungsroman*. Though sensational title seems to announce that the work operates within the slave narrative tradition, like the hybrid text and complex heroine that follow it, a semantic study of the extended title relates a more ambiguous "story."

The ambiguity/ambivalence of the title is reflected in the contradictory Frado, the novelized third-person projection of Harriet Wilson. Frado's hybridity is established at the

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<sup>61</sup> Claudia Tate affirms this: "This last subtitle implicates white abolitionists in the racial oppression of Northern black people and complicates what had to have been at least an indirect appeal to the very people who had the financial means to assist [Wilson] by purchasing her book" (39-40).

<sup>62</sup> See Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher," Ann Radcliffe's *The Castle of Otranto* or Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, to name a few popular examples.

outset, as the reader is told that she is the issue of an interracial marriage between a destitute white woman, Mag, and Jim, an honest black yeoman. In this respect, the text exists in unique opposition to the slave narrative genre respecting the conventional origin of the “tragic mulatta”; that is, Frado is not the result of the rape of a female slave by a Southern slave master.<sup>63</sup> Instead, the union is consensual, and the father is black, not the mother, a social-sexual dynamic almost as taboo in the “abolitionist” North as in the South, as the narrator attests (13). Nevertheless, upon being abandoned by Mag Smith and her second (black) husband, Seth Shipley, at the Bellmonts’ Connecticut farm, the six-year-old Frado, described as possessing “roguish eyes, sparkling with exuberance of spirit almost beyond restraint” (17) and characterized by her mother as “a wild, frolicky thing” who “means to do jest [sic] as she’s mind to” (18),<sup>64</sup> is now rendered a sympathetic figure, as the reader is introduced to Frado’s “right she-devil” mistress, “wholly imbued with *southern* principles,” Mrs. Bellmont (17, 3). With the abandonment device, the introduction of the abusive, Southern-flavored wicked stepmother and the dark attic-garret (“L-chamber”) in which she is forced to live like a prisoner (26), Wilson takes a turn for the Gothic (Mitchell 17).

Frado’s sympathetic status shifts from Gothic heroine to “tragic mulatta” with Mrs. Bellmont acting the role of the cruel slave mistress, referring to Frado as “nigger,” beating her and working her as hard as a field hand. But Wilson shifts course again as Mr. Bellmont, playing the part of caring stepfather as opposed to slave master, insists that Frado should attend school in that “[i]t was now certain that Frado was to become a permanent member of the family” (30), education and familial inclusion being unheard of for African slaves in the South.

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<sup>63</sup> See Peterson’s definition of “the sentimental figure of the tragic mulatta” in American fiction (154).

<sup>64</sup> Note the idiolectal Othering representation of Mag’s speech-dialect here with the word “jest” (“just”) as opposed to her earlier dialogic rendering in contrast with Jim’s idiolect. Also, in referring to her daughter, this term—connoting “jester”—potentially signifies Frado’s minstrel/“trickster” role in the novel.

Yet this benevolent experience is short lived, as the other schoolchildren notice Frado's racial singularity, referring to her as "nigger" and shunning her—"See that nigger...I won't play with her" (31)—whereupon the narrative veers once more, as Frado's schoolmistress (and the reader's sentimental-ethical pedagogue), Miss Marsh, models the appropriate empathetic response for the class's unique Other: "She then reminded them of their duties to the poor and friendless; their cowardice in attacking a young innocent child; referred them to one who looks not on outward appearances, but on the heart. 'She looks like a good girl; I think *I* shall love her, so lay aside all prejudice, and vie with each other in showing kindness and good-will to one who seems different from you'" (32). Following Miss Marsh's admonition, Frado wins over her classmates with her vocality and minstrel/"trickster" behavior,<sup>65</sup> becoming a school favorite at the jealous Mary's expense. Mary, like her mother, becomes the one isolated, stripped of social agency: "Day by day there was a manifest change of deportment towards 'Nig.' Her speeches often drew merriment from the children; no one could do more to enliven their favorite pastimes than Frado. Mary could not endure to see her thus noticed, yet knew not how to prevent it. She could not influence her schoolmates as she wished" (32-33). As is often the case in the Bellmont household, Frado appropriates the lion's share of sympathy, especially from James, whereas the Mrs. Bellmont and Mary, who form an amalgamation—"[Mary] was indeed the idol of her mother, and more nearly resembled her in disposition and manners than the others" (25)—are shunned, without allies. Still, the narrator's ambivalent yet deliberate incorporation of the pejorative "Nig" in reference to Frado reminds the reader that despite her victories in the forum of public opinion, the protagonist should still be regarded as a sympathetic Other.

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<sup>65</sup> This is a good example of Beth Maclay Doriani's argument in "Black Womanhood in Nineteenth-Century America: Subversion and Self-Construction in Two Women's Autobiographies" that "Frado's cleverness and trickery allow her some degree of mastery over her oppressive white world" (216).



Frado's constant shifting between conventional archetypal roles, from Gothic protagonist to "Cinderella-like heroine" (Jones 42) to "tragic mulatta" to humorous minstrel to evangelical conversion subject<sup>66</sup> to independent young mother, makes her sympathetic Otherness difficult to quantify and qualify. Lois Leveen writes, "*Our Nig* emphasizes the indeterminacy of Frado's position among the Bellmonts. [...] Frado herself is a figure of great ambiguity; despite her centrality in the text, it is difficult to know how to read her" (565, 577). Ironically, such subjective instability impedes a greater dehumanizing totalization, preserving a sense of individuality even as Frado's sentimental appeal to the reader's sympathy is restricted by the text's repeated failure to inscribe her within an abject, melodramatic category, as Beth Maclay Doriani suggests (217). Barbara Krah even claims that "Wilson chose exactly that role...of the indefinable, the floater between categories, as the primary identity for her protagonist" (474). Though the majority the persecution is conducted by the villainesses, Mrs. Bellmont and her proxy Mary, the narrator hints at a vindictive aspect of the heroine as well. Frado's practical jokes at school and at home point to a darker side of her character, reflecting the nineteenth-century "literary type" of the "disorderly girl" (Green 144), in particular the incidents with the "willful" sheep and the dessert plate, episodes which also align her with the minstrel and African American "trickster" stereotypes.<sup>67</sup> The narrator relates: "Among the sheep was a willful leader, who always persisted in being the first served, an many times in his fury he had thrown down

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<sup>66</sup> Peterson writes that Wilson "turned...to the sentimental figure of the tragic mulatta whom Remond was simultaneously invoking in her speeches across the Atlantic" (154). With respect to Frado's, Christian "conversion," see R. J. Ellis (84-88). Ellis also adds: "The sentimental patterns embedded within Wilson's sparse narrative are further undermined by a failure to deliver in full a message of Christian consolation—the other main support conventionally available to 'sorrow and trials' protagonists. The pattern of 'sorrows and trials' novels—indeed, of ante-bellum American sentimental women's novels in general—is one within which the protagonist, starting off a Christian, typically moves towards a more perfect understanding of the true nature of Christianity... By contrast, Wilson introduces a note of sustained equivocation. The development of Frado's Christian sentiments is unstable and her religious conversion far from secure" (85).

<sup>67</sup> Frado's irreverent response to the "sheep-dunking" incident is a perfect example: "Mr. Bellmont talked seriously to the child for exposing herself to danger [in 'tricking' the sheep into falling into the river]; but she hopped about on her toes, and with laughable grimaces replied, she knew she was quick enough to 'give him a slide'" (55).

Nig, till, provoked she resolved to punish him” (54). I read this sequence as analogous to Frado’s attitude towards her mistress and Mary as later Frado likens Mary to “our cross sheep...that I ducked in the river” (80), dehumanizing and Othering her before vocalizing her desire for vengeance: “I’d like to try my hand at curing *her* too” (80), “curing” connoting not just castigation but butchering within the context of animal husbandry that her reference to the sheep raises. Following Frado’s Douglass-esque “victory at the wood-pile” over Mrs. Bellmont (Jones 49), the text renders Frado uncannily and ironically similar to her abusive mistress: “[Frado] had learned how to conquer; she would not abuse the power while Mr. Bellmont was at home... She contemplated administering poison to her mistress, to rid herself and the house of so detestable a plague” (108). In addition to the fact that Mary *and* Mrs. Bellmont threaten to kill Frado at different junctures in the story, Frado’s pretensions to lethal aggression are in this instance accompanied by an inclination to the covert, just as Mrs. Bellmont reserves the bulk of her abuse for when John, James and Aunt Abby are absent.

Furthermore, though the side-narrative of Frado’s near-religious conversion through the encouragement of the invalid James occupies a significant amount of the plot, Frado does *not* become a second Sojourner Truth. She refuses to forgive in true “Christian” fashion her “tormentors” (Krah 472-73), and even expresses that ill befall them, despite the disapproval of her most stalwart moral mentor and supporter, Aunt Abby (80-81). Upon Frado’s hearing of Mary’s death, the narrator describes her reaction: “It seemed a thanksgiving to Frado. Every hour or two she would pop in into Aunt Abby’s room with some stranger query: ‘...S’posen she [Mary] goes to hell, she’ll be as black as I am. Would n’t mistress be mad to see her a nigger!’ and others of a similar stamp, not at all acceptable to the pious, sympathetic dame; but she could not avoid them” (107). Beyond Frado’s “unacceptable” *Schadenfreude*, her dialogue ironically

suggests a second comparison with Mary while at the same time it reinforces her Othering “blackness,”<sup>68</sup> in that Jack notes that Frado is “real handsome and bright, and not very black” (25), the narrator later adding: “[Frado] was not many shades darker than Mary now; what a calamity it would be ever to hear the contrast spoken of” (39). Frado’s instability as a melodramatic archetype is paralleled by these fluctuations regarding her hybrid racial alignments in that, as a mulatta, she is always white *and* black.

But if Frado’s status as a sympathetic Other is rendered suspect by her ambivalent dialogic inscription, Mrs. Bellmont’s role as the evil antagonist is destabilized by the presence of similar conventional fluctuations and dialogic polyphonies. Not only does Mrs. Bellmont lack sympathetic allies throughout the story, she is often depicted as possessing limited agency within the family, a circumstance that deteriorates as she continues to lose the affection and trust of her relatives (excepting Mary) due to her malicious behavior. In this way, Mrs. Bellmont is Othered by her isolation and alienation, and so, despite her sadism toward Frado, she exists as an object of sympathy. Furthermore, Mrs. Bellmont is also Othered by the ironic ways in which she is dialogically amalgamated with Frado. As mentioned, the text compares Frado in several places with daughter Mary, who is in turn regarded as “the idol of her mother” (25). That said, it is “[l]onely Mag Smith” (5), Frado’s tragic birth mother, who introduces a possible Frado-Mrs. Bellmont amalgamation, despite each character’s melodramatic function as an oppositional archetype for the other. Upon Seth’s suggestion that they “must give [Frado and her sibling] away” due to their inability to support them, Mag “snarls”: “Who’ll take the black *devils*?” (16). While pondering giving Frado to the Bellmonts as an indentured servant, Mag refers to Mrs. Bellmont as a “right she-*devil*” (17), creating an immediate, oddly pejorative semantic link

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<sup>68</sup> This dialogue accomplishes this with the racially descriptive term “black” as well as the idiolectal “s’posen,” a contraction which Frado’s father, Jim, uses when he proposes marriage to Mag Smith (12).

between Frado and her “wicked stepmother.” This association is reinforced when the narrator describes Mrs. Bellmont as “self-willed, haughty, undisciplined, arbitrary” (25, *emphasis mine*), followed by another rendering of Frado as “impetuous” and “of [a] wilful, determined nature” (23, 28 *emphasis mine*). In addition, Seth calls Frado “a hard one” after a defiant Frado knocks him out of his chair (19), and even James later refers to her as exhibiting “pertness” (69). Such descriptions of Frado’s imperfect deportment<sup>69</sup> continue throughout the balance of the novel, as the narrator remarks that “[Frado] would venture far beyond propriety” (38), being told by James repeatedly that she “must try to be a good girl” (50, 95) who concedes even to his mother that “he ‘would not excuse or palliate Nig’s impudence’” (72). Likewise, the text relates that Mr. Bellmont “talked with [Frado] seriously, told her...he did not wish to have her saucy or disrespectful, but when she was *sure* she did not deserve a whipping, to avoid it if she could” (104), the word “saucy” being the exact epithet that Mrs. Bellmont directs toward Frado earlier in the text (47). The italicized “*sure*” here bears a double signification, expressing either the narrator’s sarcasm at the prospect that Frado could avoid a “whipping,” or on a subtler level, as R. J. Ellis suggests, ironically hinting that Frado’s conduct—perhaps her “pertness”—may have warranted corrective punishment (118), though Mrs. Bellmont’s brutal beatings indicate criminal child abuse rather than mere corporal punishment.

Even if the ironic character amalgam of Frado and Mrs. Bellmont yields no mutual affection or solidarity, Mrs. Bellmont does voice on several occasions her appreciation of

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<sup>69</sup> Frado’s imperfection is not necessarily unconventional in women’s fiction of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as Nina Baym explains: “There are two kinds of heroine in this novel, the flawless and the flawed. The flawless are those who already possess the emotional strength and stability to function effectively when adversity strikes. The flawed are those whose characters are defective, so the triumph in adversity becomes a matter of self-conquest as well as conquest of the other... The overly dependent woman has to acquire firmness, the self-willed woman learns to bend so as not to break. The idea of what is, and what is not, a flaw varies according to the perspective of the individual author, yet all agree that some degree of self-control is a moral and practical necessity while total self-abnegation is suicidal” (35-36). I suggest that Frado exhibits “self-will” *and* “dependency,” yet it is not always clear whether the reader is to regard “self-will” as a “flaw”. It seems that Wilson regards dependency as a greater limitation, as Frado struggles to support herself once *independent* of the Bellmonts.

Frado's practical "value" as an indentured servant, despite Frado's Otherness and her antipathy towards her. She relates to her husband: "I do n't mind the nigger in the child... If I could make her do my work in a few years, I would keep her" (26), later admitting: "If [Frado] wasn't tough she would have been killed long ago. There was never one of my girls could do half the work" (88-89). Prior to Frado's departure from the Bellmonts', the narrator too recounts that "Mrs. B felt that she could not well spare one who could so well adapt herself to all departments—man, boy, housekeeper, domestic, etc." (116), highlighting Frado's functional hybridity. Likewise, James sees Frado's potential for "self-reliance" in her "native wit" and "common sense" (69), and near the conclusion the narrator also observes that Frado begins to realize her own "will to power," first in standing up to Mrs. Bellmont (105), and then by furthering her meager education: "retaining what she had learned, in spite of the few privileges enjoyed formerly, was striving to enrich her mind. Her school-books were her constant companions, and every leisure moment was applied to them... Often...did she pause to ponder on her situation and wonder if she *could* succeed in providing for her own wants. Her health was delicate, yet she *resolved* to try" (115-16, *emphasis mine*). Upon recovering from a debilitating illness, Frado "feels"

the old resolution to take care of herself, to cast off the unpleasant charities of the public. ... Frado experienced a new impulse. She felt herself capable of elevation; she felt that this book information supplied an undefined dissatisfaction she had long felt, but could not express. Every leisure moment was carefully applied to self-improvement... Thus she passed months of quiet, growing in the confidence of her neighbors and new found friends. (125)

Likewise, the description that Frado "felt" that she might improve her life via literate self-determination calls to mind the iconic will to power scene in *Ruth Hall* where a sick, half-starved

Ruth states, “I *can* do it, I *feel* it, I *will* do it” (116). As the narrative concludes, the narrator reaffirms, now in the present tense, that “nothing turns [Frado] from her steadfast purpose of elevating herself” (130), and though we are not left with the sense of financial security for the protagonist present at the conclusion of *Ruth Hall*, there is the same “self-reliant” Emersonian individualism (Jones 48), as the narrator’s language expresses a desire for self-sufficiency and productive autonomy in lieu of charity, which “Margaretta Thorn’s” endorsement also affirms in the “Appendix” (140).

In concluding the present section, I underscore the ethical ambivalence that the reader encounters through the ambiguous, dialogic character amalgamations that destabilize the melodramatic heroine and villainess archetypes and thus the text’s rhetorical strategy, whether we characterize *Our Nig* as sentimental fiction, a slave narrative, novelized autobiography, Gothic novel or a fairy tale. Specifically, we see channeled through the text’s dialogues a double-amalgamation of mutual Others—Mag-Frado as impoverished, desperate mothers and Mrs. Bellmont-Mag as marginalized yet ruthless women—that helps engender a *third*, Mrs. Bellmont-Frado as headstrong, aggressive competitors.<sup>70</sup> In particular, we witness this mercenary tendency in Mrs. Bellmont’s *and* Frado’s desperate attempts to appropriate the affections of the invalid James, to whom “Frado had become greatly attached” (52), Mrs. Bellmont by lying in order to keep Frado and Aunt Abby from visiting James (91), and Frado in employing a clever stratagem of Christian conversion to win his esteem and attention (85, 100, 103).<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Wilson indicates that Mrs. Bellmont and Mary form an amalgam; I make the case that daughter Mary and stepdaughter Frado do as well.

<sup>71</sup> R. J. Ellis refers to Frado’s pretensions to Christian conversion as both “unconvincing and “manipulative” (85-86). Regarding the mercenary side to the heroine’s “conversion,” Ellis adds: “Doubt about Frado’s final sincerity is increased by the suspect way the narrative formulates its closing religious sentiments. Her claim to piety is complicated by an inference that self-interest might underlie the religiosity” (87).

But despite Wilson's characters' close interrelationships and amalgamations, there is a pregnant lack of mutual compassion or solidarity between Others. Such instances never materialize in the text, a phenomenon that, as R. J. Ellis implies (124) and David Dowling argues, reflects the context of an individualistic, avaricious Northern "market" culture that "is unnaturally bent against cooperation and mutual aid" (128). I argue that this counterintuitive lack of ethical responsiveness evident within the dialogues amongst the novel's archetypes and individualized Others, in Ellis' words, "offers [a formulaic] *uncovering*," in that the text's "repeated deviations from formulaic norms impel its readers towards a recognition of the *contradictory tensions* pervading representations of freedom, escape and triumph in abolitionist influenced slave narratives and other sentimental representations" (183, *emphasis mine*). That said, this "uncovering" via the polyphonic destabilization of Wilson's sentimental archetypes is that which invites a Levinasian ethical reading of the text, for as Angelyn Mitchell states in Armstrongian fashion, "[i]f *Our Nig* is to be remembered as a novel of great significance, it must be rescued from critics of a narrowly structuralist and a narrowly ethnic persuasion and must be placed in its proper context as a sentimental novel about women, mothering, children, and humanity as well as about hatred, indifference, bondage, and inhumanity" (19). Though I take issue with categorically labeling Wilson's text as a "sentimental novel" for the reasons already enumerated, Mitchell frames the ethical stakes of the larger critical conversation about Harriet E. Wilson and the notion of compassion in late-antebellum America.

Though the narrative destabilization of melodramatic archetypes within sentimental fiction might seem to confuse through rhetorical ambivalence the text's ethical didacticism, the dialogic polyphony in *Ruth Hall* and *Our Nig* engenders a proto-Levinasian discourse on the duty of interpersonal responsiveness, in that the hybridization of their protagonists and

antagonists resists their being totalized as either persecutors or disempowered Others. If the texts' various voices, including the narrators', offer overstated or contradictory sentimental prompts as to how the reader is "supposed" to feel about their archetypes, failing to totalize either heroine or villainess successfully, their apparent need for public approbation suggests an instability of ideas with respect to an ethics of Otherness. What is ironic, then, is the fact that though Wilson and Fern never stabilize, via melodramatic dialogue, their protagonists and antagonists, blurring the Selfsame/Other binary, their narrators' appeals to the authority of the reader indicate that their audiences, and not their principal characters, are the ones totalized, in that both rely on the reader's emotional predictability.

Unlike the previous two, this final chapter has focused on the affective-ethical response of the novels' readers as key to understanding the polyphonic dynamism of the texts' discourses, dialogues and characters. And even though Wilson's text alternately implies a "colored" readership and a "white" New England audience, like Fern she gambles the success of her didactic project—the sentimental acquisition of the readers' sympathy and money—on the assumption of an affectively genericized ethical imagination on the part of the reader. Still, the intrusiveness of Fern's and Wilson's narrators, often cynical and sarcastic in tone, shows that neither author was entirely willing to take such a rhetorical risk without emotively "stacking the deck." It would require no small degree of readerly moral courage to resist Fern's and Wilson's affective coercion of their audience's ethical consciousness. That is, if both Mrs. Hall and Mrs. Bellmont exemplify interpersonal alienation resulting from being on the wrong side of public opinion regarding an authorized discourse based on archetypal heroines and villainess, the texts' anticipated readers may think twice before indulging in any proscribed "sentimental" response for a non-sanctioned Other.



The paradoxical irony therefore lies in the interactive dialogic representations of the texts' archetypes. Despite the narrators' prodding, protagonists', antagonists' and supporting characters' speech in both novels form a discursive polyphony that betrays, in contradiction to the voices of the narrators, an experience of Otherness and moral imperfection that would suggest an ethics of mutual solidarity. Yet the narrators suppress the development of any renegade solidarity of Otherness, either between the texts' dynamic archetypes or within the reader's empathetic capacity to respond to unconventional Others in antagonists.

Still, the legacy of *Ruth Hall* and *Our Nig* is neither the rhetorical failure of melodramatic archetypes nor the dialogic emergence of polyphonic ethical discourses, but the implication that the rhetoric of categorized totalities was not adequate in shaping the contours of interpersonal ethical discourse. Democracy could not be contained by types. Even so, many of those engaged in the polarizing national conversations on slavery, ethno-racial injustice, socioeconomics, labor, intersectional politics and women's rights were inclined to restore "proper" rhetorical order to such moral-ethical discourses by reinforcing the conventional melodramatic archetypes and sentimental narratives that, as Fern and Wilson demonstrate, were "affectively" collapsing in popular American fiction on the eve of the Civil War.

## CONCLUSION

In this study, two of the words I frequently use to describe the dialogic-polyphonic phenomena in Cooper, Melville, Fern and Wilson are “irony” and “ambivalence.” To the extent that the moral rhetoric within the texts’ dialogic structures vocalizes contrary ethical discourses on Otherness and totality, “ambivalence” is an appropriate descriptive. But ambivalence, polyphony or contradiction do not necessarily imply “irony.” Furthermore, the presence of irony in a text is not always worthy of examination. That said, what is significantly ironic about the polyphonic ethical discourses within these novels? I posit that their historical-contextual situation as works of American fiction from the mid 1800’s makes their unstable ethical polyphonies regarding Otherness reflective *and* ironic within this *milieu*. Additionally, in that the moral/ethical dialectic regarding Otherness in each text is pronounced, mirroring the ethical conversations of the place and period, similar to Jeffrey Nealon I hold that this irony reflects and anticipates the larger irony of Levinasian alterity ethics for a diverse “United” States on the eve of Secession and at the threshold of late modernity.

In an antebellum republic increasingly characterized, and lauded, by commentators like de Tocqueville for its demographic pluralism, ethical accommodation for the wellbeing of the absolutely Other in lieu of national sameness was giving way to the tendency to deal with social, cultural, political and racial differences through a mastering totalization enforced by militaristic power and violence. Furthermore, in the age of Emerson’s and Thoreau’s transcendentalism, when the primacy of individuality as sovereign subjectivity was gaining philosophical prominence, this collective “will to totalize” threatened to engulf the individual’s irreducible

particularity within a thematizing discourse of hierarchical categorization. Each of the selected novels attempts, through its rhetorical, dialogic representation, to call attention to the oppressive injustice born by any socioeconomic or political construct that would totalize and implementize individuals as objects. At the same time, these texts, like the systems they critique, voice a moral rhetoric that merely substitutes an alternative narrative of dehumanizing totalization as a counterweight to previous “injustices.” As a result, Cooper’s, Melville’s, Fern’s and Wilson’s polyphonic texts embody varying degrees of irony, if not hypocrisy.

Yet the greater significance of these texts’ polyphonic, ethical ambivalence and irony is not just a matter of displaying the imaginative limitations in the authors’ moral-ethical visions, or that, in postmodern hindsight, they somehow should have “known better.” I do more than merely call attention to their inability to envision an ethical society that acknowledges the collective *and* individual moral invocation to assume responsibility for the Good of the particular Other within an escalating national conversation “ironically” centered around questions of personhood, human flourishing and justice. I argue that these texts depict an ethical quandary implied by Levinas’ ethics and still confronted by identity politics today, within academic literary studies and in general: can a political society founded on “ethical” notions of human dignity and individual rights, one wracked by violent social upheavals in seeking to refine and redefine these same principles, respond to the moral demand to seek the well-being of the individuated Other without rhetorical totalization within an “ethical” dialectic? Do Cooper, Melville, Fern and Wilson point to a persistent inability to treat the ethical subject, the absolutely Other, as anything but a representative type? Levinas argues that rhetoric itself is the beginning of such discursive thematization (*Totality and Infinity* 70). I posit that the morally didactic rhetoric in fiction is no exception. Thus, to the extent that these authors suggest the demand for

an ethics of Otherness *and* particularity while employing the mastering optic of totalization, their works do contain a tragic irony.

Levinas' ethics of alterity help us to understand the ethical paradox within these novels' ironic dialectics, which in turn exposes the enduring modern conundrum of fecundating totalization implicit within Levinas' own rhetoric; his mediations on the particular, response-evoking Otherness of the "persecutor" acknowledges this problem (*Otherwise Than Being* 111). At the same time, Mikhail Bakhtin's formalist criticism on novelistic dialogism and polyphony allows us, as modern readers, to unearth redemptive ethical ambivalences within the polyphonic-dialogic structures of Cooper, Melville, Fern and Wilson. For example, Cooper's inability to contain classes of persons—and the ideologies they represent—within upstate New York's historic hierarchy of wealth and ethnicity in the Littlepage Trilogy gestures to an ethics of particularity, and not just a sense of interpersonal obligation predefined by one's position within a socioeconomic structure. Melville articulates in *Israel Potter* and "Benito Cereno" the intersubjective ethical complications that arise when different Northern and Southern constructions of oppressed Otherness conflict. He opposes the totality of the urban-industrial yeoman with that of the African slave, positing as well the moral-ethical confusion confronting any thematizing rhetoric that emerges in contexts of racial, functional and linguistic hybridity where the Other's particularity resists the mastery of type-categorization. Finally, despite their rhetorical projects that would convey where the "moral" reader's sympathies and antipathies "ought" to lie, Fern's and Wilson's melodramatic dialogic representations of their heroines and villainesses also create hybridity in a sentimental context through the amalgamation of protagonist and antagonist traits within would-be archetypes, destabilizing the Selfsame/Other binary as well as blurring the ethical boundary between persecutor and victim.

In each text, the characters' dialogues convey through attributing quotation, idiolectical diction and phonetic orthography a particularity that also, within the authors' totalizing rhetoric, ironically associates the speaking subject with a "particular" type. Likewise, the polyphony of such particularized voice-types reinforces a singular authorized discourse concerning ethics and thematized Otherness while evidencing the presence of ethical counter-discourses that point to the invocative presence of irreducible Other. Therefore, I conclude that these texts offer a rehabilitative ambivalence that allows them to transcend the confines of "mere" tragic irony. Bakhtin's critical method also allows us to discover additional, latent interpretive possibilities for Levinasian ethics when applied to narratives otherwise trapped by the paradox of rhetorical totalization. And, to the degree that his conception of "answerability" for the Other tracks with Levinas' ethics of "responsibility," my deployment of Bakhtin's analysis of novelistic dialogism and discursive polyphony lays the methodological groundwork for an ethico-formalist critical approach to the study of earlier American literature that, aligned as it is with the work of Lorna Wood and Jeffrey Nealon, would serve as an interpretive complement to the continued application of power discourse methodologies/identity politics as integral parts of the field.

I conclude this project where I began, with a reflection from Hayden White. Considering that I made a decision to pursue an ethical reading of selections of antebellum American fiction, White expresses best the ethical stakes of the sorts of theory literary scholars choose—or refuse—in doing textual analysis. He writes:

there is good theory and bad theory—by which I mean theory that conduces to morally responsible thought and that which leads us away from it... Theory asks us to consider what, from a specific perspective, will be permitted to count as a fact, the truth, rationality, morality, and so forth. [...] This is why the only

criterion that is appropriately invoked for the assessment of a theory is its utility in promoting aims, goals, or ends of a specifically ethical, moral or political kind. Bad theory promotes bad ends, good theory, good ones... This is why theoretical thought is always involved in ethical and aesthetic as well as cognitive concerns. And this is why a given theory is appropriately assessed as to its ethical and aesthetic implications and not, as in science and philosophy, as to its cognitive validity alone. (*Figural Realism* viii-xi).

He then adds: “the relation between literary discourse (where writing is supposed to be free and even abandoned) and historical discourse (where factuality, realism, and rational commonsense are supposed to prevail) provides a microcosm of modern Western thought’s effort to relate imagination (the vision of what might be) and commonsense” (ix). In broad strokes, White synthesizes the purpose of my study: calling attention to the crucial “dialogic” intersection of an ethical (“good”) theoretical practice, literary discourse and historical context.

My choice of primary texts, theoretical framework and accompanying criticism takes all of these components into account. Indeed, Levinas’ ethics of alterity and particularity, novelistic dialogism, discursive polyphony and the political and ideological dialectics of the United States in the mid 1800’s are all intellectual and aesthetic facets of a common ethical narrative. It is a story that speaks to the ongoing modern dilemma of discerning how the moral subject “ought” to respond to the individualized Other as a unique human being as opposed to a generic representative of a demographic totality with an *impersonal*, abstracted “right” to “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” I also argue that the totalization of the Other is an acutely modern concern, as Levinas affirms in his reflections on violent totalitarianism and the State in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in *Alterity & Transcendence*. In particular, I point to the technological

proliferation and urban mechanization following the Industrial Revolution as well as to Adam Smith's *laissez faire* economics, John Stuart Mill's rational utilitarianism and Thomas Malthus' dehumanizing mathematics as prime examples, in that late modernity would be characterized by the mass replication of identical, interchangeable implements and the translation of social—and ethical—problems into cold economic equations and depersonalized demographic appellations like “surplus population.” Such a context, and such language, reduces the particular human subject to a type, little more than a generic, replaceable cog in a totalizing machine. That said, James Fenimore Coöper, Herman Melville, Fanny Fern and Harriet E. Wilson each lend their ironic and ambivalent voices to a larger “Levinasian” conversation that would persist long after the Civil War into our own times about the ethics of responding to the radical particularity of the irreducible, absolutely Other in a modern republic that claims to champion the intrinsic worth of each individual person.

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