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The Accustomed Signs of the Family: Rereading Genealogy in Melville's *Pierre*

As generations of critics have recognized, the years between the publication of *Typee* and of *Moby-Dick* saw the public fashioning of "Herman Melville" as a precisely measured and eminently recognizable biographical construct: Melville existed, quite simply, as the "author of *Typee*." Increasingly distressed by this construction, Melville produced, in the famous "Dollars damn me" letter to Hawthorne (June 1851), his most extensive meditation on the problems of the publicly constructed authorial life. He has seen Hawthorne's portrait in New York, he writes, and "heard many flattering . . . allusions" to the success of *The House of the Seven Gables*:

> So upon the whole, I say to myself, this N. H. is in the ascendant. My dear Sir, they begin to patronize. All Fame is patronage. Let me be infamous: there is no patronage in *that*. . . . I did not think of Fame, a year ago, as I do now. My development has been all within a few years past. . . . Until I was twenty-five, I had no development at all. From my twenty-fifth year I date my life. Three weeks have scarcely passed, at any time between then and now, that I have not unfolded within myself.[1]

From his early pleasure at awakening to find himself famous,[2] Melville has progressed to a positive aversion to fame, precisely because, as his letters in the intervening years make clear, the cost of public selfhood has been submission to those who "patronize" him. And a large part of that patronage, he complains to Hawthorne, is a static misreading of his life, a reifying of his " 'reputation' " as a " 'man who lived among the cannibals.' "[3] Correcting that misreading, Melville

American Literature, Volume 70, Number 2, June 1998.

insists that he has changed and developed at an astonishing rate since his "twenty-fifth year" (and, by implication, since the publication of *Typee* in his twenty-seventh). Indeed, in his November 1851 reverie over Hawthorne's "having understood" *Moby-Dick*, Melville suggests the ultimate impossibility of a static identity, of a sustained, coherent biographical construct designated "Herman Melville": "This is a long letter, but you are not at all bound to answer it. Possibly, if you do answer it and direct it to Herman Melville, you will missend it—for the very fingers that now guide this pen are not precisely the same that just took it up and put it on this paper. Lord, when shall we be done changing?"[4]

When he began writing *Pierre* in the winter of 1851, then, Melville had become acutely sensitive to issues of literary-biographical representation, issues that frame his public career. He entered the public consciousness in 1846 as the purportedly authentic autobiographer of *Typee*, and, as Peter J. Bellis has observed, doubts about that work's veracity (on the part of its English publisher, John Murray, and a large number of its critics) essentially grounded Melville's literary life in "the problem of identity."[5] Some eleven years later, when Melville began his withdrawal from the public consciousness after the publication of *The Confidence-Man*, he did so as a purportedly authentic biographer, having offered his penultimate novel, *Israel Potter*, as an editorial revision of a Revolutionary War autobiography. That narrative posture also inspired doubts among reviewers.[6] Indeed, in the course of his career, Melville achieved the heights of public selfhood, fame, before ultimately descending to its depths, a thirty-year representational absence during which he was "generally supposed to be dead" by fellow authors and readers alike.[7] And as his letters to Hawthorne and others demonstrate, this steep decline in his public fortunes found an analogue in the equally dramatic change in his response to life narrative. From an early delight in his fame and an insistence on his works as autobiography, Melville moved toward impatience with that fame and an insistence on biographical oblivion, demonstrating roughly from *Mardi* onward an almost uniformly hostile approach to the devices (portraits, sketches, self-revelation) of self-representation. *Pierre*, written and published during the period in which this changed attitude became complete, embodies Melville's struggle against the ways in which readers and reviewers defined and

reified the public authorial self, and particularly that self known as "Herman Melville."

In developing his understanding of life narrative, Melville was responding to two particularly important conventions of the surrounding literary culture: the practice of construing the author solely in terms of his works, and the related practice of assuming "that all works by one person had real resemblances and could be properly thought of as forming one class," an assumption reviewers often rendered in terms of familial or genealogical "resemblances."[8] I want to suggest that in his public incarnation as "Typee," Melville learned the lesson of self-representation through self-erasure; for that incarnation essentially consisted of the emptying out of "Herman Melville" and the construction of a phantom that the young author repeatedly insisted was his autobiographical self. In attempting to fill in that cipher self—and thus to reveal his literary life as distinctly other than that of "author of *Typee*"—Melville engaged in self-negation of another sort, unwriting his public life by deliberately rupturing the genealogical link between the works out of which that life was read. *Pierre* replicates this progress towards biographical incoherence on both thematic and structural levels, just as its valorization of biographical silence as a mode of empowerment reinscribes the lessons of Melville's career.

The producers of his early fame—and it was prodigious[9]—were those readers and reviewers Nina Baym describes as "greatly interested in authorship" and prone to construing the writer's life from his works.[10] Their biographical theories and debates about Melville account for much of the contemporary response to *Typee* and *Omoo*. At the center of these debates, as Bellis observes, lay the question of "authenticity":[11] Was Herman Melville the autobiographer he claimed to be? Harper and Brothers thought not and declined to publish *Typee*; John Murray, Melville's skeptical English publisher, repeatedly (and futilely) solicited from the author "evidence" that his two narratives were true; and a great many reviewers concluded, along with George Ripley, "that [*Typee*] may be in the most important particulars, only an amusing fiction."[12] In the face of this first public negation of his represented self, Melville pronounced himself "heartily vexed" that "so many numskulls . . . should heroically avow their determination not to be 'gulled' by" the two narratives.[13] Yet even as he insisted

upon the truth of *Typee* and *Omoo*, he came to recognize that readers' and critics' negation amounted to more than simple disbelief in his veracity: it constituted a virtual "oblivionat[ing]" of the personal, historically grounded self.[14]

This privative biographical trend seems to have begun in Great Britain, among reviewers almost universally appreciative of Melville's work. In June of 1846, for instance, a London columnist endorsing Melville's "talent and ingenuity" wryly refers to *Typee* as an "*Alleged Forgery*": "An individual, who gave the name of Herman Melville, was brought up on a charge of having forged several valuable documents relative to the Marquesas, in which he described himself to have been formerly resident." For this witty columnist, "whether the papers were forgeries or not," their author already has been translated from Herman Melville to "[a]n individual, who gave the name of Herman Melville."[15] Indeed, this subtraction of Melville from his name became a critical commonplace among reviewers of all nationalities, a biographical erasure carried out under the banner of the pseudonym. The French critic Philarète Chasles thus recalled having discovered in English reviews "that Mr. Herman Melville was a pseudonym for the author of the apocryphal romance-voyages, *Typee* and *Omoo*."[16] At home in the United States, *The Christian Parlor Magazine* delivered "a pointed and severe rebuke" to "the real or pseudonymic author" of *Typee*.[17]

The terms of the *Christian Parlor*'s rebuke to the antimissionary Melville—"the real or pseudonymic author"—are particularly interesting because of the opposition they set up: the authorial self could either be "real" (that is, telling the autobiographical truth, which most reviewers concluded Melville was not) or "pseudonymic" (which, as we have seen, many reviewers concluded he was).[18] A more common opposition to "real," of course, is "imaginary," and in perhaps the next logical step in their construction of Melville's authorial self, British reviewers proclaimed him to be just that—an imaginary, purely fictive personage: "Herman Melville," John Wilson wrote in his *Blackwood's* review of *Omoo*, "sounds to us vastly like the harmoni[ou]s and carefully selected appellation of an imaginary hero of romance."[19] And as a *Southern Literary Messenger* reviewer observed some five years later, such "imaginary hero[es]" as Wilson likely had in mind were recognizable precisely by the "unerring certainty" with which readers "could predict . . . the[ir] fate."[20]

Issues of biographical consistency and predestination suffuse the fictional life narrative of Pierre Glendinning, in which Melville recapitulates lessons learned from such critiques as Wilson's. We know from a variety of sources that he both read and responded to these biographical figurings of him as a fictionalized phantom.[21] Writing to his British publisher in 1847, he is clearly impatient (if still jocularly so) with such representations, as well as with Murray's continuing requests for evidence of *Typee* and *Omoo*:

> Will you still continue, Mr Murray, to break seals from the Land of Shadows—persisting in carrying on this mysterious correspondence with an imposter shade, that under the fanciful appellation of Herman Melvill still practices upon your honest credulity?—Have a care, I pray, lest while thus parleying with a ghost you fall upon some horrible evel, peradventure sell your soul ere you are aware. . . . Glancing at the closing sentence of your letter, I read there your desire to test the corporeality of H—M—by clapping eyes upon him in London.[22]

The public self of the author of *Typee* and *Omoo* thus emerged within the representational void of a pseudonymic shell or fictive phantom, and it was precisely as that vacated self—"author of *Typee* and *Omoo*"—that "Herman Melville" became a biographical signifier in mid-nineteenth-century America.[23]

Indeed, it seems to have been Melville's first failed attempt at filling that void—the publication of *Mardi*[24]—that ultimately led to *Pierre*'s more serious rebellion against his publicly constructed life. For in *Mardi*'s generally poor reception (both critical and commercial), as well as in the subsequent favorable reception of *Redburn* and *White-Jacket*, Melville was forcefully made aware of the practical power of a static and prescriptive public self. In fact, looking at reader and reviewer responses to his first five works, we discover that while *Redburn* and *White-Jacket* are easily subsumed into the biographical model of "Herman Melville" as the author of *Typee* and *Omoo*, *Mardi* represents an alarming deviation from that model. And in its break with the biographical covenant, the novel comes to constitute, for its critics, an unnatural and perhaps insane perversion of Melville's true self.[25] Interestingly, one of the most explicit such evaluations of *Mardi* appeared roughly a year after the publication of *Pierre*, making it difficult to judge whether the later novel, which shares a number

of themes with the review essay, responded to or influenced contemporary critical idiom (I would suggest that it did both). Surveying "American Authorship" in the London *New Monthly Magazine* of July 1853, "Sir Nathaniel" directs his attention "to Mr. Melville":

> And in a new, and not improved aspect. *Exit Omoo; enter Mardi*. . . .
> . . . Surely the man is a Doppelganger—a dual number incarnate. . . . So that in tackling every new chapter, one is disposed to question it beforehand, "Under which king, Bezonian?"—the sane or the insane; the constitutional and legitimate, or the absolute and usurping? . . .
> . . . O author of *Typee* and *Omoo*, . . . we entreat you to doff the "non-natural sense" of your late lucubrations—to put off your worser self—and to do your better, real self, that justice which its "potentiality" deserves.[26]

The terms in which Sir Nathaniel assesses Melville's life—terms of insanity, illegitimacy, regicide, and threatened "natural sense"—will look familiar to readers of *Pierre* and *Israel Potter*. Indeed, I would argue that just as those novels reprise Melville's biographical emergence as the cipher author of *Typee* and *Omoo*, they likewise respond quite specifically to readers' insistence (implicit in the reviews I have cited) that their construction of Melville supersedes his own. By the time he began corresponding with Hawthorne, that public construction of his "real self" had left Melville increasingly impatient not only with his audience but also with the very process of self-representation, which he had come to equate explicitly with self-negation, submission, and stasis.[27]

Nonetheless, in spite of his insistence, in the 1851 letters to Hawthorne, that he was perpetually "changing," reviewers of *Moby-Dick* emphatically returned the public "Herman Melville" to his biographical origin. A typical blurb in Willis's *Home Journal* thus declares, "If we mistake not, the author of 'Typee' and 'White Jacket,' conscious of the vivid expectation excited in the reading public by his previous books, resolved to combine in the present all his popular characteristics, and so fully justify his fame."[28] The most virulent and most interesting of these attempts to read the Melville of *Moby-Dick* within the confines of his "reputation" as "author of *Typee*" appeared in the January 1852 *Democratic Review*. In an assessment that Melville likely would have welcomed in many respects, the reviewer proclaims that

> Mr. Melville is evidently trying to ascertain how far the public will consent to be imposed upon. . . . The field from which his first crops of literature were produced, has become greatly impoverished, and no amount of forcing seems likely to restore it to its pristine vigor. . . .
>
> The truth is, Mr. Melville has survived his reputation. If he had been contented with writing one or two books, he might have been famous, but his vanity has destroyed all his chances of immortality, or even of a good name with his own generation. For, in sober truth, Mr. Melville's vanity is immeasurable. . . . He will centre all attention upon himself, or he will abandon the field of literature at once.[29]

Openly hostile to *Moby-Dick*, this reviewer yet describes Melville in almost perfect Melvillean terms: as an author who has, quite determinedly, "survived his reputation" and tried to "centre all attention upon" his true authorial self, an act of "vanity" that, flying in the face of readers' and reviewers' patronage, destroys his chance "even of a good name with his own generation."

While the *Democratic Review* essayist may unwittingly speak what Melville would have welcomed as truth about his literary life, much of the critical-biographical abuse of *Moby-Dick* clearly was not welcome to him.[30] As he was writing *Pierre*, Melville was thus confronted with still more evidence that his "life" was not his to control, that participating in public selfhood meant negating what he described to Hawthorne as his "profoundest sense of being."[31] And in his fictional life of Pierre Glendinning—significantly, the novel in which he first turned from first- to third-person narration, or from feigned autobiography to feigned biography—Melville produced a narrative that not only thematized the lessons he had learned about literary biography, but also constituted his rebellious response to those lessons.[32]

Pierre's focus on matters of self-construction and self-representation—what the narrator calls his subject's "life-career" (12)—is evident in the novel's opening pages. Melville situates his muse (Mt. Greylock's "Imperial Purple Majesty [royal-born: Porphyrogenitus]" [vii]), his narrator (who declares, "the breath in all our lungs is hereditary, and my present breath at this moment, is further descended than the body of the present High Priest of the Jews" [9]), and his hero within the context of heredity and birthright. We first meet

Pierre Glendinning "issuing from the embowered and high-gabled old home of his fathers" and surrounded by a physical environment that evokes in its "popular names" "the proudest . . . family associations of the historic line of Glendinning" (3, 5). Indeed, as a biographical subject, Pierre finds that his history surrounds him in a particularly textual form: "So perfect to Pierre had long seemed the illuminated scroll of his life thus far, that only one hiatus was discoverable by him in that sweetly-writ manuscript. A sister had been omitted from the text" (7). As we discover much later, the text of Pierre's life has been in great demand by "some zealous lovers of the general literature of the age" (254), who have taught him a number of familiar Melvillean lessons about literary biography.

Like his author, Pierre has made a "magnificent and victorious *debut*" on the publishing scene, with a "delightful love-sonnet" (245) whose title—"The Tropical Summer"—is clearly meant to evoke Melville's success with a similar theme in *Typee*.[33] And in becoming the darling of the reviewers, Pierre discovers the restrictive manner in which they construct authorial reputation:

> The high and mighty Campbell clan of editors of all sorts had bestowed upon him those generous commendations, which, with one instantaneous glance, they had immediately perceived was his due. . . .
>
> . . . [T]here could be no possible doubt, that the primitive verdict pronounced by the editors was irreversible, except in the highly improbable event of the near approach of the Millennium, which might establish a different dynasty of taste, and possibly eject the editors. (245, 246)

Having constructed Pierre's literary life with an "instantaneous" and "irreversible" glance, the editors try to reify that interpretive glance by urging their youthful subject to publish his "COMPLETE WORKS" (247). Yet despite the potential "privilege" of thus "extending and solidifying his fame" (250), Pierre rejects the editors' request because of his sense—satirically rendered by Melville[34]—that his literary life is neither static nor fully determined.[35] This confidence in the vitality of his literary career leaves Pierre feeling "a pang of regret" for the surely befuddled future readers who await his confusingly inconsistent "life" (rendered, à la Poe, autographically):

> Owing to the very youthful and quite unformed character of his handwriting, his signature did not possess that inflexible uniformity, which—for mere prudential reasons, if nothing more—should always mark the hand of illustrious men. His heart thrilled with sympathetic anguish for posterity, which would be certain to stand hopelessly perplexed before so many contradictory signatures of one supereminent name. (253)

Similarly, in response to editors' "very pressing epistolary solicitations for the loan of his portrait in oil, in order to take an engraving therefrom, for a frontispiece to their periodicals," Pierre refuses on the grounds that "his boyish features and whole expression were daily changing. Would he lend his authority to this unprincipled imposture upon Posterity? Honor forbade" (253).[36]

For Pierre, as for Melville, his culture's apparent inability to read "so many contradictory signatures" or to acknowledge changes in the author's portrait leads him to rebel against the genre of literary life narrative, a rebellion that Pierre, like Melville, carries out on two levels. First, essentially quoting from Melville's letters to Duyckinck and Hawthorne, Pierre begins to remove himself from the realm of public self-representation, refusing to grant his daguerreotype or "the materials wherewith to frame his biography" to editors who claim them as " 'public property' " (254). Their "zealous" clamorings for Pierre's life narrative, the narrator tells us drily, "did certainly touch him in a very tender spot, not previously unknown to the schoolmaster" (255).

In carrying out the first level of his rebellion, then, Pierre clearly adheres to the biographical dictum set out by Melville's narrator: "In reserves men build imposing characters; not in revelations" (108). Indeed, that narrator appears eager to flout generic standards, announcing to an audience conditioned to expect biographical stasis that his history of Pierre "goes forward and goes backward, as occasion calls. Nimble center, circumference elastic you must have" (54). It is precisely such an undoing of revelation and of stasis that grounds the central action of the novel: Pierre's determination to embrace the product (his purported half-sister Isabel) of a rupture in his family's genealogical line. And that assault on the privilege of genealogy comprises the second, and most effective, level of both Pierre's and

Melville's negation of the publicly constructed self, a negation carried out quite determinedly *within* the period's generic constraints.

In his desire to acknowledge and assist the beautiful, mysterious, and "outcast" Isabel (64), who declares herself the bastard child of his father, Pierre must confront two primary obstacles: his father's "public memory," which he wishes to hold "inviolate" (198); and his mother's pride, which will not allow her to "applaud [his] sublime resolve, whose execution should call down the astonishment and the jeers of the world" (89). To spare his family the social embarrassment of exposed genealogical rupture, Pierre decides to claim Isabel as his wife, a scandalous move in its own right both because of Isabel's low social standing and because of Pierre's public betrothal to Lucy Tartan.[37] And as he conceives this plan, Pierre focuses not on "striving to reverse the decree which had pronounced that Isabel could never perfectly inherit all the privileges of a legitimate child of her father" (an idea "both preposterous in itself and cruel in effect to both the living and the dead" [174]), but rather on embracing a version of Isabel's orphanhood for himself.

Thus, in looking at the chair portrait of his father for the first time after Isabel's revelation and reversing it to face the wall, he declares: " 'Oh, symbol of thy reversed idea in my soul, . . . thou shalt not hang thus. Rather cast thee utterly out, than conspicuously insult thee so. I will no more have a father' " (87). Electing "no more . . . father" over a "conspicuously insult[ed]" one, Pierre goes on to imagine his mother's response to Isabel's claims. And once again, the pressures of "world-usages" (89), "the dreary heart-vacancies of the conventional life" (90),[38] lead Pierre to embrace what he imagines as his own genealogical undoing:

> My mother!—dearest mother!—God hath given me a sister, and unto thee a daughter, and covered her with the world's extremest infamy and scorn, that so I and thou—*thou*, my mother, mightest gloriously own her, and acknowledge her, and,—Nay, nay, groaned Pierre, never, never, could such syllables be one instant tolerated by her. . . . Then Pierre felt that deep in him lurked a divine unidentifiableness, that owned no earthly kith or kin. Yet was this feeling entirely lonesome, and orphan-like. Fain, then, for one moment, would he have recalled the thousand sweet illusions of Life; . . . so that once more he might not feel himself driven out an infant

> Ishmael into the desert, with no maternal Hagar to accompany and comfort him. (89)

Adopting the persona not simply of the orphan but of the bastard orphan, Pierre puts his plan into motion.[39] After telling his mother that he is married, he is banished, becoming "a besotted self-exile from a most prosperous house and bounteous fortune" (176). "'Beneath my roof, and at my table,'" his mother pronounces, "'he who was once Pierre Glendinning no more puts himself.'" Falling as he leaves the Edenic Saddle Meadows, Pierre "seemed as jeeringly hurled from beneath his own ancestral roof" (185). He ultimately completes his assault on genealogy—and "extinguishe[s] his house"—by "slaughtering" his cousin Glen Stanly, "the only unoutlawed human being by the name of Glendinning" (360), who, as we shall see, has attempted to impose an identity on the undone self of Pierre.

Before turning to the process of biographical negation begun by Pierre's embrace of genealogical rupture, however, we need to look more closely at Melville's representation of that rupture, as well as at the ways in which critics typically have read his thematics of genealogy. As we have seen, ideas of heredity—and particularly of hereditary aristocracy—infuse *Pierre* from its opening pages. The narrator produces his most extensive commentary on those ideas in the novel's first book. Describing Pierre's love for the country around Saddle Meadows, "sanctified" through its "long uninterrupted possession by his race" (8), the narrator abruptly launches into a critique of European views of America:

> The monarchical world very generally imagines, that in demagoguical America the sacred Past hath no fixed statues erected to it, but all things irreverently seethe and boil in the vulgar caldron of an everlasting uncrystalizing Present. This conceit would seem peculiarly applicable to the social condition. With no chartered aristocracy, and no law of entail, how can any family in America imposingly perpetuate itself? . . . In our cities families rise and burst like bubbles in a vat. For indeed the democratic element operates as a subtile acid among us; forever producing new things by corroding the old. . . . Now in general nothing can be more significant of decay than the idea of corrosion; yet on the other hand, nothing can more vividly suggest luxuriance of life, than the idea of green as a color; for green is the peculiar signet of all-fertile Nature her-

> self. Herein by apt analogy we behold the marked anomalousness of America; whose character abroad, we need not be surprised, is misconceived, when we consider how strangely she contradicts all prior notions of human things; and how wonderfully to her, Death itself becomes transmuted into Life. (8–9)

Providing context for his life history of Pierre, an aristocrat who is "not only the solitary head of his family, but the only surnamed male Glendinning extant" (7), Melville's narrator focuses on the ways in which families can or cannot "perpetuate" themselves in America as opposed to in "the monarchical world." If we recall both Melville's and Pierre's impatience with the strictures of literary biography, the terms of his comparison look familiar: European culture remains happily grounded in "the sacred Past," with "fixed statues erected to it," while in American society "all things irreverently seethe and boil in the vulgar caldron of an everlasting uncrystalizing Present."

Indeed, the narrator's means of correcting the European "misconce[ption]" of American culture reflects the aversion to stasis that we have traced through Melville's career as a biographical subject. Far from claiming that "things" do not "seethe and boil" in "an everlasting uncrystalizing Present" in America, the narrator insists that that process—"irreverent" though it may be—produces valuable new and "luxurian[t]" life by "corroding the old." As the "democratic element operates," "Death itself becomes transmuted into Life," an apt characteristic for a nation that came into being by "contradict[ing] all prior notions of human things." In constructing his first "richly aristocratic" (12) protagonist, Melville thus insists that we read Pierre's "perpetuate[d]" family standing within the context of his identity as an American, an identity necessarily at odds with the "fixed" social structures of a "monarchical world." In reading this representation of American genealogy's tendency to "rise and burst like bubbles in a vat," we should recall both the tradition in American life writing of identifying self with nation, and the portrayal of Melville in critical-biographical sketches as a prototype of national character.[40] For Pierre's progress from aristocratic wealth to common poverty, and from biographical subject to biographical cipher, is cast by the narrator as a progressive embrace of his democratic identity: "And believe me you will pronounce Pierre a thorough-going Democrat in time; perhaps a little too Radical altogether to your fancy" (13). As

he does throughout *Pierre*, Melville invokes specific standards of the genre of life writing as a means of undoing that genre, here through a particularly American assault on hereditary stasis.

However, in continuing his critique of unruptured genealogy and "long pedigrees—pedigrees I mean, wherein is no flaw" (11), the narrator returns to England, where nobles "revel in this endless descendedness" of "glorious parentage" and family names (9). Seeking to deconstruct these "all-honorable and all-eternal" hereditary "dynasties" (10), he suggests that close inspection reveals that either the nothingness of "mere names" (9) or the rupture of bastardy lies at their heart: "Perishable as stubble, and fungous as the fungi, those grafted families successively live and die on the eternal soil of a name. . . . All honor to the names then, and all courtesy to the men; but if St. Albans tells me he is all-honorable and all-eternal, I must still politely refer him to Nell Gwynne" (10). The English actress Nell Gwynne was the mother of two of the illegitimate children of Charles II, after whose time, the narrator claims, the "direct genealogies" of the English nobles "seem vain" (10). We might note, in addition, that he refers to those nobles as "titled" families (10), reminding us of Pierre wittily imagining his textual titles (for the title page of his "COMPLETE WORKS") as hereditary ones (248–49). Indeed, in explaining the significance of his long digression on genealogy, the narrator draws an explicit link between that digression and Pierre's "career" as an author. He has been "thus decided in asserting the great genealogical and real-estate dignity of some families in America," he continues,

> because in so doing we poetically establish the richly aristocratic condition of Master Pierre Glendinning, for whom we have before claimed some special family distinction. And to the observant reader the sequel will not fail to show, how important is this circumstance, considered with reference to the singularly developed character and most singular life-career of our hero. Nor will any man dream that the last chapter was merely intended for a foolish bravado, and not with a solid purpose in view. (12)

As we discover in the remainder of the narrative, Pierre's "most singular life-career," mediated by his embrace of a woman he believes to be his bastard sister, moves him from his role as "juvenile author" (257) to the "far different guise" of a writer who plans to "gospelize

the world anew" (264, 273). And it is to this life-career's connection to Melville's representation of genealogy that I now wish to turn.

A number of critics have considered issues of genealogy in Melville's writing, typically focusing on *Moby-Dick*, *Pierre*, and, to a lesser extent, *Israel Potter*.[41] Their readings tend to be heavily psychoanalytical and centered on the author's troubled relation to a real or figurative father, tracing, for instance, his "wild pursuit of the phallus of authority,"[42] his "dream, . . . through the act of writing, to achieve the distinction of being 'without father or mother,'"[43] or his attempt to "overcome the distance between [literary] father and son by abolishing paternity altogether, replacing it with a democratic brotherhood of equals."[44] Indeed, readings such as Wai Chee Dimock's and Bellis's share a grounding in a particular text, a letter Melville wrote to Duyckinck in early March of 1849. Apparently responding to an accusation by his friend, Melville declares,

> Nay, I do not oscillate in Emerson's rainbow, but prefer rather to hang myself in mine own halter than swing in any other man's swing. Yet I think Emerson is more than a brilliant fellow. Be his stuff begged, borrowed, or stolen, or of his own domestic manufacture he is an uncommon man. . . . Lay it down that had not Sir Thomas Browne lived, Emerson would not have mystified—I will answer, that had not Old Zack's father begot him, Old Zack would never have been the hero of Palo Alto. The truth is that we are all sons, grandsons, or nephews or great-nephews of those who go before us. No one is his own sire.[45]

Dimock, reading this letter in the context of Melville's wish (articulated in "Hawthorne and His Mosses") "that all excellent books were foundlings, without father or mother," concludes that his declaration that "no one is his own sire" reveals, in fact, his desire for a much different scenario. Melville's "dream," she argues, "always is to be 'his own sire,' to write as a 'foundling' would write, and, through the act of writing, to achieve the distinction of being 'without father or mother.'" Yet in thus identifying "orphanhood" as Melville's "ideal of literary individualism," Dimock does not address a crucial distinction between the texts she cites.[46] For if in the letter to Duyckinck Melville muses on *authors*' sires, in "Hawthorne and His Mosses" he points specifically to *books* as would-be "foundlings," a distinction that held specific resonances in mid-nineteenth-century America. I do not mean to suggest that Dimock, Bellis, Eric Sundquist, and others are wrong

to read Melville's thematics of genealogy in terms of the author's relation to his literary father(s); rather, I would argue that readings made *exclusively* in this context—as many such readings are—become reductive, occasionally leaving both Melville's words and his social context out of the analytical picture.

For in proffering his wish, a little over a year before he began writing *Pierre*, "that all excellent books were foundlings, without father or mother, that so it might be, we could glorify them, without including their ostensible authors," he draws on the specific idiom of his literary culture.[47] And that idiom derives directly from one of the culture's means of constructing the authorial life, the insistence that "all works by one person had real resemblances,"[48] resemblances among texts that critics routinely described as an author's children. Reviewing *Moby-Dick* in the *Spirit of the Times*, William T. Porter thus notes,

> Our friend Melville's books begin to accumulate. His literary family increases rapidly. He had already a happy and smiling progeny around him, but lo! at the appointed time another child of his brain, with the accustomed signs of the family, claims our attention and regard. We bid the book a hearty welcome. We assure the "happy father" that his "labors of love" are no "love's labor lost."[49]

Critical-biographical portraits of Melville as (a now troubled) literary parent rather than son likewise greeted the publication of *Pierre*: reviewers described the novel as a "lunatic" follow-up to the "almost stillborn" *Mardi* and *Moby-Dick*, wondered "that a really able man like Herman Melville should have compromised himself so egregiously by giving birth to such a production," decried the "strange Caesarian process" by which "books spring into life now a days," pondered the "uncouth and mysterious syllables with which Mr. Melville baptized [titled] his books," and denounced the novel as his "late miserable abortion."[50] But as Porter's *Spirit of the Times* essay makes clear, an insistence on resemblance among figurative children amounts to an insistence on genealogical continuity, a pedigree grounded in "the accustomed signs of the family." And readers did not hesitate to criticize what they believed to be ruptures in that genealogy, as a May 1849 *Literary World* review of *My Uncle the Curate* ("By the Author of the 'Bachelor of the Albany,' and the 'Falcon Family,' ") demonstrates:

> "MY UNCLE THE CURATE" should be immediately arrested for false pretences. He purports to belong to the same household of

> which the "Bachelor of the Albany" is so agreeable a member; and with a letter of recommendation from the "Falcon Family," he asks the money and attention of the reading community. Whereas, in truth, he bears on his face proof that he is of no kin to the aforesaid "Bachelor," and his walk and conversation betray immediately to those intimate with the aforesaid "Family," that "My Uncle the Curate" is a vile impostor.[51]

The terms of this critique—entitled "A Failure by a Good Author"—would have been quite familiar to Melville, whose "life-career" had similarly deviated from what critics had determined to be its legitimate line, the pedigree of *Typee* and *Omoo*. Indeed, any Melvillean anxiety over literary "fathers" in this period likely would have had its source in precisely these critics and other readers, the "patrons" who had constructed the "fame" of which he writes so dismissively in the letter to Hawthorne.[52]

As we return to the assault on genealogy in the life narrative of Pierre Glendinning, then, we should recall not only the critical-biographical traditions of Melville's day (and his impatience with them), but also the explicit link the narrator makes between his own meditations on heredity and Pierre's thoughts about his published texts. And while it is true that the novel's plot follows a son who, "repelled by kinship," rejects "all 'patrimonies,'"[53] we should further recall that Pierre does not choose that repulsion or rejection from the beginning but is pushed there by the cultural response to his initial genealogical rebellion: the embrace of his supposed bastard sister Isabel, a living representation of rupture in the Glendinning line. If we think of Pierre as a Melvillean text—as both the narrative and its title encourage us to do—we might thus begin to read his behavior, as does Dimock, as "the fictionalization of a literary credo, the narrative enactment of an authorial fantasy."[54] However, rather than the fantasy of *authorial* orphanhood that Dimock proposes, I would argue that Pierre and *Pierre* pursue a version of *textual* orphanhood, the dissolution of social strictures that prevent genealogically dissimilar "progeny" from coexisting openly (and without abuse) in a single literary "life-career." Pierre's embrace of familial rupture, in other words, sets in motion an undoing of his culture's means of constructing the author's life, a process that, in spurring him to reject his heredity, eventuates in the utter erasure of the biographical subject.

For in declaring that he has "'no paternity, and no past'" (199), Pierre invokes the structures of biographical negation that will unwrite his publicly represented self: "His resolution" to appear married to Isabel, the narrator tells us, "was not only strange and extraordinary in its novelty of mere aspect, but it was wonderful in its unequaled renunciation of himself," "the grand self-renouncing victim" (172, 173). As Pierre thus falls "dabbling in the vomit of his loathed identity" (171), he becomes again an "infant," a "little soul-toddler"[55] whose "whole previous moral being was overturned" (87). And as we might expect of a character who has learned Melville's lessons about life narrative, Pierre considers this undoing of the public self an act of true self-revelation: "'From all idols, I tear all veils; henceforth I will see the hidden things; and live right out in my own hidden life!'" (66). Indeed, as his mother's reaction makes clear, Pierre's decision to proclaim himself married to the mysterious Isabel rather than to the ingenuous Lucy evokes precisely this movement from public to private self: "'[S]tanding publicly plighted to Lucy Tartan,'" Mrs. Glendinning tells the Reverend Falsgrave, Pierre "'has privately wedded some other girl'" (and "'[t]hus ruthlessly . . . cut off, at one gross sensual dash, the fair succession of an honorable race!'" [194]).[56] Pierre thereby enacts the narrator's vision of a particularly American assault on genealogical stasis, the "marked anomalousness" of "all things irreverently seeth[ing] and boil[ing] in the vulgar caldron of an everlasting uncrystalizing Present" (9, 8). For this newly unwritten and "'cast-out'" Pierre "'stands untrammeledly his ever-present self!—free to do his own self-will and present fancy to whatever end!'" (199).

As a biographical subject who is also an author, Pierre goes on, after he has moved to the city with Isabel, to translate this program of biographical negation into literary terms. Once again "renouncing all his foregone self," he not only "burn[s] in scorn" all of his previous writing (283, 282), but also composes an autobiographical novel that, vampire style, devours its subject. "Emptying" his life into his book (258), Pierre accomplishes the goal that *Pierre* has been moving toward: the undoing of the life story. And he does so in the characteristic terms of Melvillean biography, representing the self by negating it, or "learning how to live, by rehearsing the part of death" (305). By novel's end, then, when Lucy has come to live (and die) with Pierre and Isabel, his response to those who accuse him of treachery

with Lucy is a simple refrain of biographical negation: "'I render no accounts: I am what I am'" (325). It is Glen Stanly's and Frederic Tartan's insistence on constructing an identity for him ("'Thou, Pierre Glendinning, art a villainous and perjured liar'" [356], they write) that leads Pierre to murder his only remaining kinsman, shooting him with a bullet over which he has jammed a piece of the offensive, naming text. Just before dying in prison, he proclaims himself, appropriately, "'neuter now'"(360);[57] and in the final sentence of Pierre's life narrative, Isabel declares, "'All's o'er, and ye know him not!'" (362).

Having invoked specific structures of contemporary literary life writing, Melville—in his own version of a text-sheathed bullet—satirically manipulates those structures to arrive at what he had come to see as the ultimate product of life narrative: an effaced, or unwritten, biographical subject. Yet his manipulation of genre does not end with its thematic rendering within the novel but extends to *Pierre*'s place within Melville's authorial "life." In its radical difference from his previous works—*Pierre* introduces itself in the sentimental tradition, revels in hints of incest,[58] and contains not a single sailor—this novel assaulted the genealogical continuity of the Melville canon, announcing itself as a bastard child and rupturing the static literary life of the "man who lived among the cannibals."

We might measure the success of that textual rebellion by the critical response to *Pierre*, much of which was couched in terms of illegitimacy, abortion, stillbirth, monstrosity, and madness.[59] One of the most telling such reviews, oddly on target despite (or perhaps because of) its best attempts to disparage the novel, appeared in the Duyckincks' *Literary World*:

> The author of "Pierre; or, the Ambiguities" . . . is certainly but a spectre of the substantial author of "Omoo" and "Typee," the jovial and hearty narrator of the traveller's tale of incident and adventure. By what *diablerie*, hocus-pocus, or thimble-rigging, "now you see him and now you don't" process, the transformation has been effected, we are not skilled in necromancy to detect. . . . We would rejoice to meet Mr. Melville again in the hale company of sturdy sailors, men of flesh and blood.[60]

In the Duyckincks' reading, at least, Melville has, indeed, accomplished his biographically grounded unwriting of the biographical

subject: *Pierre* has rendered him a mere "spectre," a self-constructed version of the phantom author produced by contemporary sketches. And in rupturing the genealogy of his public life by "chang[ing] his style entirely," according to another reviewer, the Melville of *Pierre* "is to be judged of as a new author."[61] If the novel records "Melville's exhaustion and burning out on the themes of authority and genealogy" and the "abandonment of [his] earlier project" of examining the "possibilities of autobiographical representation,"[62] it also strikingly represents and enacts the cultural realities of those themes and possibilities, a critique of American life writing from within the genre's very structures and traditions.

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Notes

I am grateful to Larzer Ziff and John Irwin for their comments on an earlier version of this essay, and to my colleague Charles Duncan for his suggestions for revision.

1 *The Letters of Herman Melville*, ed. Merrell R. Davis and William H. Gilman (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1960), 129–30.

2 In happily responding to Dr. William Sprague's July 1846 request for his autograph, Melville had not only referred to himself as "the author of 'Typee,'" but had also, as Merton M. Sealts points out, been "pleased to compare himself with Byron, who also 'woke one morning and found himself famous'" (Melville, *Letters*, 42; Sealts, *The Early Lives of Melville: Nineteenth-Century Biographical Sketches and Their Authors* [Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1974], 5).

3 Melville, *Letters*, 130.

4 Ibid., 142, 143.

5 Peter J. Bellis, *No Mysteries Out of Ourselves: Identity and Textual Form in the Novels of Herman Melville* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 3.

6 See Jay Leyda, *The Melville Log: A Documentary Life of Herman Melville, 1819–1891*, 2 vols. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1951), 2:501.

7 Ibid., 2:796; see also 2:787, 792, 826–27.

8 Nina Baym, *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1984), 250. From the early national period on, the trend in American biography had been toward increasing impersonality; see, for instance, the progressive turning away from the details of the personal history for three nineteenth-

century essayists: "Life of Dr. William Linn," *Port Folio*, July 1811, 89–90; "An Author's Evenings: Biography," *Port Folio*, January 1817, 29–32; and "'A Spicy Cut-up of an Author,'" *Literary World*, February 1848, 41. As Baym has demonstrated, by midcentury literary life narrative had reached the culmination of that trend. Within this cultural climate, the author's life story became coextensive with his or her corpus. "As [Melville's] work radically changed its form," his "authorial story became incoherent" (Baym, 252). He found himself "trapped by a readership that had overvalued him for his forays into journalistic semi-autobiography" (Brian Higgins and Hershel Parker, "Reading *Pierre*," in *A Companion to Melville Studies*, ed. John Bryant [New York: Greenwood, 1986], 217). He became, as many critics have observed, simply "the author of *Typee*."

9 In a short period following *Typee*'s publication in February (England) and March (United States) of 1846, Melville became perhaps "the 'best launched' author of the time," a rising star who, as Harper Brothers reader Frederick Saunders recalled, could command from publishers instantaneous acceptance of as yet unread manuscripts; see Leon Howard, Historical Note to *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life*, ed. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern Univ. Press and The Newberry Library, 1968), 294; Leyda, *Log*, 1:230). For further references to the popular and critical success of *Typee* and *Omoo* among Melville's contemporaries, see, for instance, *Log*, 1:205–13, 243–45, 247–49, 259, 264, 301, 303, 305, 308, 309, 364, 371, 373, 433, 438; 2:580, 827; J. E. A. Smith, "Herman Melville," in Sealts, *Early Lives of Melville*, 128–29; Howard, Historical Note, 294–98; and Gordon Roper, Historical Note to *Omoo*, ed. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern Univ. Press and The Newberry Library, 1968), 334–40.

10 Baym, *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers*, 249.

11 Bellis, *No Mysteries Out of Ourselves*, 3.

12 Leyda, *Log*, 1:196, 200–201, 210; Melville to John Murray, 25 March 1848, *Letters*, 71–72.

13 Melville to Alexander W. Bradford, 23 May 1846, *Letters*, 26. Melville's vexation at the response to *Typee* was followed by his "surprise & diversion" at the similar "incredulity respecting the author" in reviews of *Omoo* (Melville to John Murray, 29 October 1847, *Letters*, 65).

14 For Melville's determination to profess the truth of his narratives, which modern readers familiar with his life and reading have recognized as "neither literal autobiography nor pure fiction" (Howard, Historical Note, 291), see Melville to Alexander W. Bradford, 23 May 1846; and Melville to John Murray, 15 July 1846, 2 September 1846, 31 March 1847, 29 October 1847, and 25 March 1848, *Letters*, 25–27, 38, 45–46, 59, 65–66, 70–73. Indeed, despite his continuing refusal to satisfy Murray's requests for verification, Melville enthusiastically welcomed the reappearance of

Typee's "Toby" (Richard Tobias Greene), who offered to "testify" to the truth of Melville's claims (Howard, Historical Note, 287). For Melville's use of the verb "oblivionated," see the February 1851 letter to Duyckinck, quoted in note 27 below.

15 Leyda, *Log*, 1:220.

16 Philarète Chasles, "The Actual and Fantastic Voyages of Herman Melville," *Literary World*, August 1849, 89.

17 Leyda, *Log*, 1:224–25.

18 For further references to Melville as a pseudonymic author, see, for instance, Leyda, *Log*, 1:241, 378; 2:511, 525.

19 Ibid., 1:249.

20 Baym, *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers*, 84.

21 In May of 1846 Melville had gone so far as to remind his dying brother Gansevoort (Secretary of the American Legation in England), "I need not ask you to send me *every notice of any kind* that you see or hear of" *Typee* (*Letters*, 29). Following one such notice after Gansevoort's death—the London *Literary Gazette*'s December 1846 invitation to Melville "to dine with us on the 1st of April next: we intend to ask only a small party,—Messrs. Crusoe, Sinbad, Gulliver, Munchausen, . . . and a few others"—he wrote to John Murray of the reviewer, "I can assure him, that I am really in existence" (31 March 1847, *Letters*, 59 and 59 n). For American readers' acknowledgments of and rebuttals to the British portrait of Melville as fictional character, see Leyda, *Log*, 1:250, 256, 264, 313; 2:512, 525.

22 Melville, *Letters*, 69–70.

23 Indeed, this construction of Melville's life was seemingly universal among his contemporaries, disseminated not only by magazine columnists and reviewers but even by family members and close friends such as the Duyckincks and Sophia Hawthorne and her children. A witty column in the *New-York Daily Tribune*, for instance, announced the wedding of "Mr. HERMAN TYPEE OMOO MELVILLE" (Leyda, *Log* 1:256); both Evert and George Duyckinck, on-again, off-again friends to Melville over the course of his career, refer to him in their correspondence simply as "Typee" (*Log* 1:250); and his own Uncle Herman recorded in his remembrancer a visit by "The Author of Typee & Omoo" (*Log*, 1:251). For further references to Melville as "Typee," "Omoo," or "the author of *Typee* and/or *Omoo*," see, for instance, *Log*, 1:243, 253, 264, 279, 297, 303, 304, 305, 320, 361, 368, 375, 380, 392, 433, 438, 445, 474, 476, 477, 484; 2:499, 515, 570, 585, 755, 781, 782. For an example of Melville's explicit rejection of this public identity, see his May 1860 "Memoranda" to his brother Allan regarding the publication of his poems: "For God's sake don't have *By the author of "Typee" "Piddledee" &c* on the title page. . . . Let the title page be simply, / Poems / by / Herman Melville" (*Letters*, 199).

24 Having learned a lesson in fiction-mediated self-negation from the re-

sponse to his first attempts at autobiographical narrative, Melville set out to exploit that lesson in *Mardi*. That novel, he wrote to Murray, would elucidate the truth of *Typee* and *Omoo* precisely by its fictional difference from them: "The truth is, Sir, that the reiterated imputation of being a romancer in disguise has at last pricked me into a resolution to show those who may take any interest in the matter, that a *real* romance of mine is no Typee or Omoo" (25 March 1848, *Letters*, 70). Spurred to action by his publicly conceived identity, he plans to erase and correct that biographical conception by negative contrast—specifically, a contrast grounded in "*real* romance."

25 Among the almost universally enthusiastic reviews (both American and British) of *Redburn* and *White-Jacket*, *Sartain's* declares of the former that Melville "is evidently 'a law unto himself,'" an author "so unique, so perfectly individual" (Leyda, *Log*, 1:367); while Evert Duyckinck observes of the latter that it is the novel's "union of culture and experience, of thought and observation, . . . which distinguishes the narratives of the author of Typee from all other productions of their class" (*Log*, 1:368). Yet Melville, who proclaimed the British raves of *Redburn* "laughable" (*Log*, 1:327), clearly had come to see this perpetuation of his "perfectly individual" public self as professional drudgery, "two *jobs*" he had performed "to buy some tobacco with," "being forced to it, as other men are to sawing wood." For further reviews of *Redburn* and *White-Jacket*, see *Log*, 1:322–25, 327, 333, 338–39, 355, 362, 365–68, 370–75, 381–82.

While *Mardi* did receive a number of positive reviews, readers generally dismissed it as a literary-biographical aberration, an unnatural (and perhaps insane) deviation from the true genius of "Herman Melville." Writing in the *New-York Daily Tribune*, for instance, George Ripley, finding his "good nature as [a] critic . . . severely exercised . . . in the attempt to get through this new work by the author of the fascinating 'Typee' and 'Omoo,'" declares that Melville "has failed by leaving his sphere, which is that of graphic, poetical narration, and launching out into the dim . . . region of mystic speculation" (*Log*, 1:303). Even the favorable critique in the *Democratic Review* made an issue of readers' frustrated expectations: "The man who expects and asks for loaf sugar will not be satisfied with marble, though it be built into a palace" (*Log*, 1:309–10).

26 "American Authorship," *New Monthly Magazine*, July 1853, 300–308; reprinted in *Melville: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Watson G. Branch (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), 331, 334, 336.

27 See Melville's "Dollars damn me" letter to Hawthorne (*Letters*, 126–31); see also the February 1851 letter to Duyckinck, in which Melville declines his friend's request for a picture of him to publish in *Holden's*:

> —As for the Daguerreotype . . . that's what I can not send you, because I have none. And if I had, I would not send it for such a purpose, even

> to you.—Pshaw! you cry—& so cry I.—"This is intensified vanity, not true modesty or anything of that sort!"—Again, I say so too. But if it be so, how can I help it. The fact is, almost everybody is having his "mug" engraved nowadays; so that this test of distinction is getting to be reversed; and therefore, to see one's "mug" in a magazine, is presumptive evidence that he's a nobody. So being as vain a man as ever lived; & beleiving [*sic*] that my illustrious name is famous throughout the world—I respectfully decline being oblivionated by a Daguerretype. (*Letters*, 120–21)

Still seemingly good-natured at this point, Melville's assertion of biographical negation—which would reappear, almost verbatim, in a satirical critique of Duyckinck in *Pierre*—is twofold: published representations of the self "oblivionate" that self because appearing in a popular magazine "is presumptive evidence that [the author is] a nobody"; and, therefore, Melville's own assertion of self—his "intensified vanity"—lies in the biographical silence of public absence.

28 Leyda, *Log*, 1:438. As the excerpt from Willis's *Home Journal* makes clear, such commentary appeared in reviews that praised *Moby-Dick* as well as in those that criticized the novel; see also excerpts from the *Morning Courier and New-York Enquirer* and the London *Literary Gazette* (*Log*, 1:433, 439).

29 Branch, *Melville: The Critical Heritage*, 290.

30 Higgins and Parker argue that Melville's satirical portrait of Pierre as author, introduced abruptly with Book 17's "Young America in Literature," responds in specific ways to hostile reviews of *Moby-Dick* (introduction to *Critical Essays on Herman Melville's "Pierre; or, The Ambiguities"* [Boston: G. K. Hall, 1983], 12–16); see also Leon Howard and Hershel Parker, Historical Note to *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities*, ed. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern Univ. Press and The Newberry Library, 1971), 375–76. All page references for *Pierre* are to this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text.

31 Melville to Hawthorne, November 1851, *Letters*, 142. Melville wrote *Pierre* at Arrowhead in the winter of 1851–1852; reviews of *Moby-Dick* began appearing in the fall of 1851. (For excerpts from those reviews, see Leyda, *Log*, 1:430–39, 442–48.) Higgins and Parker argue that Melville began the novel "at a time when he could have seen few, if any, of the reviews of *Moby-Dick* and could have had no knowledge of its sales" (*Critical Essays*, 2). They further assert that *Moby-Dick*'s reception influenced *Pierre* "*not* at the time he conceived and began" the later novel but "only during or after his trip to New York" in late December of 1851 and early January of 1852, a trip whose "primary purpose" was to make publication arrangements for the novel, which he then "thought of as nearly

or actually complete" (*Critical Essays*, 14, 9, 14). This trip to New York, and Melville's new awareness of critical (or insufficiently laudatory) reviews of *Moby-Dick*, they argue, led to abrupt changes in the novel, as Melville "began writing passages relevant only to himself, not to the Pierre he had so consistently characterized" earlier in the book (*Critical Essays*, 14). Howard and Parker likewise point to a "change in tone" in the novel, noting that "[m]ost of the last half—and slightly more—of *Pierre* is clearly written by the author of *Moby-Dick*" (Historical Note, 372).

This debate over the novel's "change in tone" or interruption of "consistent" characterization, and over the role that reviews of *Moby-Dick* may have played in that change, has little bearing on my reading of *Pierre* for several reasons. First, Melville had been thinking critically about the construction and representation of the authorial life for several years before *Moby-Dick* was published, and the reviews of the novel would only have confirmed his critique. Second, Melville's concern with self-representation and self-negation is evident from the opening pages of *Pierre*. And finally, modern critics' and editors' attempts to explain away abrupt changes in the life narrative of Pierre—accomplished most dramatically in Hershel Parker's expurgated Kraken edition of the novel—simply seem to replay, in another register, the confining demands of Melville's own culture: namely, that the "life" proceed in a static, "coherent" fashion. See Brian Higgins and Hershel Parker, "The Flawed Grandeur of Melville's *Pierre*," in Higgins and Parker, *Critical Essays*, 256–63; and Hershel Parker, introduction to *Pierre, or The Ambiguities* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), xi–xliv.

32 A number of critics have commented on the turn to third-person narrative in *Pierre*, most often making a form of Bellis's argument that Melville had "exhaust[ed] the possibilities of autobiographical representation" in *Moby-Dick*, and that third-person narration—although "at the cost of [the] hero's life, and with an admission that biographical narrative must remain at an even greater distance from its subject"—proved his solution to the problem of necessarily lacking autobiographical closure (Bellis, *No Mysteries Out of Ourselves*, 12, 10); see also John Seelye, *Melville: The Ironic Diagram* (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1970), 75–76; and Richard H. Brodhead, "[Conscious Idealizings and Unconscious Sexuality]," in Higgins and Parker, *Critical Essays*, 233–36). For Bellis, "it is [a] view of the self as malleable, negotiable commodity that Melville rejects and resists throughout his career" (15).

Yet Melville's meditations on self-representation in the letters to Duyckinck and Hawthorne reveal an author seemingly longing for and celebrating the *absence* of closure and stasis in the represented life, and struggling against the specifically biographical constructions of himself that have insisted on such closure (constructions that Pierre, too, will complain about). Thus, while Bellis, citing Foucault's focus "on the way

in which the self is acted upon by social and institutional power," notes that his reading of the novel traces Melville's search for "an absolute ground that will place it beyond the reach of such forces" (15), I would argue that the turn to third-person narrative in *Pierre* represents Melville's explicit acknowledgment that the self *cannot* be constructed "beyond the reach" of social and cultural forces. While I would certainly agree with Bellis's argument that in abandoning first-person narrative in *Pierre* Melville "sharply distances himself from . . . the autobiographical project" (84), I would suggest that the novel constitutes his satirical embrace of the manner in which "social and institutional power structures"—made particularly visible in the genre of life writing itself—generate a necessarily *biographical* authorial identity.

33 Sealts points to this connection between Pierre's and Melville's literary careers in *The Early Lives* (3).

34 Melville is clearly having a bit of fun here at the expense of his hero's literary pretensions, but he is just as clearly—and far more venomously—satirizing the "mighty Campbell clan of editors" and the "always intelligent, and extremely discriminating public" (245), the readers who have made Pierre a self-satisfied "celebrity" (255).

35 Pierre settles upon "the idea that being at this time not very far advanced in years, the probability was, that his future productions might at least equal, if not surpass, in some small degree, those already given to the world. He resolved to wait for his literary canonization until he should at least have outgrown the sophomorean insinuation of the Law" (250).

36 Bellis, whose sense of Melville's search for autobiographical closure diametrically opposes my own sense of the Melvillean "life," argues that the passages I have quoted demonstrate that Pierre's "goal is to leave a single image and signature, to establish a unified textual corpus that will, unchanging and unchangeable, identify him forever" (*No Mysteries Out of Ourselves*, 155). This reading seems to me not to account for Melville's clearly satirical portrait of the audience that Pierre believes will demand such a unified corpus, an audience that can only be confused by changes in the authorial life.

37 As Bellis points out, the very concept of a marriage between half-siblings assaults genealogical sense: because such a marriage can only be "desexualized" or "incestuous," it is "in either case a genealogical failure" (*No Mysteries Out of Ourselves*, 76).

38 Pierre elaborates upon the surrounding culture's role in pushing him into orphanhood: "Oh heartless, proud, ice-gilded world, how I hate thee, he thought, that thy tyrannous, insatiate grasp, thus now in my bitterest need—thus doth rob me even of my mother; thus doth make me now doubly an orphan, without a green grave to bedew" (90).

39 Because Ishmael is the bastard son of Abraham by his wife's handmaid Hagar, Pierre's reference brings into play the novel's issues of class

(Isabel's and Delly Ulver's low social standing, and Pierre's movement from the wealth of aristocracy to the poverty of society's margins) as well as its theme of genealogical rupture.

40 For the identification of subject and nation (or, to use Jay Fliegelman's terms, of ontogeny and phylogeny) in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American life writing, see, for instance, Robert Sayre, "Autobiography and the Making of America," in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. James Olney (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980), 146–48; James Cox, *Recovering Literature's Lost Ground: Essays in American Autobiography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1989), 16–19; and Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution against Patriarchal Authority, 1750–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982), 222–25. For the characterization of Melville as prototypical American, see, for instance, Leyda, *Log*, 1:204, 249; and Branch, *Melville: The Critical Heritage*, 54–55, 56–57, 112, 167–69, 255–56, 363.

41 See, for instance, Wai Chee Dimock, *Empire for Liberty: Melville and the Poetics of Individualism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1989), 140–45, 163–74; Bellis, *No Mysteries Out of Ourselves*, 1–8, 49–82; Eric J. Sundquist, *Home as Found: Authority and Genealogy in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1979), xii–xx, 144–85; and Charles N. Watson Jr., "Melville's *Israel Potter*: Fathers and Sons," *Studies in the Novel* 7 (winter 1975): 563–68.

42 Sundquist, *Home as Found*, 150.

43 Dimock, *Empire for Liberty*, 140.

44 Bellis, *No Mysteries Out of Ourselves*, 50–51.

45 Melville, *Letters*, 78.

46 Dimock, *Empire for Liberty*, 140.

47 Indeed, as he continues in "Hawthorne and His Mosses," Melville seems to have the public construction of the author clearly in mind: "But more than this. I know not what would be the right name to put on the title-page of an excellent book, but this I feel, that the names of all fine authors are fictitious ones, far more so than that of Junius,—simply standing, as they do, for the mystical, ever-eluding Spirit of all Beauty, which ubiquitously possesses men of genius. Purely imaginative as this fancy may appear, it nevertheless seems to receive some warranty from the fact, that on a personal interview no great author has ever come up to the idea of his reader" (*The Piazza Tales and Other Prose Pieces, 1839–1860*, ed. Harrison Hayford, Alma A. MacDougall, and G. Thomas Tanselle [Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern Univ. Press and The Newberry Library, 1987], 239–40).

48 Baym, *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers*, 250.

49 William T. Porter, review of *Moby-Dick* in the *Spirit of the Times*; reprinted in Branch, *Melville: The Critical Heritage*, 278.

50 The reviews, reprinted in Higgins and Parker's *Critical Essays*, come

from the *Boston Post* (32), Toronto *Anglo-American* (49), *New York Herald* (50), *American Whig Review* (58), and *National Magazine* (74).

51 "A Failure by a Good Author," *Literary World*, May 1849, 455.

52 The word *patron*, of course, derives from the Latin *pater*, meaning "father"; a patron thus is "one who stands to another or others in relations analogous to those of a father; a lord or master" (*The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "patron").

53 Dimock, *Empire for Liberty*, 141; Bellis, *No Mysteries Out of Ourselves*, 79.

54 Dimock, *Empire for Liberty*, 141.

55 For the narrator's descriptions of Pierre as an "infant" or "toddler," see 89, 295, 305.

56 We might also remember, in this context, the "Captain Kidd Monthly" editor's futile claim on Pierre's portrait as "public property" (254).

57 In the context of the Lucy-Pierre-Isabel love triangle, the term "neuter" also has obvious sexual connotations; but I am primarily interested in the term's reflection of Pierre's progression (or regression) to biographical cipher.

58 Melville's apparent pursuit in *Pierre* of the policy towards fame that he announces in the letter to Hawthorne—"Let me be infamous. There is no patronage in that"—provoked heated and hostile reaction from reviewers, who denounced as puerile, trashy, and unnatural "the supersensuousness with which the holy relations of the family are described" (Higgins and Parker, *Critical Essays*, 42). For specific responses to the novel's alleged immorality, see Higgins and Parker, *Critical Essays*, 32, 35, 38–39, 42, 55, 59–60, 68, 74.

59 For contemporary reviews of *Pierre*, virtually all of which make note of the novel's difference from *Typee* and *Omoo* (Melville "ashore" rather than "afloat" [32]), see Higgins and Parker, *Critical Essays*, 32–68. We might note that within the novel itself, madness is also imputed to the elder Pierre on his deathbed, as he calls out, "'My daughter!—God! God!—my daughter!'" (70). If Isabel's naming of the elder Pierre as her father is correct, of course, then what is called madness here is simply his utterance of the autobiographical truth of a hidden life.

60 Higgins and Parker, *Critical Essays*, 43.

61 Ibid., 36.

62 Sundquist, *Home as Found*, 145; Bellis, *No Mysteries Out of Ourselves*, 12.