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Adaptation as Anarchist: A Complexity Method for Ideology-Critique of American Crime Narratives

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ADAPTATION AS ANARCHIST:
A COMPLEXITY METHOD FOR IDEOLOGY-CRITIQUE
OF AMERICAN CRIME NARRATIVES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

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B.A., The Catholic University of America, 2004

M.A., Marymount University, 2008

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Perhaps the sentiments contained in the following pages,
are not *yet* sufficiently fashionable to procure them general favour...

Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This section was originally a lot longer, a lot funnier, and a lot more grateful. Before I thank anyone, let me apologize to those I cannot list here. Know that deep in my computer, a file remains saved, inscribed with eloquent gratitude.

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ABSTRACT

Particularly through their relation to ideology, crime narrative adaptations expose the conflict between individuals and communities on one side and the State on the other. Adaptations take the already defamiliarizing effect of narrative and continue to defamiliarize, creating a narrative cubist effect through various audiences and discursive orderings of events. Hence, they question the ideological prefiguring that lies at the foundation of narrative understanding. Insofar as ideologies are simplified ways to legitimate actions and project images of identity, the fact that a society's narratives necessarily inherit ideology from the State obscures that society and State's inevitable deviations from their self-images. Ideology misrepresents that which it attempts to legitimate. In order to critique ideological influence, the position from which total, reflective cultural study can extend is the vantage point that consistently and actively questions culture to its limits. It can only come from a position in which the audience's freedom from domination is maximized. Cultural study and criticism thus arises most completely and honestly when it comes as close as it can from *without* ideology. By definition, the opposite of ideology is anarchy.

In this dissertation I argue that adaptations channel a mechanism by which anarchist principles emerge from the ideological constraints obliged by the State's pursuit of legitimacy—constraints which are inherent in all cultural narratives. Focusing on transatlantic “narrativizations” of crime events—different tellings of historical criminal events in view of American and European interaction—I demonstrate that adaptations, as dynamic systems of discourse, are self-driven toward anarchist critiques that splinter traditional Western ideologies. Overall, I make a three-part argument, first suggesting a method (based in complexity theory) for

critical adaptation studies, then using that method to demonstrate how transatlantic American crime narrative adaptations reveal cultural identity struggles and necessarily tend toward anarchism, and lastly describing how the *process* of adaptation likewise reflects anarchist principles. Adaptation is anarchist. The anarchist method of adaptation study I propose will indicate 1) the degree to which American crime narrative adaptations stem from and contribute to various ideologies, and 2) how they can make clear those ideologies through necessary, consistent defamiliarization.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Bruce Springsteen is considered one of the most quintessential American singer-songwriters, and in fact he has said that through his music he tries primarily to judge the distance between American reality and the American Dream. This is a concern with which I feel much sympathy, and in my own professional life I have tried to do something similar: determine what it means to have an American identity in a theoretical sense and in its realistic sense, define the discrepancy between the two, and articulate a way to bridge that gap by critiquing the stories we tell ourselves. Particularly, I study criminal narratives because they peculiarly isolate conflict over cultural identity—that is, global, national, regional, and personal identities—and do so necessarily in relation to the State, the *de jure* discriminating force between theoretical and realistic American identity.

Crimes define the limits of a nation or region's self-proposed, State-sanctioned identity. As Robert W. Gordon observes, the dominant vision of communities is of a world divided into two spheres: society and the law (79). The two are often viewed as interrelated, but separate spheres, the legal system a “specialized realm of state and professional activity that is called into being by the primary social world in order to serve that world's needs” (79–80). Essentially, society views the law as a servant to it. But as Gordon goes on to argue, the law is much less ideal, contained, or controlled than it appears. The line between law and society is blurred, for the law not only “figures as a factor in the power relationships of individuals and social classes, but also...it is omnipresent in the very marrow of society...” (97). Yet the clash between where law ends and society begins can be productive. Events outside national/local law are *ipso facto* antithetical to self-proposed national/local communal identity. And the terms “law” and “local,”

when unpacked, help disclose their complicated implications, particularly in terms of smaller regions. By “local,” narrative context may mean even a household, and thus by “law,” house rules. In any case, a crime narrative need not always present the criminal as the individual breaking communal identity; often, a criminal’s actions might reveal how official law runs counter to that identity. In these various senses, “crime,” “law,” “national/local” contain broad possibilities for meaning since these concepts derive from collective constructs of thought that may often be contradictory. The law, as Gordon phrases it, “is indeterminate at its core, in its inception, not just in its applications” (98).

At any rate, inasmuch as narrative is the discourse through which humans make sense of the events of history (personal, interpersonal, public, and cosmic)—drawing disparate events together into a unity of temporal focus—crime narratives uniquely provide a site in which challenges to communal identity are worked out. By examining various instances of crime narratives in this light, I propose to isolate the ways various American ideologies are transmitted through the nation’s stories and their iterations in different media. Springsteen has similarly used crime stories to measure the distance between the American dream and its reality, and given the correspondence between our critical goals, it would be fitting to use his music as a way to explain my own particular approach to ideology-critique of American crime narratives.

A few years after his major breakthrough with *Born to Run*, Bruce Springsteen finally released his anticipated follow-up album, *Darkness on the Edge of Town*, which stripped down the inner workings of American town life and revealed the failures of “the American dream” as it tried to play out among its working classes. The title track depicts one of the most desperate figures of this failure, an addicted gambler still struggling for the lifestyle his wife demanded,

trying to get the “good life / ... anyway, anyhow” (Springsteen, “Darkness”). Of the dark and criminal heart of the album, Springsteen said that at the time of its writing

noir was particularly interesting to me because it’s a world where people are always being pulled apart. In James M. Cain and Jim Thompson novels, the divided mind is a huge part of the psychological life of those characters and that’s how I always felt. So I was drawn to it...the tensions in those films and novels of the time felt very close to my own psychology. So a lot of *Darkness on the Edge of Town* is straight out of a noir title. I was moved by all of those pictures and I wanted my characters to have that kind of existential complexity. (“Stumbled”)

Thus, other tracks follow other “criminals” in similar pursuit: a prostitute, street racers and brawlers, despaired and burnt-out workers with ambiguous plans. The album was a turning point for a number of reasons, including a pared-down musical and lyrical style, as opposed to the larger instrumentation and sprawling focus on hyper-fictional characters in the songs on Springsteen’s previous albums. And unlike those other albums, as a means for greater social critique, the songs on *Darkness* more frequently reflect narratives outside the album’s characters, evidenced most conspicuously in the second track, “Adam Raised a Cain.”

This 1978 American song of a New Jersey native yet requires a basic understanding of the Biblical tale of Cain and Abel, the first sons of Adam and Eve—a fact that, in the context of the song, requires knowledge of their story as well. How could Springsteen presume this knowledge of his audience? Fairly easily, of course; it is a fundamental story of most of today’s major world religions, including Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. But Springsteen could also presume English-speaking atheists, Sikhs, agnostics, Buddhists, Bahá’í, Hindus, and others would also know the story, even if they had never read it or even heard it from beginning to end in any version. And further, he could trust these groups to identify (to some degree) how it could be relevant to a nonetheless thoroughly American song.

So far this all seems uncontroversial; perhaps even boring. Of course most people know the story of Cain and Abel. But this is false. No *one* person knows *the* story of Cain and Abel. But to talk about the series of events associated with those two characters, we refer to an abstract and supposedly stable narrative entity called “the story of Cain and Abel.” In fact, each time the story is related, through whatever means, it is articulated through some discourse. This was true when whatever events inspired recollection and recording of them became first inscribed. I am not suggesting that the Cain and Abel story, or any story in the Bible, is based certainly on fact. Rather, I am referring to the transition of historical events from memory into the discourse of history as a limiting case for how narratives are written. In cases of fiction—which are always necessarily based in some way on aspects of reality—the transition occurs primarily in the creator’s mind, simultaneously greatly simplifying and greatly complicating matters. Paul Ricoeur details the transition from memory to history in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, and argues that history, as a project of historians recreating the past “just as it happened,” moves from individual and collective memory through a documentary phase that records and translates eyewitness accounts into archives to form “documentary proof” (136); an intermediary phase in which the events are interpreted and explicated in terms of connectivity (182); and a representative phase in which the events are put into discursive form, usually written (136). Of course, although it appears so, this last part is not the whole of the “writing of history,” since “writing, in effect, is the threshold of language that historical knowing has already crossed.... History is writing from one end to another” (138). And this writing actually might come through a variety of representational “discourses,” including non-graphical images and non-linguistic sounds. But each distinct, unique expression of the events occurs through a discourse that must itself be interpreted. No *one* expression of the sequence of events will ever be, or be received, the

same. And any categorization of those expressions as one immutable story will be an exercise in abstraction for the epistemological purposes of understanding and explanation; but this is always at the expense of ontology.

Narrative Ontology

I turn to a particular concern with narrative since its understanding and interpretation by audiences is how ideology is transmitted, and discernment of how the narratives themselves are communicated is crucial for identifying how shifts in those ideologies occur. Furthermore, a discerning account of narrative's ontology is vital since crime is socially judged through legal discourse—opposing sides debate which narrative “adaptation” the State will recognize as true—and thus ideology is defined through competing adaptations. Like community identity, Ricoeur argues, even individual identity is constituted by narratives that become the “actual history” (247). In short, I cannot discuss adaptation, crime, or ideology without addressing narrative in a central way.

My overall purpose, then, is to lay bare what narratives are (and thus provide a more solid understanding of what adaptations are) in order to analyze and critique adaptations of criminal narratives as they relate to American ideologies. I hesitate somewhat to say “American crime narratives” since some of the crimes and narratives are not themselves American, although they always have some direct bearing on American culture. In fact, every case study *also* concerns some European culture, and this is a broader point in the dissertation: American identity is still intrinsically interwoven with European identity, indicating a transatlantic relationship.

Of course, I also hesitate to say “adaptation” since I am not comfortable with the term's traditional meaning. As will become clear, I think the term “renarrativization” more accurately describes the adaptation process. Nevertheless, I will maintain some use of the term “adaptation”

for clarity's sake, while still referring to source texts and their "adaptations" as narrativizations of theoretical events. At any rate, these adaptations take the already defamiliarizing effect of narrative and intensify it, creating a kind of narrative cubist effect through the various discursive orderings of events and their audience reception. Hence, they question the ideological prefiguring that lies at the foundation of narrative understanding. Ultimately I argue that adaptations conduct a means that reveal the anarchist opposition to ideological constraint inherent in all cultural narratives. Focusing on narratives of crime events particularly, I will demonstrate that adaptations tend toward resistance to constraint.

So what is the ontology of narrative? Analysis demands premise; yet the fundamental axiom of literary and textual criticism (its actual object of inquiry) is seldom identified by those doing it.¹ When most literary critics begin analysis, the work's ontology and epistemology are often presumed. Before I undertake any analysis, I must address this unfortunately ignored underpinning. While practicing critics rarely specifically address narrative definition and ontology, numerous stand-alone books and articles have been written on the subjects; a full survey of the various approaches to defining it is obviously beyond the scope of the present project, however. Indeed, a full survey might be beyond the scope of most projects. As Thomas Leitch notes in the preface to his innovative book *What Stories Are*, "to survey and impose order on recent work in narrative theory would be the work of a lifetime" (ix). Nevertheless, some scant summary of how criticism has conceived of stories, narratives, texts, and so on (and how they all distinguish from one another) is in order since the very *notion* of narrative is vitally central to my concept of individual and community identity.

¹ Of the scholars who have tackled the subject, I would recommend highly William Paulson's argument in *The Noise of Culture*, which uses information theory as well as chaos theory to challenge traditional notions of the text and literary criticism. Many of his conclusions echo some of my own first principles.

Actually, Leitch's book can serve as a filter for the major theories of narratology because he not only analyzes them so thoroughly, but his final conclusions complement my own. While much thought has been put into the understanding of narrative, narratology has remained generally taxonomic in nature, its use mainly relegated to *identifying* narrative types, functions, and parts and *describing* which media they can be found in. These approaches answer questions of identification and purpose: essentially retrospective questions. This does not go far enough for textual criticism, and certainly not for the present investigation into how narrative creates and complicates individual and community identity through crime. One of the more persuasive aspects of Leitch's approach is his confession that his own expectations for defining story and narrative were thwarted: "I realized that there was no way I could define *story* in terms of a structure of actions or events without reference to a specific discourse—that narrative was inescapably a kind of talking or writing or acting rather than an order of events" (x). He does not reach this conclusion lightly, and for good reason; narratology has been a major field for more than thirty years, but studies of story and narrative reach back even farther to at least Aristotle. In fact, in terms of practical criticism, few narratologists move very much beyond Aristotle. Yet, as I will demonstrate, and which Leitch also suggests, the history of narratology as a theory has nonetheless moved increasingly toward a generalized conception of narrative as discursive, although this shift has not been widely recognized.

In classical conceptions, "story" is the preeminent term. Following the structuralists and Russian Formalists, most narrative theorists "have taken as axiomatic the distinction between what Seymour Chatman has called 'the content or chain of events'...and 'the means by which the content is communicated'" (4). This distinction of story and discourse (or *sjuzet* and *fabula*, as the Formalists called them) has remained a foundation of narratology for most of the twentieth

century. Following Aristotle's theories, narrative has often been conceived as "essentially diegetic representations in which experiences are assumed to be recounted by a storyteller" (3). Thus narrative was almost exclusively considered prose narrative and just one way in which story was discursively manifested; the more mimetic discourses of drama or film might be other ways. But after tracing much of narrative theory's twentieth-century history, Leitch finally, and exhaustedly, reasons that "the conclusion is inescapable: Since there is no way of distinguishing between stories and nonstories without reference to the discourses which present them, story is indeed a discursive category.... A story is not what a narrative presents, it *is* a narrative, since no story exists outside or independent of a narrative discourse" (16–17).² The related term "plot" can now be understood as "a trope by which narrative images human action, an action involving either the relations among different agents the narrative presents or relations between the storyteller and the audience" (17).

But this is the beginning of the real trouble for my own purposes. If a story is indistinguishable from its telling, how can one identify an adaptation? And what of Aristotle's distinction between *diegesis* ("narration," "telling") and *mimesis* ("imitating," "showing")? Are the many performance arts not considered at least associated to story and narrative? In fact, one of the most significant changes in narratology since Aristotelian theory is the proliferation of a still-growing number of competing definitions of narrative. In her introduction to the collection *Narrative Across Media*, Marie-Laure Ryan suggests that the various definitions of narratology fall into three broad categories: 1) narrative as an "exclusively verbal phenomenon," 2) narrative as a fuzzy set that nevertheless finds its "fullest implementation of narrativity in its language-

² As Leitch reminds his own reader of his sudden disbanding of the story–discourse dialectic, "The point at issue here is not whether a distinction *can* be made between narrative discourse and the events it presents—obviously such a distinction is always available to the analyst—but whether that distinction can be made the basis of a narrative ontology" (32, emphasis mine).

supported forms,” and 3) narrative as a “medium-independent phenomenon” (15). At first glance, Leitch appears to fit the first category, Aristotle the second, Ryan the third.³ In fact, at least for the time being, Ryan can even act as a devil’s advocate against Leitch’s story-as-discourse formulation. Ryan posits that if narrative is defined in cognitive terms, it is a mental image, not a linguistic object; for even if we need language to articulate how narrative “hangs together,” narrative itself need not comprise that specific language. The relations of the events in the narrative do not need to be represented explicitly (11).

So how does Ryan account for narrative’s apparent medium independence, for she appears to be arguing toward a theory of pre-discursive narrative? Yet Ryan and Leitch do not stand so far apart. Ryan suggests that language may be helpful for articulating how a narrative “hangs together,” but that it can still be expressed without language. But Leitch does not actually dispute this. When he argues that a story is indistinguishable from its discourse, he means just that it is “inescapably a kind of talking or writing or acting” (x); in other words, story *is* the presentation of events rather than any generic structure or sequencing of them. Any presentation of events is discursive—is symbolic, and *thus* textual and rhetorical—since it implicates one person communicating something to someone else. But it does not need to take place linguistically. Leitch’s notion of narrative is not radically “verbal,” then. And Ryan’s is not radically “medium-independent.” Leitch acknowledges the textual, discursive ability of media such as film, canvas, sculpture, theatre, or radio, and he would further agree with Ryan’s acknowledgment that medium shapes the narrative as it unfolds (Ryan 31).

This discussion leaves us with a much better foundation for articulating the ontology of narrative to which I will now add my own philosophical foundation. Narrative is not only a relation of events; it is also the cognitive way in which humans make sense of those events. I

³ After further inspection, only Aristotle will still remain unproblematically placed.

draw this understanding of narrative from a number of sources, but I have found the most straightforward description of narrative in the writings of Paul Ricoeur. He suggests that in the human tendency to abstract time from lived experience, “narrative activity is the privileged discursive expression of preoccupation and its making-present” (“Narrative Time” 172).⁴ The “narrative function,” by making present a whole past set of events, “provides a transition from within-time-ness to historicity” (174). Our recollection of *certain* past events subsequently emerges a *sequence with a concern* that eventually ends and resolves. This is “narrativization,” a term I use to draw attention to the action implicit in each *konkretization* of the text.⁵ Narrative is distinguished from narrativization by standing for the physical discourse that represents a narrativization. Wolfgang Iser suggests a similar association of existence and narrative reading in *The Implied Reader* when he recalls Husserl’s concept of the inner consciousness of time, citing Husserl’s description of all original constructive processes as “inspired by pre-intentions, which construct and collect the seed of what is to come...and bring it to fruition” (Iser 277). The correspondence between narrativization and experience is what always implies an ending for us in each text we read.

Let me integrate how I have described narrative so far. Since story is always discursive, is always the *telling of itself*, each narrative (or, more broadly, narrativization) is a kind of retelling, not in the mythological sense but in the temporal one. Each story is always a telling toward an end that is already known. The logic of this intentionality holds forth a number of ways: first, in the very fact that there is a beginning of a story; second, in the *a priori* physical

⁴ “It is our preoccupation,” Ricoeur argues, “not the things of our concern, that determines the sense of time.... It is because there is a *time to do* this, a right time and a wrong time, that we can reckon *with* time” (“Narrative Time” 169).

⁵ I am using Roman Ingarden’s term, as perpetuated by Wolfgang Iser, signifying the realization (*konkretization*) of a “literary” (or, in my more liberal view, textual) work by a reader *working* on a text in his or her consciousness. I will come back to this concept and term in the succeeding sections.

existence of the medium in which the narrative exists (the end is literally already there); and third in the implied “narrate,” or audience, to whom the narrative is addressed. Narrativizations implicitly reconstruct events understood to be in the past, events that are then retold with a particular attention and desired aim to fulfill in, by, and through the retelling. Each narrativization thus has intentionality, providing a particular focus on an assumed broader story or set of events. A four-part relationship must be kept in mind, then: *someone* is telling *someone else* in *some way* about *something*. Moreover, this “tetrad” is actually doubled: the authorial *someone* includes the narrator as well as the acknowledged author; the *something* includes events presumed to have taken place as well as those explicitly depicted; the *someone else* includes the implied or explicit audience of the narrative itself as well as the real-world audience; and the *some way* includes the means by which the implied or explicit audience of the narrative itself receives or experiences the internal narrative as well as the medium by which the real-world audience receives its narrative.

This last “tetrad” corresponds with a recent formulation by Rick Altman, who suggests a definition of narrative “organized into three basic areas,” namely *narrative material*, comprising the minimal textual characteristics required to produce narrative; *narrational activity*, which is the presence of a “narrating instance” that presents and organizes the narrative material; and *narrative drive*, which indicates the audience attitude required (and, ideally, induced) for the material and activity to surface in the interpretive process (10).⁶ Like Leitch, Altman’s theory opposes many other narrative definitions, which have been “ineluctably bound to plot” (Altman 5), and thus his definition substantiates my own. In his conceptualization, some narrational activity (authorial presence; the *someone* through *some way*) organizes narrative material (in-

⁶ Altman uses the term “narrative,” but he is referring to the putting-together of a narrative, which is the “narrativization.” Nevertheless, I will use his term in reference to his work.

world characters in action; the *something*) into an actual narrative *for* an audience with narrative drive (the *someone else*). In his model, Altman also provides tools for comparing narrative focus among different texts; these tools will be of particular use in my more fully articulated method. Throughout this project, I will use Altman's terminology of "activity," "material," and "drive" in my ideology-critique of crime narrative adaptations that reveals anarchist opposition to their inherently transmitted ideological constraints.

Of my initial argument, two central aspects remain unexplained: adaptation and anarchism. I will turn to the latter in the next section, so let me now solve the problem I created for myself after concluding that a story is indistinguishable from its telling: how do I identify an adaptation as distinct from any narrativization?

I indicated earlier that the term "adaptation" in its traditional sense—the translation of a story into another medium—does not accurately reflect the process it is supposed to describe. As is clear now, no actual "story" exists that can be simply "translated" into another medium; the "story" is actually an interpersonal abstraction of the many in-world, discursive realizations (*koncretizations*) of the narrative in question. An "adaptation," then, is an *abstraction* of the discursive realizations of a *different* narrativization of the theoretical events that inspired the "original" narrativization. Adaptations are *social* constructs for the express purpose of comparing discursive expressions of a set of events. The only aspect required to form an adaptation is that the audience consider the narrative an adaptation. Otherwise it is categorized simply as a narrativization.

A number of recent scholars have suggested a similar understanding of adaptation, including Linda Hutcheon and Nico Dicceco. Hutcheon notes in *A Theory of Adaptation* that the audience experiences adaptations as an oscillation between the adaptation and a memory of (at

least) one of its source texts (8). As he himself notes, Dicceco similarly argues that “metaphoric thought is central to the interpretive process underlying the experience of an adaptation” (75), suggesting that the audience consciously understand one text to be the same (to some degree) as a previously existing one, and in doing so “engage various systems of associated commonplaces in productive interaction” (76). Dicceco points out that Paul Ricoeur argues in *The Rule of Metaphor* that metaphors create resemblance, rather than find or identify it (Ricoeur 236). While a reader or audience might notice similarities between narrativizations and then conclude that one is an adaptation of the other, or that they are both adaptations of a third narrative, the real productive work of adaptations occurs after the relationship has been decided. For instance, while a reader might have independently noticed a few similarities between Homer’s *Odyssey* and Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Joyce’s work operates so powerfully as an adaptation because that relationship forces the reader to seek out similarities that would otherwise go unnoticed. The simple precondition of adaptation is that the audience *knows* (or *thinks*) the narrative is somehow based on the events of another narrativization.

Any shift in narrational activity, narrative material, or narrative drive constitutes a narrativization, or an adaptation providing the audience is aware of former narrativizations. Traditionally, audiences and critics have noted adaptation as changing the *something* (narrative material) drastically or the *some way* (narrational activity) noticeably; in less frequent cases (for example, the 1998 nearly “shot-by-shot” remake of *Psycho*), changing the *someone* (through narrational activity and narrative material) was also valid. But in fact far more shifts in narrative facets need to be regarded as adaptation, particularly changing the *someone else* (narrative drive).

Adaptations are of intrinsic ideological interest, then, insofar as they express the disparate impulses (the *someone*) behind various arrangements (the *some way*) of sequences of events (the *something*) for assorted audiences (the *someone else*). Crime narrativizations thus reveal a place of sociopolitical significance in which the narrator orders and depicts events for someone, effectively as a mode of ideological influence.⁷ As should be very clear by now, crime narrative adaptations occur in contentious circumstances since the narrativizations can express various perspectives of apparently criminal events, which are then interpreted by autonomous audiences. Adaptations illustrate the political conflict always permeating the understanding of history. They also help constitute that understanding. Through their form, adaptations reflect the conflicting perspectives they present. I will show how they defamiliarize narratives (both historical and fictional) by *intrinsically* changing event-focus; they necessarily provide different interpretations of events due to inevitable shifts in focus, which occur *at least* because of the change in medium. Even in the most faithfully attempted adaptations, then, fundamental differences in media representation of events cause defamiliarization. The well-worn adage that a picture is worth a thousand words is just one vestige of our cultural understanding of these differences. And still, the ever-varying audiences that interpret these diversely ordered narratives in different media, over time and across assorted borders, remain yet another variable that ensures the alienating effect of adaptation.

Anarchism and Ideology

Why an anarchist opposition in particular? Surely the word is just a lightning rod of unnecessary controversy. On the contrary, I concentrate on anarchism because my understanding of ideology has directly lead to my conception of adaptations as an inherently anarchist

⁷ As I indicated earlier, Robert W. Gordon describes the law as just such a set of narrativizations in competition for authority in all of its etymological senses.

opposition to ideology. Let me give some account, then, of my understanding of it. In many ways this is old ground, but ideology is a concept more presumed than known. The term has found its way into a number of disciplines, and while each redefines it over again for its new audience, its Marxist formulation and development remain its most salient manifestation. Marx defined it in *The German Ideology* as “echoes of... life-process...[t]he phantoms formed in the human brain...[that] are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process” (154). Thus, as “the production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness” *from* existence, ideology reflects the material oppression by the ruling classes of the time (154). Hegemony thus legitimizes itself through ideology. Louis Althusser developed Marx’s somewhat indefinite conceptions through a Lacanian lens in “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” through a discussion of the reproduction of the conditions of production. Most important, Althusser challenges Marx’s conclusion that ideology remains just echoes and phantoms within the mind. Rather, he argues that the hegemonic production of ideas must itself have a material existence that interacts concretely with individuals in a society. In a phrase: “ideology always exists in an apparatus” (Althusser 166).

Althusser’s famous spatial metaphor of ideology as a superstructure can mischaracterize ideology as I define it, however. It is far more ubiquitous and internal, even while it maintains a material existence permitting it to interact with individuals. The self-constraining domination by societies on the communities that comprise them is quiet, but by nature persistent. In fact, the inherent drive in most natural systems, including human societies, is to preserve existence; societies do so ideologically. In a phenomenological approach that attempts to explain ideology without its consistently negative connotations, Paul Ricoeur describes ideology as “bound up with the necessity that a social group produce an image of itself, present—in the theatrical sense

of the term—itself.... Its role is thus to spread a creed beyond the small circle of the founders and to perpetuate the initial energy beyond the time of the revolution.... Ideology...is moved by the will to show that the group which it represents is legitimately the way it is” (“Ideology” 135). Ideology conceived as broadly as this obliges that no portion of social life is without its own ideology. Indeed, no individual is really without self-ideologies of simplified, schematized ways that legitimate actions and project images of the self. Once a group seeks any dominion—and not necessarily domination—it seeks its own legitimization. But, as Karl Mannheim suggests in *Ideology and Utopia*, no completely transparent legitimization can persist. Ideology is necessarily and definitively opaque, and tends toward distortion since competing groups will always challenge another’s dominion. From what vantage point can society critique its own ideologies?

The position from which total, reflective cultural study can extend is the vantage point that consistently and actively questions culture to its limits; it can only come from a position in which the audience’s freedom from domination is maximized: freedom from physical coercion, freedom from authoritarian mandate, a certain freedom even from one’s own origins. In short, cultural study and criticism arises most completely and honestly when it comes as close as it can from *without* ideology. By definition, the opposite of ideology is anarchy.

In a description of civil society, as opposed to and developed from what he considers the most “natural” form of government (monarchy), Immanuel Kant contends: “freedom and law (by which freedom is modified) are those two pivots around which civil legislation revolves” (248). He further suggests that *Gewalt* (often translated with physical connotations, such as *violence* and *force*) will arise to ensure the success of freedom and law. He considers four combinations of *Gewalt* with freedom and law, the first of which is “law and freedom, without authority

(anarchy)” (249).⁸ Kant expressly reasons that even for a civil society to propagate itself, ideology must manifest itself coercively. He concurrently reasons that anarchy is civil society absent this coercion. But how can a society that necessarily entails coercive ideology completely critique itself? For my own purpose in this dissertation, how can that society confront ideology specifically through its narratives, which can be simultaneously one of the most constraining *and* liberating of social traditions?

Let me elaborate very briefly on anarchy since the suggestion that ideology and anarchy are polar opposites is contentious.⁹ While I use Kant’s description of anarchy for rhetorical purposes, nevertheless a couple of further definitions of the core of anarchism might emphasize my point. Colin Ward plainly defines anarchy as “a society which organizes itself without authority... a mode of human organization, rooted in the experience of everyday life, which operates side by side with, and in spite of, the dominant authoritarian trends of our society” (11). Paul Goodman eloquently defines its praxis as “the extension of spheres of free action until they make up most of social life” (“Reflections” 34). He argues, in fact, that anarchism is based in principle and proposition, rather than planning, and

far from being “Utopian” or a “glorious failure,” it has proved itself and won out in many spectacular historical crises. In the period of mercantilism... free enterprise... was anarchist. The Jeffersonian bill of rights and independent judiciary were anarchist. Congregational churches were anarchist. Progressive education was anarchist.... And so forth, down to details like free access in public libraries. Of course, to later historians, these things do not seem to be anarchist.... But this relativity of the anarchist principle to the actual situation is of the essence of anarchism. There *cannot* be a history of anarchism in the sense of establishing a permanent state of things called “anarchist.” It is always a continual coping with the next situation, and a vigilance to make sure that past freedoms are not lost.... (“Anarchist Principle” 29–30)

⁸ “Authority” is Victor Lyle Dowdell’s translation for *Gewalt*.

⁹ In fact, I should be clear here that self-described anarchists are not without ideologies; in fact, the many different kinds of groups that identify themselves as “anarchists” implies that anarchists tend to have very strong ideologies that define them. Ideology is inescapable, but its theoretical opposite is still anarchism.

As Goodman suggests, anarchism relies on adaptation to historical circumstance, and critical theorists of all sorts, including Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse, echo this principle.

Anarchism is adaptation, and as I will demonstrate, adaptation is anarchist.

**Practical Ideology-Critique through Discursive Theories of Narrative:
Macherey and Scientific Models of Narrativization**

If my ideology-critique of adaptations of American crime narratives requires an anarchist approach based in narratology by what method can I critique the ideologies they conduct? Even through the definition I have provided (narrative as the always-discursive, story-logic-producing presentation of a sequence of events), practical criticism remains frustratingly far away. If narrative is always discursive, what is narrative's "measurable" existence, and how can I analyze it? Having declared some features and purposes of narratives, I will state my starting principles of their existential ontology and subsequent investigation by way of Pierre Macherey's *Theory of Literary Production*.¹⁰ Macherey speaks specifically about literary works, but I am not conflating the representations possible in other media with those in literature. As I have argued, if stories exist entirely within their various media presentations, nonetheless their phenomenological reception in the audience remains the same. In all media, they remain textual, and in their comprehension must filter through language *cognitively*.

Macherey smartly begins his work with a modest but far-reaching question, "What is literary criticism?" He suggests provisionally that perhaps the critic brings out a difference from within the work by demonstrating that it is somehow other than it is (7). While this temporary

¹⁰ In fact, I might have used a number of theorists to illustrate my first principles of criticism and narrative ontology, but I confine myself to Pierre Macherey's work for his straightforward logic and his direct concern with ideology-critique, which this dissertation also covers. I might also have drawn on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin (in *The Dialogic Imagination*), Hans-George Gadamer (in *Truth and Method*), Roland Barthes (in *S/Z*), William Paulson (in *The Noise of Culture*) or some of the Constance School (Wolfgang Iser [in *The Implied Reader* and *The Act of Reading*] or Hans Robert Jauss [in *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*], for instance). Of these possibilities, Bakhtin would be the most relevant since his concept of polyphony and heteroglossia corresponds entirely with what I draw out of Macherey.

premise will return (in a slightly different formulation), after pages of logical inquiry Macherey finally reasons that the “object” of literary criticism must be illusory—criticism has fallen into the empiricist fallacy, presupposing an object *because* there is inquiry (19). Macherey further argues that this empiricist fallacy is followed logically by another: criticism attempts to modify and normalize the work in order to “assimilate it more thoroughly, denying its factual reality as being merely the provisional version of an unfulfilled intention” (19).

In a move reminiscent of several interpretations of quantum mechanics, then, Macherey argues that in pursuing an *object* of inquiry, critics have *created that object*. In reality, however, Macherey suggests that the literary work is a locus of productions by the author and reader and their sociohistorical–linguistic contexts. These productions comprise text that is, as Mikhail Bakhtin articulates it, “stratified and heteroglot in its aspect as an expressive system” (675). This echoes Leitch’s claim that story is always and only discourse. As Macherey, Bakhtin, and Leitch understand it, the literary work is “itself and nothing else” (Macherey 40). Neither whole nor incomplete, neither improvised nor predetermined, the literary work becomes what it is to the critic only theoretically, while it yet retains its autonomy (41). Nevertheless, he warns, while it is irreducible, “the product of a specific labour” that initiates something new, its autonomy “*must not be confused with independence*” (51). The text is influenced by the problems of the writer’s individual existence, as well as the “the history of literary production” from which its audience or readership derives its meaning and *koncretization* (52–53).

Autonomous but dependent, then, the text often becomes a theoretical object of inquiry through its explication. While the text is abstracted for analytical purposes, the explication process is still part of the ongoing productive existence of the text. It more fully *becomes* through its critical explication, but is still an irreducible product of human labor, despite the fact that the

labor includes future audiences. “Explicit is to implicit as explication is to implication,” Macherey explains, “these oppositions derive from the distinction between the manifest and the latent, the discovered and the concealed” (82–83). More than a simple discovery of a secret, hidden, latent meaning, though, which would suggest an ideological opposition between appearance and reality that the critic “corrects,” criticism explicates the ideological absences that the text contains *openly* since “its scattered discourse is its only means of uniting and gathering what it has to say” (99). Lest this “exposure” of “absent” implications seem contradictory to Macherey’s defense against the interpretive fallacy, recall that story is discourse and nothing else, and that any discourse “implies the absence of its object, and inhabits the space vacated by the banishment of what is spoken” (59). In terms of interpretation, Macherey further contends that “the work must be incomplete *in itself*: not extrinsically, in a fashion that could be completed to ‘realise’ the work.... The thin line of the discourse is the temporary appearance behind which we recognise the determinate complexity of a text” (79). Interpretation does not complete a text by *adding* to it; it helps complete it by *drawing out* its fullness.

So I can return to Bruce Springsteen’s “Adam Raised a Cain,” and say with confidence that the song is reconstituted each time it is heard drawing on various understandings of the Cain-and-Abel/Adam-and-Eve stories, among others. These reconstitutions are based in material conditions under definite preoccupations and in light of various contexts, all of which subtly shift the *someone, someone else, something*, and even *some way* of the narrative experience. Thus, further and continuing explication of the song will draw out its unfolding, unceasing meaning. For this particular project, the song’s constant recalling of the crime of Cain—an event with radically different meaning in its original context—implies how crime will reproduce itself in the working classes of late-capitalist America, articulated more fully through screaming vocals, a

pounding rhythm, and blistering guitar-work. Through this deeply entwined intertextuality, and in an anarchist spirit in the vein of Goodman's anarchist principle, Springsteen's song grates against Western civilization's Christian conditions in an ironic reflection of one of its foundational stories. Just as original sin multiplied (literally and figuratively) from Adam through Cain, the original sins of Protestant capitalism—and the resultant, reactionary sins it generates—reproduce themselves in continuing opposition within the deeply entrenched father-son relationship. Drawing on this Biblical allusion, Springsteen reveals how capitalist exploitation entrenches itself psychologically.

The Discursive-as-Quantum-Wave Model of Narrative

I turn now to the physical sciences to invoke some analogies in order to explicate my argument for my particular ideology-critique. I mentioned earlier that Macherey's theory of literary production is reminiscent of quantum mechanics in some ways. I want to press that comparison as a bridge to illustrating how the physical sciences offer practical tools for narrative interpretation and analysis. When we consider a textual work existentially, as *drawn out* through interpretation, the textual work of art—like a quantum mechanical object—is best defined as a probability. Since its existence unfolds through its ongoing reception (in the continuing completion of the ensemble of possible readings and interpretations that comprise it), how does this “probability” exist in the real world? How can it reference or implicate or invoke other works in any definite way? In a very obvious way, of course, we can still consider the textual work as a single object—I can take a book down from my shelf and read determining criticism on it—just as light waves sometimes appear as quantized, determinable objects to a measuring physicist. And as light waves are also a complicated entanglement of frequencies, the textual work is also complicated entanglement of discourses.

But as Heisenberg explains in *Physics and Philosophy*, in cases when phenomena are perceived in apparently conflicting ways, “what we observe is not nature in itself but nature exposed to our method of questioning” (25). This is precisely the logical fallacy Macherey suggested many literary critics had fallen into. When we conceive of complex entities as concrete, unified wholes, we are using a model to understand it—which is perfectly valid. But the fallacy is mistaking the model for reality, which is an unethical attitude to the labor involved in creating the text. Criticism that attempts to pin down a textual work as a single, determinable object will find it to be exactly so, but that will not be the whole story (so to speak). Each “determination” of a textual work, through reading and analysis and reception, will pin down a “reality” for that book. But, as Macherey explained, this “reality” is an illusion. The unfolding of each interpretation and reading is just one more perspective of the *ongoing production of a literary work*. In contemplating the electron in quantum mechanics in his introduction to Heisenberg’s *Physics and Philosophy*, Paul Davies unwittingly provides a description for the literary work in this context, if corresponding terms are only substituted:

One cannot meaningfully talk about what an electron is doing between observations because it is the observations alone that create the reality of the electron.... What, then, is an electron, according to this point of view? It is not so much a physical thing as an abstract encodement of a set of potentialities or possible outcomes of measurements. It is a shorthand way of referring to a means of connecting different observations via the quantum mechanical formalism. But the reality is in the observations, not in the electron. (xii)

Similarly, when readers and critics speak of a literary work, the work they often mean is not a “real” entity but an abstract encoding of its production and set of potential readings; with each reading, the knowledge of this set is broadened. As in quantum mechanics, this expanded understanding does not lead to rampant relativism: scientists do not get to dictate where they will find particles just as literary critics do not get to dictate what a literary work means. Either group

may try, of course. I will return to the problem of relativism in the exposition of my method. In any case, Davies means “reality” in the sense that the particle (or in this case the literary work) has been made measurable to humankind. Thus, when an electron is hypothesized to exist within a range of positions or momenta, a measurement is made to verify that supposition. Likewise when a literary work is supposed to have some kind of meaning, a critic can methodically examine the text for evidence to verify that supposition.

In quantum mechanics, a particle’s behavior is described by the Schrödinger equation, which basically equates the change in position of the particle with respect to time with its total energy.¹¹ But solving this equation for a particle’s location or energy will give only the *probability distribution*, rather than any definitive value, of its position or momentum. How this has been interpreted in terms of measurable reality has been vigorously debated, and at present no authoritative interpretation has been accepted. In the most widely accepted theory, the Copenhagen interpretation, Schrödinger’s equation is understood to give the probability of how the particle will behave (i.e. its location and movement), indicating that if the particle is measured numerous times in a specific, repeatable context, the varying positions and momenta will reflect the probability distribution originally given. Analogically, for narrative studies, this would reflect the reality that over numerous *koncretizations* of the narrative work, given certain initial conditions, its interpretation would fall into a probability distribution, rather than one specific interpretation.

¹¹ Schrödinger’s equation takes a number of forms, but its general, time-dependent form is as follows: $i\hbar(\delta/\delta t)\Psi = \hat{H}\Psi$. The “i” and “h” are known constants (with important implications, but constants nonetheless), the $(\delta/\delta t)$ is a mathematical operation indicating change with respect to time, and Ψ represents the position of the particle. Thus the first part of the equation simply tells the user to find the change in position with respect to time and multiply it by two known values. The \hat{H} on the other side is the Hamiltonian operator, a stand-in for all mathematical operations related to the potential and kinetic energy that works on the particle’s position.

Understanding the textual work of art in this way, through quantum mechanics by way of Macherey, I can better proceed in grounding my assertions of narrative and adaptation in analogies to the physical science, from which I can also identify alternative methods of interpretation and analysis which literary studies have largely overlooked in fetishizing the literary work as an object. Turning back to Macherey first, though, recall that the textual work is autonomous but *not* independent; it is produced in a complicated network by its author and audience in their physical existence through an accompanying vast array of discourses that perturb each other and superimpose openly (but not always so “visibly”) within the text. From these discourses that interweave like component frequencies in a complex wave, “we always eventually find, at the edge of the text, the language of ideology, momentarily hidden, but eloquent by its very absence” (Macherey 60). How then do various texts interact with each other? How do real-world *koncretizations* of complicated, interweaving discourses form apparently unified narratives that interact? To figure out these problems, I will adopt a companion model to go with my quantum model that still allows us to visualize complex textual narratives in terms of discrete, quantized components as well as entangled, probabilistic discourses.

Sandpile Narratives: A Self-organized Criticality (SOC) Model for Narrative

Narratives are complex, figuratively and literally. Figuratively: innumerable discourses and contexts precondition their production; literally: they are thus dynamical systems, capable of further description and of their own peculiar approach for analysis. I have arrived at this conclusion reasoning through the ontological basis of narratives and through an analogy to the physical sciences. Yet a number of literary scholars have investigated this comparison to some

degree before, but with different grounding and different implications.¹² The relation of chaos (and its close corollary, complexity) to the humanities emerged most visibly between the mid- to late-1980s and the mid-1990s, after which it fell out of favor in most academic circles. The most influential and widely known of these critics is N. Katherine Hayles, whose monograph *Chaos Bound* provides an excellent description of the movement's whole development. For the most part, use of chaos and complexity theory arose from insights into information theory by Claude Shannon, later developed more specifically for the humanities by Michael Serres. As Hayles argues in *Chaos Bound*, a productive comparison between the humanities and information theory arose from competing definitions of information in relation to entropy, the thermodynamics measure for energy dissipation. In 1951, Leon Brillouin posited that information is defined as a kind of negative entropy (negentropy)—thus for any increase in information, a system must have a corresponding increase in entropy, and vice versa. Shannon defined information as equal to entropy. In fact, as John Arthur Wilson proved in 1968, the theories were compatible, but lead to opposing interpretive stances toward noise, or extraneous information apparently unrelated to the intended message (Hayles 58). The competing concepts of information carried on through the ideologies of various scientific disciplines. Brillouin's "negentropy" described information for chemists and physicists, mainly for its association with thermodynamics, while Shannon's equation of the two described information for electrical engineers (57). As Hayles argues, "the crucial differences revealed...are two opposite ways of valuing disorder...the crux of the disagreement lies in where the commentator positions himself with respect to the transmission process.... *Shannon considers the uncertainty in the message at its source, whereas Brillouin considers it at the destination*" (58). For those following Brillouin, extraneous information

¹² The major exception here is William Paulson, who argues in *The Noise of Culture* a quite similar description of the literary text as I have and will set forth. Several of our conclusions and strategies are nonetheless quite distinctive.

starting at the source is inefficient and confusing; for those following Shannon, extraneous information arriving at the destination can be a surprise bonus.

The importance of this relation of entropy and information concerns what order can come from noise. As chaos and complexity theory reveal (and I will describe them more in a moment), extra noise in a system can actually lead to a feedback mechanism that increases the complexity of a system, minute fluctuations causing the system to evolve in a different, unpredictable way. As William Paulson relates, Serres developed Shannon's idea and applied it to the entirety of human intellectual endeavor: "That entropy is linked to information is the greatest discovery in history, in the theory of knowledge and in the theory of matter" (qtd. in Paulson 46). The noise in any message, so unwanted by most disciplines, Serres describes as not only noise (extra information) from the environment but "activity of the subsystems," so that "at any given level of the system there is transmission of information and generation of noise. The next level acts as an observer of the preceding one, and for this observer, the ambiguity resulting from noise in the first transmission of information becomes a source of new information, of added organizational complexity" (Paulson 48). While a bit of information is transmitted, extra information is included with it, and the system grows in complexity. Ultimately, information and noise are passed through a large number and wide variety of levels of reception and interpretation, through the body and into the brain, until we realize that "what we call knowing, perceiving, speaking, are all activities that imply, and take place through, the integration of information and noise" (49).

Hayles and others used comparisons between literary theory and chaos theory to fashion exciting new interpretations, but their theory remained at the story-event level. For instance, Hayles provides an interesting, compelling reading of *The Education of Henry Adams* in the third

chapter of *Chaos Bound*, but her use of chaos theory, as with most of the critics at this time, is limited to how the events in the novel demonstrate chaos theory. She argues that Adams's correlation of "chaos and the way the self is constituted within language and literature" reveals how chaos theory operates in a narrative, revealing how "the chaos that tore him from his roots...also...[connected] him to the future he dreaded and anticipated" (90). My own use of chaos theory, complexity theory, and its relevant connections to information theory, identifies a different comparison between the sciences and literary studies with farther-reaching implications.

In 1987, Per Bak, Chao Tang, and Kurt Wiesenfeld (BTW) published a paper detailing their discovery and explanation of something called self-organized criticality (SOC), a mechanism by which certain open, dynamical systems not only reach a critical state, but actually tend *toward* it based on local interactions.¹³ While the sciences have often reduced behavior in systems to their simplest cases, extrapolating the more complicated scenario additively or through perturbations, SOC occurs in dynamical systems like ecological groups that "are organized such that the different species 'support' each other in a way which cannot be understood by studying the individual constituents in isolation" (BTW, *Phys. Rev. A* 364). However, as they go on to say, "The same interdependence of species also makes...[them] very susceptible to small changes or 'noise.' However, the system cannot be too sensitive since then it could not have evolved into its present state in the first place. Owing to this balance we may say that such a system is 'critical'" (364). These systems lie beyond predictability but before utter chance—much like narratives. In a predictable, linear, relatively stable system, small disturbances only have a local impact. In a random system, disturbances have no discernible role

¹³ Throughout when I refer to open, dynamic systems, I mean those systems that remain in flux and are also open to outside influences. In short, energy can move in and out of an open, dynamic system.

or relation. But in nonlinear complex and chaotic systems, which can even be defined by very simple initial conditions, small disturbances can have profound consequences; this effect is known popularly as the butterfly effect. In that subset of these systems that are critical, as BTW define it, such noise that through complicated interdependence leads to chaotic effects nonetheless remains reined in by that very interdependence. In this section, I will explain how narratives behave like SOC systems, particularly through the way disturbances propagate through them and influence the whole system.

Since the terms have some broad popularity, I should explain how chaos and complexity differ. Chaos theory does not mean “chaotic” in the colloquial meaning, but refers to extremely complicated systems that are still *relatively deterministic and semi-predictable*. James A. Yorke coined, but did not specifically define, the term “chaos” with T. Y. Lin in a 1975 *American Mathematical Monthly* paper (“Period Three Implies Chaos”), which has left the term open to much malleability. The Chaos Group at the University of Maryland, in which Yorke now works, might be the most stable source for a good definition, then. Yorke’s *vitae* page at Maryland defines chaos as “a mathematical concept in non-linear dynamics for systems that vary according to precise deterministic laws but appear to behave in random fashion” (Mecholsky, *Chaos at Maryland*). A similar, but more rigid, definition comes from Stephen Kellert as “*the qualitative study of unstable aperiodic behavior in deterministic nonlinear dynamical systems*” (2). Vicente Valle, Jr. clarifies Kellert’s meaning lucidly for the lay reader:

First, that the system is dynamical, means that it changes over time. Second, that the behavior of the system is aperiodic and unstable means that it does not repeat itself. Third, although chaotic behavior is complex, it can have simple causes. Fourth, because the system is nonlinear, it is...sensitive to initial conditions. (Nonlinearity means that the output of the system is not proportional to the input and that the system does not conform to the principle of additivity, i.e., it may involve synergistic reactions in which the whole is not equal to the sum of its parts.) Fifth, because the system is deterministic, chaotic behavior is not random even though its aperiodicity and unpredictability may make it

appear to be so. On the other hand, because of the instability, aperiodicity, and sensitivity to initial conditions, the behavior of chaotic systems is not predictable even though it is deterministic. (Valle 2–3)

The only point with which I want to quarrel is the unpredictability of chaos theory. In fact, some short-term prediction (forecasting) is possible, but the prediction necessarily falls only within a certain envelope of error; weather forecasting is an example of predicting chaotic systems.

Complexity theory arises from chaos theory and describes dynamic and apparently chaotic systems that remain *relatively unpredictable but not random*. Unlike chaotic systems, complex systems are theoretically unpredictable since they are based in the interactions of numerous independent agents, as with the ecological systems BTW mention. Narrative texts fall within this domain. The elemental agents of complex systems “continuously interact and spontaneously organize and reorganize themselves into more and more elaborate structures over time” (Valle 4). These systems are thus

characterized by: a) a large number of similar but independent elements or agents; b) persistent movement and responses by these elements to other agents; c) adaptiveness so that the system adjusts to new situations to ensure survival; d) self-organization, in which order in the system forms spontaneously; e) local rules that apply to each agent; and f) progression in complexity so that over time the system becomes larger and more sophisticated. As with chaos, the behavior of self-organizing complex systems cannot be predicted, and they do not observe the principle of additivity, i.e., their components cannot be divided up and studied in isolation. Complex systems can naturally evolve to a state of self-organized criticality, in which behavior lies at the border between order and disorder. (Valle 4)

In complexity, behavior patterns are discernible, but the system may be overwhelmingly complicated because we do not know how components produce the whole. As William Paulson sums it up, “What distinguishes the *complex* system...is a discontinuity in knowledge between the parts and the whole” (108). The human mind and body are just such complex systems. As Valle states, the independent but interacting elements act according to *local rules* that apply everywhere in the system. While these “rules” can be discerned, the overall progression of the

system is unpredictable since the system will adapt and self-organize to maintain order, even if the system is driven toward criticality. Again, the behavior that emerges in a complex system could never be *completely* predicted by tallying information from its many constituents, but it remains patterned, measurable, and even consistent. Now, the predictability of large-scale patterns based on local activity is of fundamental importance to textual criticism since it has historically operated through sample close readings that stand for analysis of the whole. One of my objections to this is its assumption that the textual work is some kind of homogenous entity. All the same, I will emphasize the importance of retaining a way to make such predictions using local activity, anyway, even if the process by which this occurs is “non-linear.”

Given these conditions, complex systems (such as sandpiles, economic systems, societies, and narrative texts) demand ecological, network-driven comprehension. The elements of a complex system must be understood in relation to the whole, the whole in relation to its parts. As N. Katherine Hayles argues, any “complexity turn” in literary studies should include a major shift from “the individual unit to *recursive symmetries between scale levels*...[modeling] turbulence through symmetries that are replicated over many scale levels. The different levels are considered to be connected through coupling points” (13). But first I should clarify how narratives are anything like sandpiles or any of these other SOC systems. BTW use the case of a sandpile to visualize SOC since the avalanches on a sandpile mimic those of other “dynamical systems with extended spatial degrees of freedom.” Degrees of freedom are simply “the number of independent pieces of information” that contributes to a system (Lane). For a sandpile, they are the numerous pieces of sand and their ability to move in space (in three dimensions) and time (in one dimension). In a textual narrative as I conceive it, the degrees of freedom (or dimensions) would be even more numerous: first, the number of overlapping, conflicting, interdependent

discourses in composition *and* reading comprehension; and second, the number of spatiotemporal parameters of composition *and* reading comprehension (which have their own numerous, interdependent degrees of freedom). It appears unmistakable now that even the simplest of textual narratives must be a highly complex, relatively irreducible system.

In BTW's formulation, which I will extend to my own, disturbances in such multi-dimensional, complex systems propagate in an interesting way.

To illustrate the basic idea of self-organized criticality in a transport system, consider a simple "pile of sand." Suppose we start from scratch and build the pile by randomly adding sand, a grain at a time. The pile will grow, and the slope will increase. Eventually, the slope will reach a critical value (called the "angle of repose"¹³); if more sand is added it will slide off. Alternatively, if we start from a situation where the pile is too steep, the pile will collapse until it reaches the critical state, such that it is just barely stable with respect to further perturbations. The critical state is an attractor for the dynamics. The quantity which exhibits $1/f$ noise is simply the flow of the sand falling off the pile (this is analogous to the situation in an hour glass)... These models evolve into a critical state: as the pile is built up, the characteristic size of the largest avalanches grows, until at the critical point there are avalanches of all sizes up to the size of the system... The energy is dissipated at all length scales. Once the critical point is reached, the system stays there. (*Phys. Rev. A* 365)

BTW's papers on SOC describe an important property of these systems that helps explain the strange effect of disturbances in those systems: "Dynamical systems with extended spatial degrees of freedom naturally evolve into self-organized critical structures of states that are barely stable...[wherein] noise propagates through...by means of a 'domino' effect upsetting the minimally stable states" (*Phys. Rev. Lett.* 381). As related above, this "noise" propagation (as the perturbations and disturbances are called) behaves like something called " $1/f$ " noise, which is sometimes called flicker noise, or pink noise.¹⁴

Within a system of low dimensionality—like one piece of sand moving on a flat piece of paper—grand disturbances have great effect, while small disturbances have little effect. But if many pieces of sand can move in a pile, a small disturbance on one piece will affect the many

¹⁴ More widely known is "white noise," which is a kind of noise that is spread evenly and indiscriminately.

adjacent pieces to it, which in turn perturb the many adjacent pieces to it, and so on: a domino effect. Of course, so many of these disturbances propagating will also often be self-defeating, and such disturbances frequently (and ironically) prevent themselves from traveling very far. Thus, large disturbances are likewise shut down. One never quite knows how far a disturbance will go or when: “That is, a given perturbation can lead to anything from a shift of a single unit to an avalanche. The lack of a characteristic length scale leads directly to a lack of a characteristic time scale for the fluctuations” (BTW, *Phys. Rev. A* 367). In general, this pattern shows how the spatiotemporal noise propagation is inversely proportional to the frequency of the disturbances.

But as I discussed with complex systems, apparently random action can contribute to recognizable large-scale behaviors. In the case of BTW’s sandpile model, it is the pink-noise propagation pattern, found in complex systems all over nature, including earthquakes and turbulence in a river. As BTW explain, “*The system will become stable precisely at the point when the network of minimally stable states has been broken down to the level where the noise signal cannot be communicated through infinite distances. At this point there will be no length scale in the problem so that one might expect the formation of a scale-invariant structure of minimally stable states*” (*Phys. Rev. Lett.* 382, emphasis all in the original). Essentially, even as the pieces of sand shake about and try to push the system to a breaking point, the whole system reins itself in through that same noise. Ever moving toward collapse, the system remains ironically stable. One of the most important implications of BTW’s discovery, worth emphasizing, is the startling fact that “the critical point...is an attractor...insensitive to the parameters of the model” (*Phys. Rev. Lett.* 381). This criticality is self-organized, relatively unconditional to outside forces. The criticality comes necessarily from within. In fact, BTW go

far enough to say that the noise in SOC systems “is not noise but reflects the generic dynamics of extended dynamical systems” (*Phys. Rev. A* 373). I include my own analogical use of noise in this same category, but will retain the term “noise” regardless.

The scale-invariant pattern of noise (now understood as the generic dynamics of the system) moving through these SOC systems follows what is known as a power-law distribution.¹⁵ A generic power-law distribution look as follows in Figure 1.

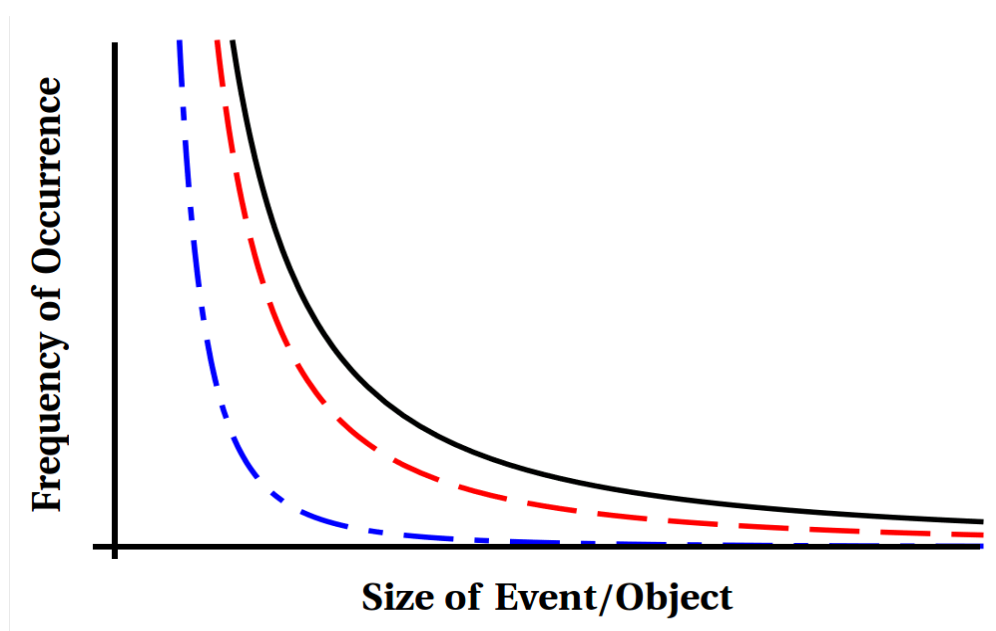


Figure 1. A generic power-law distribution

Essentially, very large values of the vertical axis correspond with very small values of the horizontal axis; very small values of the vertical axis correspond with very large values of the

¹⁵ This term sounds far more threatening than it actually is. To aid in comprehension, I reproduce with permission a large portion of a non-technical explanation by Victor MacGill in the appendix. Note: the power-law distribution graph I present here mimics how the graph looks with real values; one of MacGill’s graphs (which I duplicate in the appendix) is a log-log graph of the same kind of data, though it looks different. Nevertheless, it indicates the same information, as the accompanying descriptions prove.

horizontal axis. In the case of a sandpile, the horizontal axis represents frequency of disturbances, and the vertical axis represents the strength of a sample disruption.

How can this relate to a discussion of the ontology of textual narratives and their adaptations? In a very fitting way, it turns out I can make a “self-similar” analogy—that is, a self-similar analogy of self-similarity itself.

By self-similar analogy, I am saying three things at once: first, I am making a comparison between how *narratives* and certain complex systems (like sandpiles) behave, which is self-similarly; second, I am making a comparison between how *adaptations* and certain complex systems (like sandpiles) behave, which is also self-similarly; and third, I am demonstrating how these analogies are *themselves* self-similar: no matter the level of discourse, the behavior remains similar. In this section, I am dealing with only the first comparison. The last two will be made in the development of my method.

But if narratives are self-similar, scale-invariant, complex systems that behave according to a power-law distribution, what is a disturbance? Everything hinges on this aspect of the analogy. As I mentioned earlier, Paulson defines discursive disturbances as noise from other subsystems, unintended information transferred along with an intended message providing an overall surplus of meaning. He further clarifies that noise, while apparently “a perturbation in a given system [,] turns out to be the intersection of a new system with the first” (87). Practically speaking, in the case of narratives, a disturbance is the jostling effect of one or more of 1) the overlapping and conflicting discourses in composition or reading comprehension, or 2) the spatiotemporal parameters of composition or reading comprehension. At a basic textual level, the disturbances would come from the defamiliarizing effect (to borrow from Viktor Shklovsky’s term *ostranenie*) of narrative in general. As R. H. Stacy demonstrates in *Defamiliarization in*

Language and Literature, defamiliarization applies across various artistic media at various “length scales” (so to speak), insofar as Shklovsky suggests it is the mechanism by which art intensifies perception of life by reversing its habitualization: “art exists that one may recover the sensation of life.... The technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar,’ to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception” (Shklovsky 12). This intensification of life corresponds with Ricoeur’s notion that narrative developed as a cognitive process to understand lived time.

How does literature defamiliarize? Answering this question simultaneously describes the self-similarity of narrative ontology. As I suggested, the defamiliarization occurs at all linguistic length scales: morphemically, phonologically, syntactically, semantically, and pragmatically. Stacy provides numerous examples of defamiliarization not only in the linguistic realm, but in music, the visual arts, cookery, and even Zen Buddhist practice. Confining myself linguistically, I will briefly mention some of Stacy’s examples. Morphemically and phonologically, Stacy refers to a great many cases of defamiliarization that can be modeled as discourse perturbation: blend words and portmanteau words (Lewis Carroll’s “chortle” or Joyce’s “chaosmos”); neologisms (Milton’s “pandæmonium”); use of archaic and obsolete words; verbal distortions involving metathesis, Spoonerisms, or gibberish; hyphenated words; typographical emphasis, as used in Joyce’s *Ulysses* or Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*; and many others (51–59). Semantically and syntactically, Stacy suggests that literary devices such as inverted word order, fragments, asyndeton, polysyndeton, oxymorons, zeugma, syllepsis, and several other rhetorical devices exhibit defamiliarization (60–71). In all of these cases, habitual discourse is interrupted in some way: suspiciously suppressed, overtly over-determined, or oddly mismatched. Other discourses are invited in through the reading process, displacing habitual linguistic recognition.

Let me illustrate an example of the kind of broader pragmatic disturbance general textual criticism often concerns itself with. In a contemporary reading of the story of Cain and Abel, one of the fundamental crime stories of Western civilization, one discourse perturbation might be of capital punishment since God's response to Cain's complaint that "anyone may kill me at sight" is, "If anyone kills Cain, Cain shall be avenged sevenfold" (*New American Bible*, Gen. 4.14–15). It is possible that for some readers, this disturbance will not even register. For others, it might be an amusing or confoundingly contradictory point that God's punishment to those who kill Cain might be 1) sevenfold of his exiling and preservation of Cain or 2) a much harsher punishment than Cain received for killing his brother. For still others, this discourse interference might become the resounding focus of the entire passage, and perhaps even prompt the writing of a homily on an Old Testament basis for rejecting capital punishment. Likely the narrative construction-through-reception would follow a power-law distribution: very few would be overcome by capital-punishment discourse, very many would barely notice it, and a middle-range of readers would take it in moderation with the other competing discourses. Likewise, the system-wide effect of the displacement would be complex; perhaps the effect would be a bang, perhaps a whimper. Other discourse and interpretive dynamics at this level are possible, of course. Physical discomfort during the composition or reading of a textual narrative will affect its production, as will allusions to classic literature, memories from childhood, or previous narrative treatments of the same events—all of which might also be provoked by a more morphemic or phonemic disturbance, as the SOC system suggests. In any case, it is this last area of narrative noise (adaptations) with which the rest of this dissertation is concerned.

**Analysis of Narrative Noise in Adaptations:
An Anarchist Method for Adaptation Studies**

Now that I have established narrative in terms of 1) how I can identify it, 2) what its purposes are, and 3) models for understanding how it exists, I can elaborate a method for studying it in renarrativization across media. In doing so, I will employ one last physics comparison that ties my use of quantum mechanics and SOC. I have so far said that *narratives are the always-already discursive (re)presentations of events according to a “story logic” that gives an existentially meaningful order to them, comprising a tenuous and complex entanglement of discourses of 1) Macherean authorial production and 2) interpretive production that accumulates and unfolds into existence over time and space.* In my quantum analogy, I mentioned light and its infamous wave–particle duality. Actually, Louis de Broglie reasoned that this duality is true of all matter, reconfirming Heisenberg’s remark that “what we observe is not nature in itself but nature exposed to our method of questioning” (25). Are things really of a dual nature? Perhaps not so much as things are of a nature we cannot readily visualize without restoring to a dualistic model. In our everyday experience, matter tends to appear in quantized forms, but de Broglie and others have demonstrated that even rigid matter exhibits wavelike properties and can be expressed mathematically as an entanglement of waves.

But how can anyone work with such a complicated, apparently innumerable collection of waves? In 1807, Jean Baptiste Joseph Fourier posited a way. He suggested that the most complicated of waves (or any periodic motion, including that of particles) could be considered a synthesis of simpler waves (or simpler periodic motion). Through Fourier analysis, then, complicated waves can be decomposed into their most predominant frequencies (see Figure 2, on the following page).

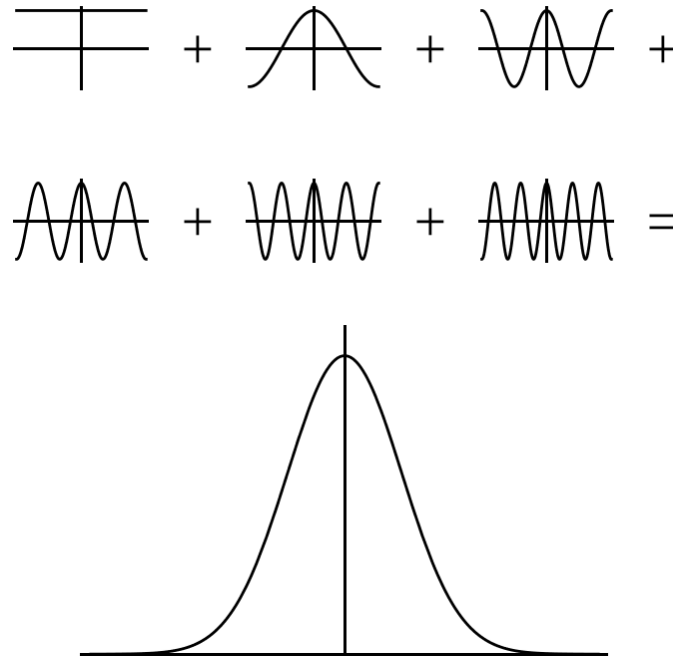


Figure 2. Waves of increasing frequency add together to form a larger wave that may or may not (on first appearance) reveal the complication of its composition.

Similarly, I can approach adaptation studies through a kind of discursive Fourier analysis in which the complicated, entangled interaction of narratives from accruing adaptations is decomposed into its dominant “frequencies” (or principal components), an analysis I believe would follow a power law. It’s very important to note two things here. First, the interaction refers to the defamiliarizing conflict of adaptations in their reception at both the individual and social level. Second, if complex systems could be *completely* described by Fourier analysis, they would no longer be complex. Nonetheless, as in studies of turbulence, Fourier analysis can provide broad descriptions that relate to the emergent behavior of numerous independent agents in interaction. In a sense, determining this “frequency” relates to finding the predominant frequency of $1/f$ noise in a sandpile at some given point and time. This Fourier-like analysis is actually quite similar to Bakhtin’s approach to analysis as demonstrated in his essay “Discourse

in the Novel,” but its analysis of discourse does not end with the implication that “language has been completely taken over” since in addition to “the context and contexts in which it [each word] has lived its socially charged life” (676–77), words and phrases *always* carry noise from other subsystems.

To some degree, Bakhtin probably meant what I am describing through complexity and information theory—namely, that words and phrases carry a surplus of meaning through extraneous, unintended information included from other systems beyond the one in which the intended message moves. But his implication that such surplus takes language over, and that it may only be taken back when it is appropriated by an individual who infuses it with a speaker’s “own intention...accent” (677), does not resonate with the fullness of my SOC model and its description of the unpredictable interaction between various length scales of discourse, nor with my anarchist approach, which similarly broadens the consequences of such unpredictable interactions between the parts and the whole.

I draw on Fourier, and not more specifically Bakhtin, so I can analyze discourse interaction at a wide variety of length scales by bracketing the burden of informational expectation. In Bakhtin’s analysis, a speaker (concealed or otherwise), an utterance, its form (concealed or otherwise), its intention (concealed or otherwise), and its reception (concealed or otherwise) are scrutinized thoroughly. But Fourier’s treatment of periodic behavior works well analogically even when I consider narratives at a broad length scale (that is, as a whole and particle-like) since the complex yet periodic behavior of the particle disruptions still follows SOC behavior, as evidenced in the sandpile. Furthermore, in analyzing discourse, I will not only be concerned with how ideology influences a character or speaker at the semantic and syntactic level, but may be more attuned to how ideologies clash at the pragmatic level or how certain

utterances reflect engagement with an interpretation of another text altogether. In any case, the “wave-like” features of discourses in a narrative still propagate like noise among different adaptations and at various scales. This means identifying how discursive perturbations reveal discursive system interactions of as many sorts as possible, watching carefully for new productions of meaning. The disruption caused by one discursive presence in one adaptation could potentially cause an “avalanche” of cultural understanding as much as it could dissipate among other competing discourses. An example of this is evidenced by the critical response to Zack Snyder’s 2007 film adaptation *300*. Left-leaning reviewers tended to criticize the film’s thoughtless “race-baiting and nationalist myth as an incitement to war” (Stevens), while right-leaning critics tended to praise it as a film about “bravery, freedom, honor, and country.... A film with a clear divide between good and evil.... A film that celebrates patriotism, heroism, sacrifice, freedom, and honor...it makes a counter-culture statement as strong as *Easy Rider* in its day” (*Libertas*). Polarizing sentiments about the Iraq War colored almost all critical reception of the film. Indeed, they even colored the film’s production. The film’s historical expert, Victor Hanson, a classicist who also wrote the historically-minded foreword to the companion book *300: The Art of the Film*, is himself a partisan historian who has defended the Iraq War and Donald Rumsfeld personally in a number of articles. This same ideological divide did not similarly arise in other popular Frank Miller adaptations, such as *Sin City*, even though Miller is known for his extreme right-wing views.

Now, earlier I claimed to be making a self-similar analogy in three ways: first, by making a comparison between *narratives* and SOC systems; second, by making a comparison between *adaptations* and SOC systems; and third, by demonstrating how these analogies are *themselves*

self-similar. I dealt with the first comparison in the previous section and have since touched on the last two. I turn now to them more explicitly.

If you can picture a text as the composition of numerous discourses, picture it also as such a complicated, emergent synthetic whole that it would appear as a discrete, concrete entity (a wave–particle duality of narrative). All of this I have discussed, of course, and this last image should not be at all difficult anyway since it is the natural attitude toward textual works. We think of a textual work as being whole, yet we are able to tease out numerous threads of thought about them. So how do different narrativizations (i.e. adaptations) interact cognitively and critically?

I have already emphasized the arbitrary division between story and narrative (*sjuzet* and *fabula*) in terms of actual narrative reception, but it remains a useful analytical tool since the dynamic, complex system that is a narrative text emerges as an apparent whole to its reader. If I use this abstraction to picture adaptations as discrete texts, I can draw a parallel between the collective abstraction of *koncretizations* of narrativizations as one “story” and pieces of sand falling onto an accumulated (and accumulating) sandpile. Since individual readers conceive the discourses of a set of events as related, and since they somewhat indiscriminately throw their holistic abstractions together with others when a new narrativization concerning those events is received, a sandpile analogy is wholly appropriate.

An illustrative example will help clarify the analogy. Bonnie and Clyde are well-known historical outlaws from twentieth-century America. Their story has been disseminated into a number of narrativizations and narratives, all of which contribute to a broad cultural understanding of the criminal lovers. These narrativizations include Edward Anderson’s novel *Thieves Like Us*, published in 1937, shortly after their deaths; the two film adaptations of

Anderson's novel, Nicholas Ray's *They Live By Night* and Robert Altman's *Thieves Like Us*; and Arthur Penn's famous 1967 film *Bonnie and Clyde*, starring Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway. But they also include less obvious examples like Eminem's "Bonnie and Clyde '97" track on *The Slip Shady LP*; the "Ronnie and Clyde" Digital Short with Rihanna and Andy Samberg on Saturday Night Live; the recent publicized accounts of the alleged exploits of Angela Atwood and Logan Welles McFarland in Utah; its use in the 1979 sixth-circuit appeal *US v. Phillips*; and even a recent musical that ran 2009–2011 in San Diego, Sarasota, and New York. Upon reflection, the accumulation of narratives and narrativizations comprising or even alluding to the Bonnie and Clyde legend seem to be very much like the complex systems described above. Each narrative instance acts like another disrupting piece of sand falling on the pile, causing adaptations to tend toward self-organized criticality. As in the case of information theory, each narrativization piling onto the collective abstraction of the story carries with it noise that imparts new information to the "story" and increases its complexity.

And as in any complex system, the ways in which these narratives combine specifically and contribute to the "Bonnie and Clyde Story" would be impossible to predict precisely. For instance, a set of narratives would "accumulate" in one individual, while different sets would accumulate in others. An individual in Utah would likely be aware of Atwood and McFarland's actions, but probably not the Bonnie and Clyde musical. The opposite would probably be true of an arts-minded individual in Sarasota. And each experience of any one narrative, even in one individual, would change in each temporal *konkretization*, according to complexity laws. Nevertheless, from the vast, complex network of individuals "receiving" various Bonnie and Clyde narrativizations, an emergent sense of "The Bonnie and Clyde Story" would arise in the

culture.¹⁶ Here is the third self-similarity. If 1) each narrative of Bonnie and Clyde is an ongoing, accumulating, and conflicting series of discourses (like the SOC sandpile); 2) these narratives accumulate in an ongoing, conflicting way within individual members of an audience (again like the SOC sandpile); and 3) these public notions of Bonnie and Clyde accumulate conflictingly and continuously as emergent yet shifting cultural notions (yet again like the SOC sandpile), then *the entirety of narrative existence—from production to reception and cultural diffusion—is a self-similar, scale-invariant process of converging and diverging discourses that continuously produce new meaning from the inevitable “cultural noise.”*

This method for studying adaptation, then, must involve the complex behavior of conflicting discourses within narratives as they clash with those in related narrativizations. Even as an audience individual will receive and harbor numerous, apparently isolated narrative texts concerning one abstracted set of events, they fall into each other like the sand grains and disrupt each other’s place in the overall conception of the Story.¹⁷ An SOC model of adaptations suggests looking at how this noise (the disturbances of each narrative *konkretization*) affects the overall cultural reception of the abstracted Story, predicting it will follow something like a power-law distribution. But if the disturbance of receiving a new narrative about a Story can affect the ever-shifting conception of the Story, will they also affect or disturb other individual narratives already received? Since a narrative, even when considered as a whole, is still a complex entanglement of numerous discourses, when it comes into cognitive contact with the tangled discourses of another narrative, the respective interwoven discourses of each narrative

¹⁶ I cannot take up much space with a discussion of the concept of emergence—the manifestation of large-scale structure out of numerous simple interactions in complex systems—since we have more or less alluded to its concept already, but I urge the interested reader to learn more about it from any of a great number of reliable sources. See, for instance, the NOVA program “Emergence,” available for free at pbs.org.

¹⁷ I will capitalize “Story” from here on to emphasize the abstract quality of the conceptual entity comprising in-world *konkretizations* of narrative through various media.

similarly enmesh according to complexity laws. Thus, the cognitive comparison of adaptations of a single Story will follow complexity theory at the level of discourse interaction, as well as whole-narrative interaction. The resultant analysis must act self-similarly, working at various length scales to identify how large-scale patterns emerged from local discursive perturbations and how some local disturbances led to no noteworthy global behavior. Evaluating the global, emergent behavior of a number of narrative texts and adaptations may also lead to some modest forecasting concerning how new narrativizations might affect the cultural reception of a Story.

As I mentioned earlier, I employ an analysis that is similar in many ways to Bakhtin's analysis in "Discourse in the Novel." Within this holistic Bakhtin–Fourier analysis, the noise affecting a narrativization could come from one of three general places (using Rick Altman's terminology): the narrational activity, the narrative material, or the narrative drive. These areas correspond to the authorial production, the abstracted events from which the actual narrative "derives," and the manner in which the narrative is received by a particular audience. Any one of these areas (in practicality, all three) would be noticeably "changed" when compared with another adaptation. The conflicting discourses *within* the narrativizations and *between* them would be located as part of the narrational activity (how the narrative followed and framed its characters and events), the narrative material (which events were selected, which were ignored, which were invented), and the narrative drive (the attitude in which the narrative is received). But how would an analysis be able to treat each of these? Since a synthesis of all local discursive interactions would not provide an accurate interpretation of the complex narrative, anyway, some interpretive leap must be made in the first steps of analysis to direct the critic's attention to the most salient large-scale patterns in the narrative, which would dominate the narrative's activity,

material, or drive. In essence, I need some mechanism for distinguishing information and noise in relation to the various interacting discourses in the narrativizations.

Well, only one loose end remains: anarchism. But if this method hangs almost exclusively on analogies borrowed from the physical sciences, why bother re-introducing what appears to be an unnecessary term? My fundamental concern is unearthing American cultural ideologies by examining a history of crime narratives through an anarchist lens. I chose anarchism *a priori* since my definition of ideology so distinctly contradicted it. In my development of narrative ontology and its implications in adaptation studies, this *a priori* premise has *a posteriori* support. Complexity theory and its experimentation have a number of relations to the theories and experiments of anarchism. In a number of papers written on complexity theory and its related subjects (such as chaos theory, network theory, cybernetics, and especially emergence), anarchism is directly linked as an example of how complexity manifests in nature and society. In chaos and complexity theory, small elements acting with relative freedom within a system transmit their power throughout the system on a comparable scale as larger forces; likewise anarchists emphasize the individual's ability to effect change in a society through the exercise and propagation of freedom, over and above even larger cultural forces. Anarchism attempts to make social power scale invariant.

While anarchists have been quick to maximize their association with complexity for their own credibility,¹⁸ those in the sciences and humanities have (perhaps unwittingly) also increased association between complexity and anarchism. Indeed, you can view the use of “anarchy” and “complexity” in comparison as *intended information* in anarchist studies, but more as irrelevant *noise* in the sciences and humanities. For instance, political scientist Robert Geyer, in

¹⁸ For example, in “Anarchy and Anarchism: Towards a Theory of Complex International Systems,” Erika Cudworth “suggests a radical reconceptualisation of ‘anarchy’ ...using insights from complexity theory” because of anarchy’s negative connotations in political science (399).

“Europeanisation, Complexity, and the British Welfare State,” refers somewhat disparagingly to anarchism in relation to complexity theory:

By the later half of the 20th century, with complexity already deeply penetrating the physical sciences, biologists, geneticists, environmentalists and physiologists also began to consider their respective disciplines within the context of complexity. Analysts in these fields set out to investigate the properties of systems, including human beings, comprised of a large number of internal parts that interacted locally in what looked like a state of anarchy that somehow managed to engender self-organised, stable and sustainable global order. These systems were not only complex, dynamic and dissipative, but also adaptive and display *emergent properties* or *emergence*. (8)

Geyer uses the word “anarchy” only in descriptive, figurative language, and implies that human beings (and other elements in other systems) in anarchy should have come to no good, yet “*somehow* they managed to engender...order” (emphasis mine). Nevertheless, he directly links anarchism, even in one of its most disparaged meanings, with the processes of complexity theory. In anarchist studies, this comparison is direct, strong, and intended.

Geyer’s comment that complexity has been astoundingly applicable to disciplines like biology, genealogy, ecology, physiology, and others that he does not specifically mention (such as economics, geology, and political science—the last of which he himself demonstrates through his paper) suggests a better question than “how could complexity be relevant to narrative?”: “how could complexity *not* be relevant to narrative?” Geyer’s very exclusion of the humanities after indicating complexity’s clear transdisciplinary demonstrates how discursive perturbations can convey new information that first appears as only noise. And by implicating narratology and complexity, another question arises: how is anarchism *not* relevant to narrative? Vicente Valle’s characterization of complex systems strongly echoes definitions of anarchism, insofar as they are both

characterized by a) ...independent elements or agents; b) persistent movement and responses by these elements to other agents; c) adaptiveness so that the system adjusts to new situations to ensure survival; d) self-organization, in which order in the system forms

spontaneously; e) local rules that apply to each agent; and f) progression in complexity so that over time the system becomes larger and more sophisticated. (Valle 4)

Complexity theory models narrative *and* anarchist behavior. As I will demonstrate, in a fittingly self-similar and coincidental way, anarchism already models narrative behavior.

Given how unpredictable each narrative text will be in each of its *konkretizations*, the Bakhtin–Fourier analysis of discourse that is the center of this adaptation-studies method must be sensitive to each individual narrative, and anarchism provides the ethical manner by which the relative autonomy of each text is identified and ensured. Following an anarchist studies tactic, analysis must be *ethically open* to each narrative text, allowing each transactional narrative production to occur as fully as possible. The manner in which various discourses entangle with one another during the *konkretization* provided by a particular reader in a particular spatiotemporal context will be unique; analysis must be present to the work itself and the attitude in which it is engaged.

Jesse Cohn outlines an excellent, phenomenologically hermeneutical strategy for this first part of the method in *Anarchism and the Crisis of Representation*, pointing out that no interpretive tactic fully open to its work of inquiry can be content “to treat the text as statement *or* structure, reflection *or* instrument” (106), as many literary theories (such as New Historicism, Marxism, psychoanalysis, New Criticism, and so on) prescribe. Insofar as those theories primarily reveal textual acts in terms of 1) “the agent who acts through the text” (rhetorical), 2) “the text as an action through an agency” (structural), 3) “the scene in which the textual act takes place” (contextual), and 4) “the purpose served by the textual act” (functional), their depth of insight, Cohn points out, is proportional to the limitations they necessitate (98, 106). Much as Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle demonstrates the limit of the simultaneous knowledge of pairs of physical properties, and much as blind attention only to intended information misses the

information conveyed from other systems through noise, Cohn suggests that the “dominatory” perspective of literary theories simultaneously blinds those theories to the effects of other influences they must necessarily ignore. The interpreter should thus adopt the role of an ecologist, Cohn suggests, synthesizing methods to identify holistically *quo modo* (i.e. the attitude in which) the textual work is produced and then received in some particular place at some particular time. This “ecological” approach must be aware not only of the original production of the physical work, but of the many times and places in which it can be *reproduced* in its reception as a text. Again, this production and ongoing reception is the fullness of the always-unfolding existence of a narrative.

Thus, anarchism—through a phenomenological questioning of the agent, agency, context, and purpose in which a textual act arises—guides analysis by providing an ethical guide for analyzing the narrational activity, narrative material, and narrative drive of different adaptations. This questioning identifies the discursive disruption *within* and *between* narrativizations and their complex effects on the ideological transmission of the abstracted Story the adaptations imply. Adopting Cohn’s *quo modo* posture first (as a means to distinguish possible avenues of interpretation and attune the various channels of information), my analyses will proceed using the Bakhtin–Fourier discourse analysis that addresses particular perturbations and displacements in adaptations caused by interacting discourses within and between the narrativizations. Cohn’s approach will identify which aspects of a narrative’s *konkretization* (discursive or spatiotemporal) might be evaluated, and at what level of discourse they occur.¹⁹ How do semantic-level discourses affect a whole narrative? How do they not? How do pragmatic-level

¹⁹ Just as a quick reminder, my own goal in this project is ideology-critique. As I have demonstrated, this particular method can be used again and again to discover various kinds of new information from cultural noise in a narrative. But I will always be making the decision to discover the way in which adaptations reveal transformations in ideology.

discourses affect the whole narrative or not? How does narrative discourse affect other narratives and their pragmatic- and semantic-level discourses? How has and how will time affect narrative *koncretization* at various discourse levels? The discourse analysis will be at several length scales, then, but always focusing on how discourse interaction tends toward anarchist criticality within and between narratives. This criticality will be defined by the recurring defamiliarization and displacement caused by overlapping, conflicting, interdependent discourses in composition and reading comprehension, as well as the various spatiotemporal parameters of composition and reading comprehension.

I want to address a few possible criticisms. First, perhaps this method seems unnecessarily complicated. But it needs to be complicated to a much larger degree than most are accustomed to. The fundamental characteristic of a complex system is the inability to reduce its comprehension to simplistic models: the greater the information, the greater the entropy, and thus the greater need for adding organizational energy. As with the analysis of flocks of birds shifting course to avoid a predator, simply dissecting the particular elements of a narrative or set of narratives will not explain the large-scale patterns that emerge from the propagation of discursive defamiliarization. Second, if this method examines narratives as so particular to include individual readings, how does it rescue itself from solipsistic relativism? In all criticism, we must remember that just because narrative *koncretizations* are individualized, they are not cut off from other individuals, in the same way that members of a flock are autonomous but reactive and responsible to the herd. Cultural abstractions of narrative comprise the many, many individual receptions of narratives over space and time and organize themselves based on the ongoing totality of those readings. The honest critic will recognize the important but humble position of individual readings and will understand the ultimate futility of ignoring other

readings: those readings will still comprise the larger cultural understanding of the abstracted narrative. Any analysis that willfully silences or ignores competing readings willfully attempts to silence the text itself. Each analysis should be oriented toward contributing its present criticism into broader understanding of the narrative and providing for the eventual involvement of other readings, not to cancel or supersede previous readings but to augment them.

Criticality in American Ideological Diffusion

Moving forward with this new method, I can address how I will explore ideology in American culture. I said at the beginning that my overarching goal is to define the discrepancy between American identity in its theoretical senses and in its realistic senses that is caused by ideologies of the State, and articulate a way to bridge the theoretical–realistic gap by critiquing the stories Americans tell themselves. That bridging is the anarchist–critical impulse. Such an impulse presumes that some theoretical American identity is desirable, which I ultimately argue that it is. In examining how the State warps American identity, I will study criminal narratives since they isolate conflict over cultural identity and do so necessarily in relation to the State, the *de jure* discriminating force between ideal and realistic American identity. Particularly, I will contend with ideology’s transmission across time and region through narratives, illustrating how the complex, self-organizing anarchism of adaptation necessarily splinters ideology. I will further demonstrate how a history of American crime narratives and their adaptations reveal the ways in which American ideology is appropriated, challenged, and transformed spatiotemporally. As my method confirms, these crime narrative adaptations bring to light the engagement between the individual and the State and convey State responses to anarchism over the past two centuries, indicating the role crime plays in the construction of “official” State narratives of events.

While ideology is conveyed through narrative in a number of ways, I am focusing my attention on how certain crime narratives and narrativizations come to terms with real events. As indicated earlier, Ricoeur suggests that narrative is primarily a mode through which we make sense of the passage of time in terms of human experience. History and fiction both operate through narrative ontologically and epistemologically, “each...borrowing from the intentionality of the other” (*Time and Narrative*, Vol. 3, 181). I rely on Ricoeur’s suggestion that “history in some way makes use of fiction to refigure time and...fiction makes use of history for the same ends” (181). While *all* fiction requires historical, real-world context for *konkretization*, in the case of narratives of true crime, the “quasi-historical moment of fiction” and the “quasi-fictive moment of history” overlap in an astonishing way. Ricoeur proposes that

one of the functions of fiction bound up with history is to free, retrospectively, certain possibilities that were not actualized in the historical past... The quasi-past of fiction in this way becomes the detector of possibilities buried in the actual past. What “might have been”, the possible in Aristotle’s terms, includes both the potentialities of the “real” past and the “unreal” possibilities of pure fiction. (192)

Crime narratives based on history suggest a need for humankind to make sense of particular events due to some inexplicability. These events that inspire several adaptations suggest a difficulty for cultural identity that narrative mode tries to work out. Ricoeur’s description of fiction based in history as freeing “certain possibilities that were not actualized in the historical past,” as expressing “possibilities buried in the actual past,” calls to mind my allusions to quantum mechanics earlier. If one measurement of a wave equation only gives a partial solution, more measurements are needed to describe the full solution. Similarly, fiction allows society a way to understand better challenging moments in history. Furthermore, this anarchist method reveals a Utopian component in its attempt to rescue the past from itself and project the “what

might have been” onto the “what could be.” This component is vital for rediscovering an American identity from its ideological warping.

One final way my approach draws on complexity theory comes through my choices for narrative analysis. My method is oriented toward articulating how the State, a large-scale abstraction with a nonetheless immediate physical grounding, affects the individuals and communities it professes to comprise and represent. The interaction between the individual and the State, or individuals-in-community and the State, reflects a complex, self-organized system in conflict with an organizing force trying to tamper with the initial conditions of the system. In the following chapters, I will examine fictional scenarios of how this system clashes with the State (the organizing force). My entire inquiry is divided into two parts. In the first part, I look at the way the State co-opts revolutionary principles (warping them into ideology) and subsequently compels individuals to internalize its ideologies. Within this perspective, I also appraise the possibilities of individual resistance to State compulsion. In the second part, I study how the revolutionary principles that initiated a society might survive the State’s supplanting those principles. I also look at the effects of groups banding together outside the control of the State to reclaim a self-organized system and then relate the outcome of groups banding together *within* the confines of the State and yet still against it. By considering the adaptations of these fictional accounts, I will demonstrate how the renarrativization of the accounts reveals an inherent anarchist opposition to ideological control that successive adaptations only intensify. Regardless of the events the narratives relate, or even the rhetorical intentions of the authorial voices, the anarchist opposition emerges from the audience’s *konkretization* of the adaptations through the knowing interplay between narrativizations. Thus, the crime narratives themselves

reveal a struggle with the State over identity, both individual and communal, and the narratives' adaptations indicate the anarchist response to the attempts at ideological control.

In the next chapter (Chapter 2), which is the beginning of Part One, I begin my investigation into anarchist responses to ideology through transatlantic American crime narrativizations with a full and sustained demonstration of the method heretofore conveyed. I engage one particular, fictional narrativization of some apparently unrelated historical events—Herman Melville's last prose work, *Billy Budd, Sailor (An Inside Narrative)*—and indicate how the interplay between the events and the narrativization uncovers an anarchist critique of the State's drive for complete control of history and knowledge through repression of individuals to try to reaffirm sovereignty and legitimate representation. Chapter 2 provides an exceptional case in point for an investigation into American cultural adaptation since 1) the unfinished novella's well-documented composition indicates Melville's process of adaptation of his own works; 2) the fact that it is a novelistic adaptation of events highlights my underlying project in this whole inquiry to extend the traditional focus of adaptation studies beyond film to incorporate media such as opera, drama, radio drama, comics, and novelizations; 3) its reliance and commentary on events from the Napoleonic wars (1797) and the *U.S.S. Somers* affair (1842) to the Haymarket massacre (1888) facilitate a rare glimpse at how American ideology shifted over the course of its first full century through one narrative's wandering gaze; and 4) its multiple twentieth- and twenty-first-century adaptations in opera, theater, film, radio, and comics cultivate a greater appreciation for media choice in adaptation and indicate the ever-changing political use of American ideology through the last century and a quarter of the nation's history.

This opening analysis will be long necessarily, opening with an in-depth textual and critical overview, followed by a full application of Cohn's *quo modo* questioning before turning

to the particular discourse analysis obliged by that questioning. Given its need for a wide view of the possibilities in narrative noise, the method I put forth requires lengthy consideration of the manner of textual production to facilitate acute awareness of discursive fluctuations at all length scales in the text and to stimulate further information discovery. Without considerable contemplation of the narrative as a rhetorical statement, a generic structure, a sociohistorical reflection, or a cultural instrument, my method falls flat, obscuring the critic's choice of information from the reader. Any anarchist criticism must be as open as practically possible about the scholar's representation of text and context. The length of the investigation in Chapter 2 is further justified by a need to draw on it in Chapter 3 while discussing twentieth-century adaptations of *Billy Budd*.

In Chapter 3, I expand my investigation into *Billy Budd* narrativizations to explore a wider variety of media—including drama, film-from-drama, and opera—demonstrating how the logics of genre and media influence the anarchist impulse in adaptation. While I focus on the way an individual's identity can be crushed in the interests of affirming the State's legitimacy in Chapter 2, in Chapter 3 I consider the way individuals come to comprise the State, identifying the way ideology arises in reality. I distinguish how the discursive echoes of the *Somers*, Parkman, and Haymarket affairs—insofar as they signify anxiety over martial law, criminal intent, and labor exploitation—resonate powerfully through *Billy Budd* adaptations, namely Louis Coxe and Robert Chapman play, Peter Ustinov's 1962 film, and Benjamin Britten's opera. These echoes drive those narrativizations to accentuate Melville's more latent critiques of the State by concentrating on Claggart and Vere's roles in embodying the State, particularly through the way they relate to each other.

In Part Two, I turn my attention to how communities respond to the State. In Chapter 4, as I mentioned, I focus on dissenting groups that try to carry forth the values that initiated their society, but attempt to do so outside the confines of the State's dominion. As an instance of such a group, I examine some narrativizations concerning the Molly Maguireism in nineteenth-century Pennsylvania. In particular, I scrutinize Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's 1915 novel *The Valley of Fear*, as well as its renarrativizations in the 1935 British film *The Triumph of Sherlock Holmes*, the 1962 German-French-Italian film *Sherlock Holmes and the Deadly Necklace*, the 1983 cartoon film *Sherlock Holmes and the Valley of Fear*, the 1997 BBC 4 radio drama *The Valley of Fear*, and the 2011 British comic book *The Valley of Fear*. In analyzing these narrativizations, I consider how the State silences outside challenges to its legitimacy and how that very silence is announced through the anarchism of adaptation. In my adaptation choices, I further extend my media of focus to include comics, cartoons, and radio drama.

In the last chapter, Chapter 5, I question the possibility of revolt by groups within the State, and furthermore look at *intentional* critiques of the State through narratives and the way ideological corruption of subsequent adaptations can still result in anarchist opposition to ideological diffusion. By studying *Die Dreigroschenoper*, as well as its source work (*The Beggar's Opera*) and its many adaptive performances, I dissect how the *lumpenproletariat*—a group on the fringe of the State's interests—attempt to contest the State's coercion, but instead reveal the replication of more ideology through attempts to resist the State. And then, insofar as *The Beggar's Opera*, *Die Dreigroschenoper*, and *The Threepenny Opera* are critiques of their capitalist cultures, I describe how the pervasive ideology that ensnared Billy, Claggart, Vere, the Molly Maguires, as well as Jack Sheppard and Jonathan Wild can also distort critiques of that ideology. I then elaborate how even distortions of critiques through narrative can still signify the

inherent anarchism of adaptation. In my discussion of the various productions of *The Threepenny Opera*, I further extend my notion of adaptation to consider not only narrativizations that drastically change narrational activity and narrative material, but also those *konkretizations* of narratives that shift the narrative drive for the audience due to necessary changes in time or space. In addition to the various media I will have thus far introduced, I include *performances* as distinctive adaptations.

In each chapter, I will employ the same method most fully worked out in Chapter 2. And while the *quo modo* sections in the other chapters will not be as involved as in Chapter 2, I want to reiterate that each must maintain a wide view of the possibilities in narrative noise to draw attention to the many discursive disturbances in the text. Again, anarchist criticism must be transparent about the scholar's representation of text and context.

PART ONE
“THE EFFECT OF AN INSTINCT”:
INTERNALIZED IDEOLOGY IN *BILLY BUDD* AND ITS ADAPTATIONS

CHAPTER 2
“THE DRUMBEAT DISSOLVED THE MULTITUDE”:
INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY, CULTURAL COMPULSION,
AND THE PROBLEM OF ACQUIESCENCE IN *BILLY BUDD*

Wise Draco comes, deep in the midnight roll
Of black artillery; he comes, though late;
In code corroborating Calvin’s creed
And cynic tyrannies of honest kings;
He comes, nor parlies; and the Town redeemed,
Give thanks devout; nor, being thankful, heeds
The grimy slur on the Republic’s faith implied,
Which holds that Man is naturally good,
And—more—is Nature’s Roman, never to be scourged.

Herman Melville, “The House-Top: A Night Piece”

Yet Ah, that Spring should vanish with the Rose!
That Youth’s sweet-scented manuscript should close!
The Nightingale that in the branches sang,
Ah, whence, and whither flown again, who knows!

Omar Khayyám, *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*

He was illiterate; he could not read, but he could sing, and like the illiterate nightingale was sometimes the composer of his own song.

Herman Melville, *Billy Budd*

In his 1878 edition of Edward FitzGerald’s translation of *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, Herman Melville placed a check mark next to the ninety-sixth ruba’i (in the epigraph above), only one of nine he marked so in a book of poems he knew very well—he owned at least three copies of it, his favorite of which was Elihu Vedder’s 1886 illustrated edition. Indeed, in his later years particularly he seems to have turned to it over and over again, likely due to its preoccupation with old age, memory of youth, and the inexorable procession of time toward death, but also for the way his “own disillusionment [and world-weary skepticism] was undoubtedly soothed by [it],” as Hershel Parker remarks (25). This disillusionment and skepticism is in full display throughout his *Battle-Pieces* poetry, which Melville asserts reflects

“the contrasted airs which wayward winds have played upon the [harp] strings” after the fall of Richmond in the Civil War (Melville, “Preface to *Battle-Pieces*” 3). The book comprises Melville’s meditations on the brutality of war as much as its sometime necessity. Never far from these contemplations is warning: against ideology, against idealization, even against triumph. In light of these preoccupations, *Billy Budd* seems to be a way that Melville contended with some turbulent changes in his country, as well as his life. In fact, through *Billy Budd*, Melville illustrates how blurred the line between individual identity and the State’s ideology can be. Melville’s apparent fascination with the *Rubáiyát* and its coincidence with his long composition of *Billy Budd* indicate an approach by which the many conflicting interpretations of Melville’s last prose work can be brought together in a fruitful synthesis that attends specifically to that work’s status as an adaptation.

This interpretive synthesis of the personal and national is partly suggested by the epigraphs. Melville’s last prose text modifies and depicts historical events (as well as fictional historical ones), and he uses them to make an anarchist critique of American ideological control, even as he reluctantly acquiesces to their permanence and their implication of coerced participants. The historical events Melville draws on—an alleged American naval mutiny plot, a murder at Harvard, and the Haymarket bombing—point to the ways the State intervenes in personal histories and memories for absolute control of history and knowledge of its “dominion” to try to reaffirm sovereignty and legitimate representation. In the passage from his poetry, Melville personifies the physical authority of the State (Draco) sneaking in at night, redeeming the people who nevertheless quickly forget their reliance on the State’s dangerous physical might and its consequences. Corresponding to how individuals relate to the State, I want to compare the passage from the *Rubáiyát*—which likens the closing manuscript of youth, ending after some

loss of innocence, to a singing nightingale that has flown away for good—with the nightingale simile from *Billy Budd* about the titular character. Reading these passages together, I want to argue an allusion to my whole argument: the necessary repercussions of the State's might, howsoever necessary they appear, echo through to the individual level of a nation and will crush even the most innocent along with potential enemies. As Melville says, Draco comes in the midnight roll of artillery, and thus has little sensitivity or patience for all he will devastate, and the innocent fallen will be gone and forgotten in favor of safety under the State.

As indicated toward the close of the previous chapter, my analysis of *Billy Budd* will demonstrate a full example of my method and takes the form of a two-step method: 1) a phenomenological questioning of the agent, agency, context, and purpose in which a textual act arises, suggesting a *quo modo* (to use Jesse Cohn's term) for the adaptation that identifies the discursive disruption *within* and *between* narratives and their complexity effects on ideological transmission; and 2) discourse analysis of the ruptures between narratives in the narrational activity, narrative material, and narrative drive. The length of this inquiry, but its ultimate coherence as part of one methodological investigation, necessitates I split the chapter into two sections roughly the length of more customary dissertation chapters. The first section will explore the background discursive noise, as well as the *quo modo* examination. The second section will delve into direct analysis of Melville's *Billy Budd* and several of its subsequent adaptations, drawing on findings from the first section. The explication of my thesis will be most fully addressed in the second section, and will feel thus somewhat delayed. Quite simply, I beg patience and pardon.

At any rate, in order to substantiate and introduce the method, to begin this first section of the chapter, I will present first a panorama of *Billy Budd*'s discursive noise, starting with a

composition and critical history of Melville's problematical novel. Sorting out how the threads of discourse interact with each other will provide a path for more specific analysis of the narrative. In most ways, too, this necessary background also provides a description of the functionality of *Billy Budd* as a cultural artifact, and will therefore also act as a bridge between general knowledge of the text (a usual starting point for analysis, anyway) and the first step of my adaptation method: the *quo modo* questioning.

Discursive Noise and *Quo Modo* Examination

Composition and Critical History

Reconciling the turbulent critical history of *Billy Budd* contributes directly to the very method I have put forth since it seeks to articulate a fuller description of the convoluted work through its many interpretations. Frankly speaking, I am not sure I could concoct a better first case for this project than *Billy Budd* offers. It excels in almost every way in demonstrating the need for a broader understanding of narrative and adaptation. Moreover, I can think of very few major, canonized American authors that have received such extensive critical and commercial attention while simultaneously directing attention to formative cultural events and concerns across two full centuries and even two continents. James Fenimore Cooper would be the best rival. This attention to a canonized American author of broad impact is helpful in terms of best investigating the transformation of American ideology and of best illustrating the extensive relevance of such an investigation.

Composition

The most fundamentally important factor in *Billy Budd*'s paradigmatic excellence is its thoroughly unfinished condition. At the time of his death in 1891, Herman Melville had already published his last novel (*The Confidence-Man*) thirty-four years prior, having concentrated almost solely on poetry in the interim. He left no final copy of *Billy Budd* ready for publication. Consequently, the novel *Billy Budd* has actually been closer to *three* novels: *Billy Budd, Foretopman* (edited by Raymond Weaver), *Melville's Billy Budd* (edited by F. Barron Freeman), and *Billy Budd, Sailor: (An Inside Narrative)* (edited by Harrison Hayford and Merton M. Sealts, Jr.). Each argued for its supremacy as the authoritative edition of the last novel, and none decidedly won.

To be completely fair and dedicated to my ontological groundings, this is still not an accurate list of editions since numerous others persist that have cobbled together bits of these three in various ways. Additionally, at least two annotated versions exist online today that significantly alter the experience of the narrative, one of which suggests outright that it should supplant the Hayford and Sealts edition. Hofstra University is currently at work on an ambitious online project that will be “the first born-digital online resource for Melville studies, texts, research, and teaching” and will include images of the *Billy Budd* manuscript leaves, as well as “diplomatic transcriptions” and “base versions” of each leaf (Bryant). This all still leaves aside the numerous print and online versions that establish the text graphically in noteworthy ways. In any case, David Padilla's extensively annotated edition for American Studies at the University of Virginia provides a handy illustration for the precariousness of a unified *Billy Budd* text. His foreword to the text:

This edition of *Billy Budd* is based on the 1924 Raymond Weaver edition of the novel...sort of. As even the most cursory glance at the convoluted textual history of this

novel shows, there has traditionally been agreement about this novel only in the broadest terms. Different editors have adjusted the text in various ways arranging and rearranging certain sections, inserting and excluding other sections [...] That said, without trying to ignore the significant textual issues while also trying to make the novel as accessible as possible for today's reader, the following table of contents matches that which is found in many contemporary editions of the novel. It is based on F. Barron Freeman's 1948 edition and Elizabeth Treeman's later modifications to the text and includes certain chapters which Weaver either excluded or incorporated with the surrounding chapters. Further, as the Weaver and the Freeman/Treeman text hold, the ship upon which most of the action takes place is referred to as the *Indomitable* (not the *Bellipotent* as Harrison Hayford and Merton Sealts maintain that Melville intended it to be). In an effort to point out these variations, notes throughout the text mark points of departure between the various editions. ("The Text")

In one sentence, Padilla mentions no less than five people involved in significantly different editions of a text that he himself is putting into a new (and significantly different) edition. And even though, as Padilla indicates in a longer explanatory note on the text, the Hayford and Sealts edition has become the standard critical edition, many contemporary editions have come from Freeman's edition. In fact, with full knowledge of the Hayford–Sealts edition, Padilla still bases his own text on Freeman's. This is just as well, for as Padilla acknowledges, "The often contradictory results [of numerous editions] has forced *Billy Budd* in to [sic] a more or less perpetual state of flux" ("Manuscript").

This indeterminacy is quite helpful, though, particularly in consideration of the second way *Billy Budd* serves as an exemplar text for my present method in adaptation studies. The numerous and tentative editions of *Billy Budd* underscore the long-unfolding, and ultimately uncertain, composition of the narrative. The writing process took *at least* five years while the narrative expanded and contracted under *at least* nine distinct revision phases of varying magnitude and focus.²⁰ Knowledge of this composition and revision process is necessary for establishing a standard text, yet discrepancies and ambiguities persist even in Hayford and Sealts

²⁰ Hayford and Sealts have fairly direct physical evidence to support this claim; see their "Editors' Introduction" for an overview (most directly p. 1–3) and their "Analysis of the Manuscript" for more in-depth discussion and evidence (p. 236–40 especially).

authoritative edition. As such, the various scholars and editors who have wrestled with the manuscript have highlighted the proliferation of competing discourses in the novel, and have had to admit subsequently, as Hershel Parker so vehemently argued, that they were not in fact working with “a perfect verbal icon” (8), as so many canonical texts are presumed to be during analysis. It is demonstrably a dynamic, complex system.

Its use in demonstrating the relatively undetermined nature of narrative aside, *Billy Budd* is also an astounding social, historical, and biographical gauge, particularly inasmuch as it is an adaptation. First, it has been suggested as an adaptation of historical events surrounding (at least) three infamous crimes (the 1842 alleged mutiny on the USS *Somers*, the 1850 Parkman–Webster murder case, and the 1886 Haymarket riot), and also stands as an adaptation of Melville’s own work (his poem “Billy in the Darbies,” originally intended for publication in his *John Marr* collection). Of course, the number of historical events and persons it appropriates and implies are exponentially greater still: the French Revolution, a Civil War desertion, Casper Hauser, Sir Horatio Nelson, Denis Diderot, the Siamese twins Chang and Eng, Guy Fawkes, Tennyson, Thomas Paine, John Calvin, Tecumseh, Edward Coke and William Blackstone, Ananias, Chiron and Achilles, and Orpheus, to name only a small number. The allusions are not all equally important to the text—another indication in the way narratives are intrinsically complex, nonlinear systems: although two literary allusions may take up the same space, their effect on greater levels of discourse will not be equal and will often be disproportionately so.

Beyond these historical connections, *Billy Budd*’s subsequent adaptation into a play, an opera, a musical, several teleplays, two radio-plays, a film, and a comic over the course of the twentieth century also provides a nearly unique opportunity for clarifying the development and

transformation of ideology in American culture.²¹ The fact that Melville's text particularly explores the shifting role of narrative in personal and cultural identities further stresses those developments and transformations. Finally, Melville's last novel fittingly launches the textual analyses of this dissertation for its confirmation of Melville's life-long obsession with the social implications of the French Revolution, particularly in their manifestation in American society and government.

Criticism

As I have implied already, something in *Billy Budd* requires synthesis. This is clearly true in the narrative ontology I rely on. But in more "classical" terms, how is this still possible? At this time, Herman Melville is a fully canonized author, his stories and novels read throughout high schools and colleges across the country; scholarship on Melville is astounding, the most consequential analyses filling whole book stacks, while a long-tail of lesser articles remain too numerous to wade through completely in any reasonable analysis. But over-awed deference buries the historical conflict that won Melville canonical status and does not explain the ongoing debate over the very basic meaning of *Billy Budd*.²²

Speaking generally, its criticism tends to order itself both historically and thematically. In terms of history, Robert Milder states flatly that critics before 1950 "unhesitatingly pronounced

²¹ In fact, there have been a number of other adaptations, most prominently including Charles Fuller *A Soldier's Play*, its film adaptation by Norman Jewison, John Wilson's play *Hamp*, its film adaptation (*King and Country*) by Joseph Losey, and Claire Denis's *Beau Travail*. The adaptations listed in the main text are simply those that directly referred to Melville's novel in production and advertisement. I will return to these other adaptations in the next chapter.

²² Hershel Parker provides a detailed account of *Billy Budd*'s discovery, subsequent and recurring editing and publishing, and its materially-based ascent into the American literature canon. William V. Spanos has specific and notable critiques to make of Parker's account, however, and details most of them in the second chapter of *The Exceptionalist State and the State of Exception*. In any case, the full story of its entry into American literature is convoluted, fascinating, and unfortunately mostly outside the purview of this dissertation. Those interested should certainly see Parker's account in *Reading Billy Budd* and Spanos's in "Criticism of *Billy Budd, Sailor: A Counterhistory*" (36–74).

the book (in E. L. Grant Watson's phrase) a 'testament of acceptance,'" and goes on to clarify their positions: "Like Shakespeare in *The Winter's Tale* or Milton in *Samson Agonistes*, Melville, it appeared, had surmounted his anger and reconciled himself to...what? Much of the confusion, wrangling, and downright ill will of *Billy Budd* criticism stems from the failure of early readers to specify what Melville's testament was an acceptance of." (3). The acceptance theories, as Milder calls them, comprised both Christian reconciliation and humanistic varieties. In terms of reconciliation, for instance, John Freeman (who edited and published the second version of *Billy Budd*) suggests that Melville,

after what storms and secret spiritual turbulence we do not know...in his last days...[re-entered] an Eden-like sweetness and serenity...and [set] his brief, appealing tragedy for witness that evil is defeat and natural goodness invincible in the affections of man. In this, the simplest of stories...Herman Melville uttered his everlasting yea, and died before a soul had been allowed to hear him. (36)

The more humanistic version of acceptance, Milder summarizes, "sought to enclose the tragic sacrifice of Billy within the radiant vision of private apotheosis" (4). In these interpretations, the magnanimity of Vere and Budd (to borrow Warner Berthoff's phrasing) overwhelm the reader through their sufferance in the face of crushing reality.

In 1950, Joseph Schiffman inaugurated a new wave of interpretations through his essay, "Melville's Final Stage, Irony: A Re-examination of *Billy Budd* Criticism." Schiffman reasons that "in almost all respects, *Billy Budd* is typically Melvillian. It is a sea story...it deals with rebellion. It has reference to reforms.... It is rich in historical background, and concerns ordinary seamen. All those features of *Billy Budd* bear the stamp of the youthful Melville" (46). The language, however, is "cool, detached...seemingly impartial" (46). These suppositions led Schiffman, and many following, to regard Billy and Vere as ironic figures. "The aged Melville had developed a new weapon in his lifelong fight against injustice" (47).

Quite popular for some time, these analyses have since been criticized in the wake of more contextual scholarship of Melville's life, which has generally suggested that "Melville's ideas about history, progress, and egalitarian democracy underwent a major reorientation in the decade beginning with his journey to the Holy Land (1856–57) and ending with the Civil War" (Milder 13)—a time period that also immediately followed his public failure as a writer of prose, and comprised his financial ruin, his return to tedious labor, the continuing dissolution of his marriage, and the suicide of his eldest son. Milton Stern concludes that, in later years, Melville's "rebellious attitudes diminished—although his anger didn't—and his doubts about human progress and the nobility of the common man had increased considerably" (145). In further evidence, he argues, "His Civil War poems constantly place the rebellion in the role...of the forces of chaos and anarchic change... The temperamental antipathy to change, the nostalgia, in the late poems is prefigured in the metaphysics of Melville's political allegiances in the Civil War poems" (144).

The explosion of literary critical theory in the 1960s and 1970s spawned much more political and contextual scholarship of *Billy Budd*, including comparisons with his poetry. The most notable shifts in *Billy Budd* criticism, however, occurred in terms of the legal aspects of the narrative. As Richard Weisberg notes in the editor's preface to the first volume of the *Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature* journal, *Billy Budd* "has come to 'mean' Law and Literature among many of its interpreters and constituents." Through all these cases, Milder argues, "the persistent division among *Billy Budd*'s interpreters, repeated on every plane of critical sophistication and infused subtly or crudely with many of the same passions, has suggested to some readers that *Billy Budd* is an indeterminate work, not only because it is unfinished...but by design" (11). Milder further notes that many now argue that indeterminacy is also what the work

is *about*. And still, even this interpretation has led to divisions. Does Melville intend the indeterminacy to be liberating or paralyzing (11–12)?

These successive waves of scholarship—historical and thematic but apparently alternating between testaments of acceptance and resistance, to quote popular phrases for the two groups—are even more convoluted than they first appear. William V. Spanos spends a considerable amount of space in his 2011 book *The Exceptionalist State and the State of Exception* arguing that the classical commentary on *Billy Budd* was quite influential, and that the efforts of Harrison Hayford and Merton Sealts in their investigation into the composition of the novel toward a “definitive edition” bolstered these conservative readings, particularly through the editors’ argument that Melville was methodically excising references to the political time period in which he wrote *because* he wished the story to remain apolitical. Spanos challenges Hayford and Sealts’s self-professed disinterested approach to the text, and likewise takes Hershel Parker to task for suggesting that apolitical interpretation of the text is possible. His further frustration is that critics like Hayford and Sealts, Parker, and Milder greatly exaggerated “the quantity and critical authority of...‘resistance criticism’...[obscuring] the fact that...[testament of acceptance theories were] dominant in the period between 1920 and the mid-1960s and beyond” (57). Spanos certainly has an ax to grind—he seems to forget that Milder, for example, admits the significance of the early essays on *Billy Budd*—but he makes a very valid point, particularly in his critique that “above all, in the name of disinterested inquiry, they concealed their ideological basis against a criticism that interpreted the late Melville’s work as *continuous with*, rather than as a turning away from, the fiction from *Moby-Dick* to *The Confidence-Man*” (57).

Even in summary, then, the history of *Billy Budd* scholarship is dizzying. The lingering doubts about the text's composition exacerbate debates over its meaning. Milder, as usual, sums it up well:

In brief, the burden of the compositional evidence is that *Billy Budd* is not a testament of acceptance *or* a testament of resistance, not metaphysical in theme *or* social in theme, not tragic *or* ironic, but that it was as it evolved, and as it stands, all of these things, whether one reads it genetically in light of Melville's development from 1886 to 1891 or formalistically as an unfolding action presented in the successive but overlapping perspectives of myth, religion, history, politics, and psychology. (17–18)²³

Ironically, most scholarship on *Billy Budd* following Milder's *Critical Essays* collection failed to heed this summary or take up his suggestion for enlivened scholarship on the work given that "the present debate has run its course and consists largely of a restatement of old positions in new or not-so-new vocabularies" (18). By 2002, Donald Yannella still ended up noting in the introduction to his landmark collection *New Essays on Billy Budd* that little had changed (18). This chapter's analysis, in following this dissertation introduction's stated method, also follows Milder's suggestion logically. The narrative text is a tragic and ironic testament of acceptance *and* resistance, metaphysical and sociopolitical in theme without really abandoning any of their implications.

Does this mean anything goes? No. For one, a lot of evidence has been given for these various interpretations, but analysis of some of that evidence has led some scholars to rule out

²³ Sparing few in his book, Spanos berates critics like Milder and Parker for "retreating" into "disinterestedness" and emphasizing the complexity of the text, arguing that "from the perspective of poststructuralist theory's problematization of disinterested inquiry...one cannot help but perceive that...[it is] informed by a conservative ideology" (61). While I greatly respect Spanos's attempt to re-politicize *Billy Budd*, as I wish to, and while I applaud his efforts to raise awareness of the inherent interestedness of "disinterested" critical inquiry, his book often goes so far in its polemics that he leaves the reader with the impression *he* is a little too interested in completely obliterating other scholars' readings. In a similar vein as Milder and Parker, he claims to read *Budd* "in full awareness of its ambiguities, its ultimate unnamability...that attends as faithfully as possible, not simply to the ambiguities...but to the degree and power or weight that accrues to each side of the ambiguity in the process of telling" (76). Why must Milder and Parker be *so far* off the mark, even if they do not admit so resoundingly to "an openly interested (ideological) reading" (76)? Spanos's readings come quite close to my own (his approach suggestively reflects aspects of anarchist theory, as well as my commitment to the irreducible complexity of the text), but his tirades often and unfortunately destabilize him rhetorically.

other information as relatively unimportant. In complexity terms, such critiques extrapolated local evidence *additively*, making global predictions based on a synthesis of elements rather than identifying emergent patterns from the complex interactions of various discourses and then attending to local interpretation. But this methodological problem is also beside the major point. As I described earlier, the textual work unfolds through its ongoing reception by successive audiences. This existence, as Macherey argued, is autonomous (if dependent) insofar as it is the irreducible product of specific labor and innumerable materials. Thus, denying further interpretations of a text (or reducing it to only one or a handful of readings) willfully contravenes the sovereignty of the text's completeness-through-reading. Likewise, defending just *any* interpretation willfully disregards authorial production. Interpretation owes an existential and ethical debt to the text. So *how* do we avoid relativism? By maintaining Cohn's *quo modo* attitude. This means being aware of—but not controlled by—rhetorical analysis, structural analysis, contextual analysis, and functional analysis by integrating their approaches and making allowance for moments in which one analysis must be prioritized for the overall argument. Above all, it means a synthesis of the implications of a work's agent, text, context, and utility in identifying its real-world unfolding. This critical openness is the key tactic needed for recognizing the inherent anarchism of adaptation.

Quo Modo of Billy Budd, Sailor (An Inside Narrative)

What rhetorical, functional, contextual, and structural influences developed the attitude of the production of Herman Melville's *Billy Budd*? In this section, I will pass over a direct discussion of functional influences on *Billy Budd* (i.e. how the purpose it serves society affects its ongoing production) since that question was answered indirectly in the preceding composition and critical history and will be throughout the subsequent discussions on contextual, rhetorical,

and structural influences on the production attitude of *Billy Budd*. Before I enter into direct discussion of these various influences on *Billy Budd*, I will address their ultimate implication.

What will become clear from my survey of the contextual, functional, structural, and rhetorical grounds of *Billy Budd*, and a glance at Melville's immediately adjacent poetry, is his debt to the Enlightenment. From specific plot points concerning impressment and Paine's *Rights of Man* to its general thematic concern with the role of the individual to the modern liberal State, Melville's 1880s novel shares deep ties with the basic tenets of the late eighteenth-century intellectual movement. As I will ultimately demonstrate, Melville's contemporary misgivings over the recent Civil War and the labor trouble culminating in the Haymarket tragedy led him to explore his own personal history of the conflict between liberty and authority, the individual and the State, in conjunction with his nation's own history.

Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* answered soundly Edmund Burke's critique of the French Revolution, and in a way that celebrated America. "She made a stand," Paine writes, "not for herself only, but for the world, and looked beyond the advantages herself could receive" (471). In fact, "no sooner did the American governments display themselves to the world, then despotism felt a shock, and man began to contemplate redress" (471). And Melville, like many Americans, had been proud of this tradition. But the distance between the American Dream and its reality is always measurable, and Melville noticed conspicuously how law was being misused in relation to liberty after the great declamations of the Enlightenment. In fact, the great experiments in the Enlightenment seemed to betray something of their ideological foundation.

The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen suggests that "men are born free and remain free and equal in rights" and that the limits of liberty "may be determined only by law" (467). Of course, Jean-Jacques Rousseau had pointed out in *The Social Contract* that "man

is born free; and everywhere he is in chains” (430). Even before the Enlightenment and its resultant revolutions, law was the limit of freedom. In effect, humankind was always free and equal, but the State had usually unfairly circumscribed these rights. Rousseau suggests that liberty be subject to “the general will” in the form of a “body politic,” whereby “whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be compelled to do so by the whole body. This means nothing less than that he will be forced to be free...” (435). Rousseau continues, understatedly,

The passage from the state of nature to the civil state produces a very remarkable change in man, by substituting justice for instinct in his conduct, and giving his actions the morality they had formerly lacked.... What man loses by the social contract is his natural liberty and an unlimited right to everything he tries to get and succeeds in getting; what he gains is civil liberty and the proprietorship of all he possesses. (435–36)

Civil liberty, he argues, is true liberty insofar as “mere impulse of appetite is slavery, while obedience to a law which we prescribe to ourselves is liberty” (436). But many men (and most women) lost more than their natural liberty, and gained less than their full civil liberty and proprietorship, in joining the social compact. For citizens like Claggart and Billy, “civilized” from their apparently dominant natural states, morality would have to be supplied, and *someone* would have to supply it. Their liberty would always be subject to the general will, and insofar as many apparently lacked morality in the natural state, *someone* would ultimately decide on what the general will wanted.

But let me begin with the broader contextual concerns, particularly the possible historical sources for the novel as well as literary influences on Melville as he was writing. Since my overall investigation examines how narratives affect and effect history (and vice versa) contextual discussion will be necessarily extensive. Moreover, Chapter 3 relies on broad contextual knowledge that must be described somewhere. Anyway, *fugit irreparabile tempus*.

In terms of history, I already indicated what various scholars have suggested as historical sources for *Billy Budd*: the 1842 alleged mutiny on the USS *Somers*, the 1850 Parkman–Webster murder case, and the 1886 Haymarket riot. And of course the 1797 events at the Spithead and the Nore also bear significance to the novel. I will deal with these in turn. In terms of literary influence, Melville’s penchant for allusion and his great appetite for reading make identification simultaneously easier and harder. If readers wish to find evidence of classical canonical literature (e.g. Shakespeare, Milton, the Bible) in Melville, they need only flip to any page in any of his books. The significance of that allusion, however, consequently will be much more difficult to prove in the traditional sense. In keeping with my conception of the narrative as an entanglement of discourse, though, I will sift through a number of references that form a baseline of literary influence (self-evident in a broad cross-section of Melville’s oeuvre) and discern those ruptures that propagate and defamiliarize the narrative. First, however, I will examine the important historical context of Melville’s writing from 1885 to 1891.

Quo Modo: Context

The *Somers* affair

To begin, the 1842 debacle aboard the U.S. brig *Somers* was so thoroughly considered the primary impulse and source behind Melville’s novel that, in 1962, Hayford and Sealts took pains over several pages in their “Editors’ Introduction” to demonstrate how the composition of the manuscript reveals that the case “was not the primary and motivating source of *Billy Budd* but in the story’s last phase was certainly a cogent analogue, even as Melville’s comment in the novel suggests” (30). With no knowledge of how Melville wrote the story, *Billy Budd* certainly does seem to be a creative adaptation of the *Somers* affair. As Hayford and Sealts note,

The assumption has been...that when Melville set out to write the story he adapted his central characters and situation from those involved in the events aboard the American brig-of-war. Certain facts encouraged such a view. Melville had referred to the case twice in *White-Jacket*. His cousin, Guert Gansevoort, first lieutenant of the brig, was as deeply involved in the affair as any man but the commander, Alexander Slidell Mackenzie, and the three men hanged—Acting Midshipman Philip Spencer, Boatswain’s Mate Samuel Cromwell, and Seaman Elisha Small.... Moreover, Melville mentions the *Somers* case directly in *Billy Budd* itself, at the climax of the trial scene.... There are obvious similarities in the two cases...[and because] of the striking similarities, and Melville’s own relation to the case, the...differences have been regarded as deliberate alterations he made, perhaps to veil the actual source...perhaps to serve his artistic purposes. The central situation and issue seemed fundamentally the same. (28–29)

A summary of what occurred on board the *Somers* is in order, although the whole event was fraught with such ambiguity that even more than forty years later, between February 1887 and October 1889 (while Melville was working on the novel), a primary-source letter and two separate and contradictory accounts were published in major periodicals.²⁴ Furthermore, a number of books, including one as late as Philip McFarland’s 1985 *Sea Dangers*, attempt to sift through the hazy documents and evidence for a clearer answer. None really exists. In any case, precisely these uncertainties are what were likely of most interest to Melville.

The official but contested account of what occurred is reflected approximately in the numerous periodical accounts that covered the affair around Christmas in 1842. From the New York papers, the Catholic *Boston Pilot* reported, in an article titled “FEARFUL MUTINY *on board the United States Brig Somers, and execution of the Ringleaders,*”

The *Somers* sailed from this port about three months ago for the coast of Africa, having on board eighty apprentices and eight seamen, and *no marines*. Her Commander, *Slidell Mackenzie*, her *only* Lieutenant, *Mr. Gansevoort*, of Albany, and five or six midshipmen, of whom Philip Spencer, son of the Secretary of War was the oldest.... It is believed the plan of mutiny was arranged soon after leaving this port, but not matured, until on her return from the coast of Africa, the Brig was about going into St. Thomas for water and provisions. When within 700 miles of the island, one of the crew gave notice to Commander Mackenzie that a mutiny was in progress, and soon after a paper was

²⁴ The *Magazine of American History* published (for the first time) Mackenzie’s letter to the naval court of inquiry; “The Mutiny on the *Somers*,” appeared in volume 8 of *The American Magazine*; and “The Murder of Philip Spencer” followed in response a year later in volume 7 of *The Cosmopolitan*.

discovered in which the whole plan of it was detailed. Midshipman Spencer was found to be the instigator of the mutiny, aided by the Quarter Master and Boatswain. . . . It seemed, too, that more than half the crew were implicated in the revolt; and the few officers, ignorant how far the contagion had extended and aware, moreover, that by taking off the leaders, the revolt would most readily be quelled, determined upon their immediate execution; and they were seized, and their guilt being ascertained, they were forthwith hanged at the yardarm, their associates in crime running them up, while the officers armed stood by to witness the execution. A large number of the guilty were then put in irons. (423)

Even by that time—for the *Somers* had been docked since mid-December, and the incidents took place December 1—a number of conflicting reports had been published, including one in which Spencer had held a pistol to Mackenzie’s heart before he and the other officers wrestled him and the other mutineers to the ground (McFarland 159). In any case, even in the above (filtered yet still-biased) account, certain facts already suggest an “inside narrative,” most particularly the fact that the ship comprised “eighty apprentices and eight seamen,” with only two officers and a handful of midshipmen. These apprentices and seamen were between thirteen and eighteen. The *Somers* was effectively a floating school.²⁵ As time passed after the event, more and more details emerged that clouded the once-clear “mutiny” and summary execution of its “ringleaders.”

The particulars leading up to the supposed mutiny plot, as well as its discovery and handling, were so riddled with ambiguity that high-profile critics (such as Spencer’s father and James Fenimore Cooper) started leveling charges (official or otherwise) of outright falsity against Mackenzie and Melville’s cousin, Guert Ganesvoort. As inquiry continued, suspicions surrounding their actions on board only seemed to multiply and intensify.²⁶ Even in accounts sympathetic to the captain, doubts spontaneously emerged. Charles Sumner’s 1843 article in the *North American Review* reports that Mackenzie held previous ill-will toward Spencer:

²⁵ In fact, the *Somers* affair prompted the United States to create the Naval Academy at Annapolis.

²⁶ For the interested reader, a number of excellent resources more thoroughly examine the mystery, most notably McFarland’s *Sea Dangers*. Still more examine the particular relationship among Melville, *Billy Budd*, and the ill-fated ship, especially Michael Paul Rogin’s *Subversive Genealogy*.

It appears, that, before sailing, Commander Mackenzie had heard of previous misconduct on the part of Spencer, which inclined him to look unfavorably upon his character, and to desire his removal from the Somers. On the Brazilian station he had wantonly insulted an English midshipman, in a freak of drunkenness, and been otherwise involved in difficulties, on account of which he was dismissed from the squadron, and incurred the severe censure of the Navy Department. It is said, that, at this time, only the interference of friends and his own promises of amendment saved him from the action of a court-martial, and expulsion from the service. "The circumstance," says Commander Mackenzie," of his connexion [sic] with a high and distinguished officer of the Government, by enhancing, if possible, his baseness, increased my desire to get rid of him. On this point I beg that I may not be misunderstood. I revere authority, and, in this republican country, I regard its exercise as an evidence of genius, intelligence, and virtue. But I have no respect for the base son of an honored father." (215)

Mackenzie argued that his unusually quick execution of Spencer extended partially from his belief that his Secretary of War father would undoubtedly see to his acquittal.

In fact, the whole affair would cloud the remainder of all of the officers' lives. On the last day of March 1843—the evening before Mackenzie was exonerated by his court-martial, and only four months after the executions—the *Somers's* doctor, Richard W. Leacock, shot and killed himself (McFarland 240). Questions about the events that apparently haunted young Leacock so heavily hounded Mackenzie and Ganesvoort until their deaths—and even after. In 1889, Gail Hamilton's article in *The Cosmopolitan* went so far—and she was not at all alone in this—to declare, "In the name of truth, which is eternal; of justice to the dead, which is the highest duty that can devolve upon the living; the verdict of history should be reversed, and everywhere it should be told and known that Philip Spencer and his two companions were illegally and unjustifiably put to death, absolutely innocent of the crimes wherewith they were charged" (134).

If Melville was indeed drawn back to the case while writing *Billy Budd*, it seems he must have been drawn to some of the stranger details of the case and, even more particularly, to Mackenzie's role in it, rather than any central preoccupation with Spencer or even Mackenzie's

specific relationship with Spencer. As indicated earlier, Hayford and Sealts do make a sound argument against the affair as the “sufficient source” for the novel: Melville was certainly working on it before the 1888–89 *American Magazine–Cosmopolitan* articles, before even the 1887 Mackenzie letter publication. His major development of the story—concerning, almost exclusively, conflict between Billy and Claggart—occurred in that period, and they have few direct parallels to the *Somers* case. Billy is an innocent, while the chronically improper Spencer seemed to have some moral guilt; and none on board the *Somers* were charged with the kind of malevolence Claggart appears to show.

But as Michael Paul Rogin notes, somewhat exhaustedly, “Critics who have argued whether the *Somers* affair provided a ‘sufficient source’ for *Billy Budd* have missed the point” (295). What is certain is that Melville’s characterization and elaboration of Vere and his involvement in *Billy Budd*’s plot occurred no earlier than December of 1888, long after the *American Magazine* rekindled interest in the *Somers* (Hayford and Sealts, “Editors’ Introduction” 7–8). It probably occurred even as the reactionary *Cosmopolitan* article appeared. This is particularly significant given the striking parallels of Vere to the learned Mackenzie, a friend of Longfellow and Irving and who published a number of naval histories (on Oliver H. Perry, Stephen Decatur, and Paul Jones) and well-regarded memoirs (*A Year in Spain*, *The American in England*, and *Spain Revisited*). Both captains were “forty or thereabouts” when they ordered the executions that harried them (Melville, *Billy Budd* 60). Both “had a marked leaning toward everything intellectual” and “loved books...to which every serious mind of superior order occupying any active post of authority in the world naturally inclines: books treating of actual men and events no matter what era—history, biography, and unconventional writers like Montaigne” (62).

In short, as Rogin insinuates, the *Somers* affair did not need to be the sole blueprint for *Billy Budd* for the events to have significant bearing on the narrative. Rogin goes on to list the striking similarities between Vere and Mackenzie's difficult situation, and their handling of it:

Both captains initially discounted the story, but then precipitously determined to hang the alleged mutineers. Each convened a court (composed, with one exception, of the same officers on both ships). The first lieutenants presided formally over those courts, but each was "overrulingly instructed" ([Melville, *Billy Budd*] 108) by his captain. In spite of ambiguous evidence, and in the absence of actual mutiny, both courts sentenced the accused to death. On each ship a condemned sailor blessed the authority about to hang him. First published reports grossly exaggerated both mutinies, requiring an accurate narrative to correct them. (296)

Overwhelmingly, evidence points to Melville's use of *Mackenzie* as the "sufficient source" of *Vere*—although his being such a source does not preclude Vere's functioning in further respects.

In any case, in this period during which he developed Vere's character, Melville made a number of other, smaller revisions that seem to reflect certain peculiarities in the *Somers* affair, presumably to enhance the similarities between the two cases. If Melville did not begin with the *Somers* affair in mind, he meant to include it as an important parallel; in fact, as I will demonstrate later, he specifically used it in conjunction with other historical analogues as part of a broader confrontation with the problem of historical knowledge. Thus, Melville is markedly more interested in how the details on the *Bellipotent* are related and interpreted than in some overall, direct parallel to events on the *Somers*. In this light, Billy's opposition to Spencer is particularly quite noteworthy. Both Billy and Spencer are considered to be dangerous because of their popularity with the crew, and both are implicated in bribery and plotting with other sailors. But the interpretation and understanding of these similarities is importantly different between the narratives. When the ever-popular Billy is asked by one of afterguardsman to "slip into the lee

forechains” to speak privately, and is subsequently offered money, these events presumably lead Claggart to bring up charges against Billy (81–82).²⁷ Spencer,

it was observed...was in the habit of associating very little with the other officers, but was continually intimate with the crew. He was in the habit of joking with them.... He drew from the purser a large quantity of tobacco and cigars...which he distributed among the apprentices and seamen, whose favor he seemed desirous to secure. On the day before leaving New York, he gave money to Small...on the passage out, he gave money to Cromwell... (Sumner 216)

Further, “on the night of the twenty-fifth of November...Wales states that...Spencer came up, and, after a few remarks about the weather, requested him to get on top of the booms, as he had something very important to communicate” (216). According to these reports, of course, Spencer is the instigator—rather than the bystander like Billy. But the fact that they were reports would make all the difference in the *Somers* affair. *Who* told *what* to *whom*, and with what knowledge or proof, ended up being the very core of the mystery of the *Somers* affair. In all, Michael Paul Rogin proposes that “Melville borrowed interior details from the *Somers* affair...even more striking than the external parallels” (296). To these details I will return after an examination of how the Parkman murder and the Haymarket affair affected Melville in his writing of *Billy Budd*.

The Parkman–Webster affair

The probable brutal murder of George Parkman in November of 1849 stirs even less recognition these days than the *Somers* affair, but at the time it was at least as notorious and well-known as the *Somers*—probably more. The need for me to equivocate about whether or not the murder even occurred indicates the degree to which the Parkman case parallels events on the *Somers* at least in terms of certainty. As in the case of the *Somers*, where mutiny was never established beyond reasonable doubt before Spencer, Small, and Cromwell were executed for its

²⁷ Claggart’s charge of mutiny against Billy has traditionally been interpreted as an intentional lie on his part. In the more direct textual analysis, I will argue quite differently.

plotting, George Parkman's actual murder was never established unequivocally before John White Webster was convicted and executed for Parkman's murder and dismemberment. In both cases, any summary of what occurred must be understood in light of the great discrepancies that presented themselves at the time and in subsequent investigations.

The relatively official account of events is as follows. George Parkman, a Harvard graduate and psychiatrist hailing from a wealthy Boston family, lent money throughout the city, and would daily walk about collecting debts. He was doing so on November 23 when he went missing, last seen at a quarter to two in the afternoon. Within a few days, rewards were posted by his family for information to his whereabouts. He was apparently found exactly a week after he went missing by Ephraim Littlefield, the janitor of the new Harvard Medical College, where Webster worked and of which Parkman was a benefactor. Littlefield—himself a popular suspect before and after the body had been found—claimed he noted strange behavior by Webster over the course of the week after Parkman's disappearance, and on Thanksgiving began to dig a tunnel into Webster's laboratory. On November 30, he found a dismembered body in the vault under Webster's privy, later identified as George Parkman. The body's identity was disputed by several who claimed to have seen Parkman or heard from him after the disappearance, including his friend Oliver Wendell Holmes (beneficiary of an endowed chair by Parkman) who had previously examined the discovered remains and gave a eulogy at Parkman's funeral. Even the identification of Parkman's dentures was disputed.²⁸ Nevertheless, those closest to Parkman identified the body as his, and it was eventually accepted as official.²⁹

²⁸ A further reason *Billy Budd* and this case's connection to it provide an excellent first study for crime narrative adaptation is the trial's historical import to crime narratives in general: it was the first to use dental identification, and one of the first ever to use forensics evidence.

²⁹ The dispute over the body was more than gossip and hearsay. In fact, even if the body were certainly Parkman's, homicide had not been definitely ruled. Since the discovered corpse was missing "the head, the arms, the hands, the feet, and the right leg from the knee to the ankle" (Bemis 15), the prosecution had a two-step case they had to make: the first "that Dr. George Parkman...has been murdered" (11), after which they could establish the second part,

Webster was quickly arrested—although he was not told why; he thought he was being brought in as a witness—and upon notification of the cause of his arrest through Littlefield’s actions, purportedly exclaimed, “That villain! I am a ruined man!” (Bemis 370). The watchman and turnkey John M. Cummings testified that later the imprisoned Webster unconsciously cried out, “I expected this” (192). He declared that he had been framed by Littlefield and, while in prison awaiting trial, put strychnine in his own mouth in a failed attempt to end his life.

The trial established, indisputably, that Webster owed Parkman a substantial amount of money and had for several years. The discovery of the body was fairly damning evidence, although Webster’s defense doubted whether the body was even Parkman’s and further argued that Parkman was seen after his visit with Webster. Anyway, Littlefield provided the most accusatory testimony, effectively claiming (through circumstantial evidence) that Webster planned the murder for several days (asking for a dissection light from Littlefield and locking all his laboratory doors) and tried to buy Littlefield’s silence (with a Thanksgiving turkey, though Webster had never given any gift before). Many criticized Webster’s lawyers—as he himself did in his self-made closing remarks—for failing to provide the best defense they could, specifically concerning cross-examination of Littlefield (Bemis 449–50). Apparently, in private letters just before his execution, Webster made a counter-statement to his court-room accusations, asserting that his defense lawyers, Merrick and Sohier, had omitted nothing and in fact “took the deepest interest, and were indefatigable in my behalf” (Bemis 612). Statements like these, part of the post-sentencing about-face that Webster made, added tremendously to the ambiguity of an

which was “that he was murdered by John W. Webster” (11). The coroner’s inquest took around eight full days; and while the findings were sworn to be true, the jury still needed to be convinced of the fact that Parkman was murdered. In closing, the defense still questioned these suppositions. In fact, the bulk of their defense rested on several witnesses who knew Parkman and swore he was still alive after 1:45 p.m. (Chase 198–99).

already complicated case. Beyond any of this ambiguity, though, the impartiality of the court was suspect.

On the last day of the trial (after a five-hour closing statement by the prosecution and a brief statement by Webster), the presiding judge—Herman Melville’s father-in-law Lemuel Shaw, Chief Justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Court—gave a three-hour charge that was instantly one of the most influential single legal statements in American history, and for a number of reasons. The circumstances surrounding the case were so ambiguous that few real certainties existed. Both sides centered their arguments on the concept of circumstantial evidence and reasonable doubt. No one could definitely prove that the body found was Parkman’s, that he was even murdered, that Webster was the last to see him, that *if* the body was Parkman’s he had been murdered or only dismembered, that Webster was the only one with access to his laboratory rooms. Shaw was compelled to elaborate on legal definitions of both evidence and doubt:

The distinction...between direct and circumstantial evidence, is this. Direct or positive evidence is when a witness can be called to testify to the precise fact which is the subject of the issue in trial.... But suppose no person was present on the occasion of the death...is it wholly unsusceptible of legal proof? Experience has shown that circumstantial evidence may be offered in such a case; that is, that *a body of facts may be proved of so conclusive a character, as to warrant a firm belief of the fact*, quite as strong and certain as that on which discreet men are accustomed to act in relation to their most important concerns....

The necessity...of resorting to circumstantial evidence, if it be safe and reliable proceeding, is obvious and absolute. Crimes are secret.... It is therefore necessary to use all other modes of evidence besides that of direct testimony, provided such proofs may be relied on as leading to safe and satisfactory conclusions....

What is reasonable doubt? It is a term often used, probably pretty well understood, but not easily defined. It is not mere possible doubt; because everything relating to human affairs and depending on moral evidence is open to some possible or imaginary doubt....*the evidence must establish the truth of the fact to a reasonable and moral certainty.* (Bemis 462, 470, emphasis mine)

Shaw’s full statement on reasonable doubt now essentially defines the American legal system’s understanding of it, and to such a degree that it has since come to be used verbatim. As the

Handbook of Massachusetts Evidence warns, “Where the *Webster* charge is given, there can be no error” (Brodin and Avery 77n25). It is little wonder that the legal discourse of “firm belief” and “moral certainty” resurfaces in *Billy Budd* as a noticeable perturbation to the text, as I will examine later.

While Shaw defined circumstantial evidence and reasonable doubt through these phrases for the benefit of that specific case, he also felt the need to draw clear distinctions between murder and manslaughter, “not because there is much evidence in the present case which calls for their application, but that the jury may have a clear and distinct view of the leading principles in the law of homicide” (460). The chief distinction between the two “it will be at once perceived...is malice, express or implied. It therefore becomes necessary in every case of homicide proved...to ascertain with some precision the nature of legal malice...” (457). After distinguishing between murder and manslaughter, and acknowledging its possible irrelevance to the case, Shaw affirmed, “There is some evidence tending to show the previous existence of angry feelings; but unless these feelings resulted in angry words, and words were followed by blows, there would be no proof of heat of blood in mutual combat...” (460). The notion of the role of intention would return as a central concern *after* Webster had been convicted, and appears as a preoccupation of the drumhead court in *Billy Budd*. This discursive noise, hailing from Melville’s past and the nation’s short history, arises in the text discreetly, only apparent as information in light of the broad context of the narrative’s production.

Despite the charge’s prominence, its influence should not be overestimated to be only positive. The further lasting significance of Shaw’s charge is the controversy it caused at the time. The criticism must have been somewhat compelling since Shaw revised his in-court statement for the 1850 publication of the official transcript of the trial, and revised it three more

times by 1852 (Cook 20). Nevertheless, his statements before and after revision never lost their essential controversy: Shaw restated and interpreted data for the jury and, furthermore, emphasized how they could find Webster guilty based on circumstantial evidence and despite doubt, and in the absence of any extenuating situation of passion. He was thereafter often accused of influencing the jury against Webster, much as Vere has been accused of influencing his officers against Billy. Hence, opinions were divided sharply over Webster's conviction.

Alexander Oakley Hall—Mayor of New York City in the late 1860s and early 1870s, and himself the subject of much scandal—wrote in exasperation in his 1850 *Review of the Webster Case*, “What shall we say of the charge by Chief Justice Shaw? Is not the legal or the merely historical reader carried back by its perusal to the times when judges overawed counsel and jury, and dictated verdicts? What is the amount of this charge but a direction to the jury to bring in a verdict of guilty in accordance with popular feeling and my own prejudice?” (21).³⁰ The jury, Hall maintains, retired and brought back a guilty verdict with no discussion of doubt or Webster's alibi because

they knew the feelings abroad when entering the box. They saw the timidity of the prisoner's counsel.... They were told by the Judge, in almost so many words, that the prisoner was guilty. And they became weeping automatons in vindicating the reputation of Massachusetts law and order, as their ancestors had done in former days, by burning witches and Quakers. (23)

Hall finishes his pamphlet suggestively with “a case very like Professor Webster's...where...the circumstances were strong against him, and yet, as afterward appeared, *the murderer was*

³⁰ “Elegant Oakley” (as he was known) is of some coincidental background importance to this entire work since he was Mayor of New York City around the time of Marc Blitzstein's setting of the American version of *The Threepenny Opera*. He also legally defended anarchist Emma Goldman's speeches in 1894 New York against charges of inciting to riot; in his closing remarks during Goldman's trial, Hall argued that “the moneyed classes of America were seeing red since Governor Altgeld had pardoned the three surviving anarchists of the group hanged in Chicago in 1887” (Goldman 130). Although convicted, Goldman was grateful of his help, and applauded his “eloquent plea for the right of free expression” (130). Of his storied time as mayor, she defended him, maintaining he was “too humane and democratic for the politicians” (128). In a further coincidence, while in New Orleans in his youth, Hall apprenticed in the law firm of Slidell Mackenzie's older brothers, Thomas and John Slidell.

foreman of the jury” (24). In that trial, the account of which takes up the last four-and-a-half pages of the pamphlet, the judge directly ordered the jury to find the defendant guilty; when they did not, he refused the verdict and sent them back twice until they returned a guilty verdict.

Strong parallels between the Parkman affair and *Billy Budd* already emerge. The ambiguity permeating both cases is impossible to ignore, as is the strange predicament in which a learned man effectively orders (“overrulingly instructs”) his jury to bring back a guilty verdict that will ensure death. These similarities paired with Melville’s close association with Shaw and his known interactions with Oliver Wendell Holmes further substantiate this claim biographically, as do the last events of the Parkman–Webster affair. A month after he was imprisoned, Webster protested his innocence to the governor, George N. Briggs. Yet another month later, Webster’s Unitarian minister withdrew Webster’s declaration of innocence and apparently delivered his confession to Briggs. Less than a month from then, Briggs refused to commute Webster’s sentence, and his execution date was set (Cook 19).³¹

Webster’s apparent confession is odd enough, but the particulars of this confession seem to solidify a certain connection between *Billy Budd* and Webster, as a number of scholars have argued. Webster claimed that Parkman had been “very importunate for his pay” and “had threatened me with a suit, to put an officer into my house, and to drive me from my professorship, if I did not pay him” (Bemis 565). When they met, Webster said that Parkman was agitated, and would not let him speak.

He would not listen to me, but interrupted me with much vehemence. He called me “scoundrel” and “liar,” and went on heaping upon me the most bitter taunts and opprobrious epithets.... I cannot tell how long the torrent of threats and invectives continued.... But I could not stop him, and soon my own temper was up. I forgot everything. I felt nothing but the sting of his words. I was excited to the highest degree of passion; and while he was speaking and gesticulating in the most violent and menacing manner...in my fury I seized whatever thing was handiest,—and dealt him an

³¹ Even Briggs’s decision to permit Webster’s execution is fraught with controversy.

instantaneous blow with all the force that passion could give it. I did not know, nor think, nor care where I should hit him, nor how hard, nor what the effect would be. It was on the side of the head... He fell instantly upon the pavement. There was no second blow. He did not move....I found that he was absolutely dead (565–66)

As Margaret Seligman Cook confirms, “This part of the Webster confession resonates in Melville’s description of the confrontation between Claggart and Billy” (20). Further, “the parallel between the antagonists turned victims is reflected by a parallel between the victims turned murderers. Both murders, committed spontaneously, are attributed to self-confessed flaws in the murderers” (20). In the official trial publication, further (supposed) confessions were presented, which aided in allaying suspicion about the trial.

Indeed, the arrangement and organization of the report compiled by prosecutor George Bemis—with its careful revision of Shaw’s statements; its inclusion of the coroner’s inquest proving the identity of the body; the attached, self-professed letter-from-a-juror attesting to the careful consideration given to the trial; that juror’s demonstration that he and the other jurors were not unduly influenced by Shaw; the several corroborating documents to Webster’s confession—seem designed to minimize doubt and uncertainty concerning the court’s actions throughout the trial. The most conspicuous augmentations to the case added by Bemis were the corroborating documents, which Webster—having died—unfortunately could not authenticate. These documents bear out the Melville connection even more.

Taken together, Webster’s trial for the murder of Parkman, in concert with Webster’s strange actions once in prison (possibly part of a larger effort to have his sentence commuted to life imprisonment), fully sustain arguments made by critics about the relation of the Parkman–Webster affair to *Billy Budd*. To recall Rogin’s phrasing, the interior details are even more striking than the external parallels.

The Haymarket affair

It is no coincidence that each section title in this contextual endeavor has avoided naming the particular crime often associated with it: for the *Somers*, I avoided “mutiny”; for Parkman and Webster, “murder”; for Haymarket, “massacre” and “bombing.” In each of these culturally significant events, *what happened* has never been indisputably settled. I argue the same for *Billy Budd*, and further suggest that these events inspired and informed much of Melville’s last work. Melville’s interest in the *Somers* and the Webster trial has been pretty well demonstrated given his personal connections to Ganesvoort and Shaw, in addition to their inescapable importance to the history of the United States *qua* government. The Haymarket affair, however, has no direct personal connections to Melville; in fact, the whole series of events occurred in Chicago, far from Melville’s New York home. Yet the events of the first four days of May in 1886—the May 1 and 3 eight-hour strikes, the May 4 demonstration against police violence in the latter strike, and the May 4 bomb and subsequent fighting—not only took national attention, but had a lasting effect on labor movements in general. No one was unaware of it.

At the same time, Melville no more could have been unaware of the Haymarket tragedy than he could have been unaware of *any* of the labor unrest that had been an increasing concern from the end of the Civil War through the decades following. In fact, the festering, growing division between labor and capital from 1865 on was itself the fundamental instigation of the whole affair. As Carl Smith points out, “Even the fact that the perpetrator remains unknown to this day is fitting, since this cataclysmic event seems a creation of its times rather than the act of a single isolated individual, or, as the authorities charged and the jury agreed, the handiwork of a conspiracy. Put another way, what happened in the Haymarket makes a certain dramatic sense, given the time and place in which it occurred” (“Whither America?”). Labor organization had

appeared so forcefully in America that Karl Marx noted with pride in his first volume of *Capital*, “The first fruit of the Civil War was the eight hours’ agitation, that ran with the seven-leagued boots of the locomotive train from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from New England to California” (329). But the rise of the labor movement was, of course, not without its growing pains. The explosion at the Haymarket was the great snapping point of decades of growing tension between labor and capital. All of America had noticed the growing unrest in Europe (especially in France), and moreover *felt* that unrest with the waves of immigrants who filled the shores and brought with them the tenets of socialism and anarchism. Invigorated thus with growing numbers of the already-discontented, labor groups in the United States often directly echoed the European socialist unrest. American newspapers at the time often directly referenced the French Revolution, the Paris Commune, and other figures and events in relation to their own concerns.

The labor reform movement that swept the country in the last decades of Melville’s life moved with increasing momentum from its first roots. By 1867, angered workers had garnered enough support and clout to have a Chicago law passed that would give “eight hours for work, eight hours for rest, and eight hours for what you will.” The law, the first of its kind in the United States, was to go into effect on May 1, but employers refused to honor the law; local and state government cowered from enforcing it (Green 32). The betrayal of the law would embitter labor leaders in Chicago for years.

The capitalists’ fears of labor organization, and the laborers’ similar hatred of the capitalists, were further provoked by the events of the 1871 Paris Commune at the close of the Franco–Prussian War (Green 40–41). Workers were inspired by the Commune, employers horrified. The *Chicago Tribune* openly urged the slaughter of the Communards (Green 40). Later that year, the Great Chicago Fire devastated the city, killing hundreds and hampering the

economic growth city capitalists had been enjoying (42). The town's business owners panicked at the thought of rioting and looting in the wake of the fire, and many colorful—and almost entirely false—reports circulated in the papers about mob rule, often going so far as to blame dangerous immigrant workers for willfully starting the blaze (42–43). Fresh with thoughts of the Commune and the so-called *pétroleuses*—female Communards accused of gleefully burning Paris to the ground during the last days of the Commune—rumors of panic, riot, and “inhuman incendiaries” spread all over Chicago and the rest of the country.³² Headlines in the October 11 issue of the *Herald* in Melville's home city luridly read, “Inhuman Incendiaries Caught. The Men-Wolves Hanged to Lampposts or Shot.... Fears of Pillage---1,500 Special Police and 500 Troops on Guard.” Many of those “special police” were Pinkertons, led by the Scottish immigrant Allan Pinkerton, hired by several business leaders to protect their interests and instructed to shoot looters on sight (43). Pinkerton and his agents had become famous for their protection of Lincoln and their spy work during the Civil War, but in the postbellum period they would become stalwarts of capital against increasing labor unrest. These actions fostered unease with the immigrant working class all over America, unease that would be resurrected several times.

The fire and its repercussions further poisoned labor–capital relations, particularly through local politics (Green 52). Moreover, the capitalists' betrayal of the 1867 law, their fear of socialist mob rule, and their violent and sometimes deadly use of a private police force also contributed to dividing labor and capital and served to stoke continuously their already enflamed relations. Anyway, capitalists might have been able to effectively silence labor concerns for some time, if not for inescapable economic crises. The Franco–Prussian War not only prompted

³² The fabricated Chicago-Fire origin story of Mrs. O'Leary's cow kicking over a kerosene lamp has echoes of the *pétroleuses*.

the short-lived Commune, but triggered a worldwide depression when the newly formed German Empire ceased minting silver *thalers*, a coin Europe had used for centuries. This apparently innocuous act solidified the “gold standard” for the world and created a catastrophe in silver mining, which especially affected the United States. This monetary change in conjunction with a number of other economic factors, such as the tie-up of capital in the postbellum railroad boom, resulted in the Panic of 1873, which cast an economic shadow over the rest of the decade.

Strains between employers and employees intensified even more. The Panic of 1873 caused international economic depression (the so-called Long Depression), and in America the brunt of it was passed on to the workers through firings and wage cuts (Green 50–51). Labor discontent obviously remained high during the depression, and by 1877 a strike of Baltimore & Ohio (B&O) Railroad engineers in Martinsburg, West Virginia easily grew into what would be called the Great Railroad Strike of 1877—the first nationwide strike. The strike grew so quickly mostly due to damaging wage cuts, but also in reaction to the increasingly violent and deadly force used to put each strike down (74–75). Phrasings around the words “reign” and “terror” were used in newspapers around the country, strongly evoking images of the French Revolution (cf. Green 78). Employers were scared, but most of the deaths in the striking cities were perpetrated by militia and state and federal troops who often fired on unarmed workers and bystanders. Police had even taken to attacking private, peaceable meetings; in one such instance, a man was shot in the back of the head (124). Such was the culture of “wise Draco” come to make “the Town redeemed.”

Recessions continued to hit the American economy, and as usual, labor was hit hard. By this time, the events of 1867, 1871, 1877, and the recurring economic downturns and intense police brutality had turned many socialists to more radical means, many embracing the terrorist

“propaganda of the deed” suggestions by leaders like Johann Most. In March 1886, streetcar strikes and their consequential confrontations with the police unsettled Melville’s Manhattan, his house in the very thick of the unrest. Given the climate of the past years, the agitation that continued even after an agreement was made between the strikers and the streetcar company was unsurprising (Reynolds 24). Into this climate, the events of the Haymarket unfolded.

The Haymarket affair entailed more than just an ambiguous night of violence on May 4, of course, but enveloped a national May 1 strike, the follow-up strike on May 3 that turned bloody and that eventually contributed to the clash between workers and police on May 4 when a bomb was thrown at gathering policemen. And even then the affair continued, comprising several manhunts and a year-and-a-half of trial drama. And once the petitions, commutations, suicide, executions, and even pardons were concluded, the nation and world would still continue to debate the event and its aftermath.

At present, many of the public events leading up to the actual bombing are agreed upon. On May 1, workers across vocations made a massive strike for an eight-hour workday (Green 161). That day (a Saturday), and the day following, passed in peace. On Monday, May 3, while many employers capitulated to the strikers’ demands, a number of Chicago’s powerful revisited tactics that won the day on May 1, 1867 when the first eight-hour law was passed in the city: the city’s police forces, along with a number of deputized “specials” were amassed to protect the capitalists’ interests (167–8). Blood was inevitably shed at McCormick’s Reaper Works, a factory in long and bitter dispute with striking laborers, while the émigré August Spies was speaking to striking workers. Around 3 p.m., when the strike-breaking workers were ending their workday, a skirmish broke out between those so-called “scabs” and the strikers despite Spies’

best efforts to call for peace. Almost immediately, the police began attacking the strikers with clubs and guns (170). Four workers died, and many more were injured.

Precisely what was planned *by whom* for the following day is debatable. The police force near the Haymarket were led by Captain William Ward and by Chief Inspector John Bonfield, both of whom were ready for heavy confrontation with 176 patrolmen. Bonfield was a ruthless man who believed unarmed protestors should be clubbed into submission (Green 123), and it was he who retained overall command of the officers and informed them that they were “arming for war” (180–81). The protestors lacked direct leadership, which led to confusion and scapegoating later. But bombs were certainly made beforehand and some discussion was had about retaliating against police violence. Only two of the eventual accused (George Engel and Adolf Fischer) are known to even have been present at one of these meetings, though, and only one of the accused (Louis Lingg) was ever ascertained to have made any bombs at all. And he was not present at the Haymarket on May 4. Of the seven people sentenced to die for the death of Officer Mathias Degan, not one actually threw the bomb.³³

After a day of speeches and general protest, August Spies (the speaker at McCormick’s the night before), Albert Parsons, and Samuel Fielden were still speaking in the 9 o’clock hour while Mayor Carter Harrison listened, ready to disperse the crowd peacefully should an incident break out as had the night before (“Testimony of Carter H. Harrison” 27–28). He informed Inspector Bonfield that the speakers were “tame” and “communicated to him the fact that he did not think there would be any trouble; that the meeting was a quiet and orderly meeting as such meetings went; and that he [Harrison] was about to go home and also directed that the police patrolmen which had been held under his direction at the other stations should be directed to go

³³ The prosecution admitted this, particularly through a witness who accused Rudolph Schnaubelt of throwing the bomb (cf. “Testimony of Harry L. Gilmer” 438). Schnaubelt was initially arrested but never charged. He later fled Illinois.

home” (44). He went home at 10 p.m., apparently satisfied that the day would conclude with no violence.³⁴ Nevertheless, one of Bonfield’s detectives decided the remarks were inflammatory and he reported to Bonfield. Ward and Bonfield and scores of officers marched toward the crowd, and Ward ordered them to “peaceably disperse.” Fielden responded that they were peaceable. Ward repeated his order, and Fielden stepped down. At that moment, a dynamite bomb was thrown into the ranks of policemen. Reports then begin to diverge, even as to the number of dead and wounded. Over the next weeks, numerous arrests were made (leading to thirty-one indictments for murder of which eight were brought to trial) in what is considered the first “red scare” in American history (Smith, “Toils of the Law”).

The trial was an international sensation, and a turning point for a number of historical developments. Although the preceding events may seem too enveloping for one particular act of violence, the Haymarket affair was truly a product decades in the making. The defendants, particularly Spies and Parsons, had been gradually moved toward more radical thoughts and words due to the legislative betrayals and failures and police violence of the previous twenty years. The major capitalists of Chicago (e.g. Marshall Field, George Pullman, and Cyrus McCormick, Jr.), “who had been on special lookout for troublemakers since at least 1877 and who were well aware of their own central roles as villains in radical rhetoric,” backed the investigation and police force financially (Smith, “Toils of the Law”). Popular opinion was likewise strongly antagonistic of the accused; a presumption of guilt reigned. As Carl Smith observes, “That the police conducted their arrests and searches without warrants seemed of no particular concern to anyone but the accused” (“Toils of the Law”). The newspapers fanned this

³⁴ The defense intended to show that the Mayor himself had asked the police officers to disperse, satisfied that the speakers were not inciting violence. As absolutely pertinent as this was to the trial, the prosecution objected to the argument and Judge Joseph Gary barred any discussion of the interview between Harrison and Bonfield. In fact, the prosecution built their argument on the establishment that the defendants incited the bomb-thrower to violence against the police with their speech.

fervor, no doubt in solidarity with Pullman, McCormick et al., and supported the police and capitalists' view. The bias was so blatant and damning that Karl Marx's son-in-law, Edward Aveling, lamented, "If these men are ultimately hanged, it will be the *Chicago Tribune* that has done it" (qtd. in "Toils of the Law").

Meanwhile, Melville would learn about the affair like most Americans—through the newspapers; and the newspapers, as Aveling suggested, were not kind.³⁵ Nevertheless, even those most rabidly hostile to the anarchists acknowledged that the trial was mostly a sham. Larry J. Reynolds suggests that "the majority view was expressed by the owner of a Chicago clothing firm who declared, 'No, I don't consider these people to have been found guilty of any offense, *but they must be hanged...the labor movement must be crushed!*'"(25). From the beginning of the trial on, the prosecution, judge, and jurors at various times admitted that they presumed the defendants' guilt, even though none had actually thrown the bomb (Smith, "Toils of the Law"). Judge Gary repeatedly barred evidence and testimony specifically capable of demonstrating innocence and contravening guilt.

In all, as Robert K. Wallace argued in the March 1975 *American Literature*, "Not only do the plot and theme of the final version of the novel parallel the actual Haymarket case, the successive stages of Melville's story...parallel successive developments in the Haymarket affair" (110). Most pertinently, "the third and final version of the story—begun a year after the Haymarket hangings—shifts the focus from Billy and Claggart to Vere just as national concern over the Haymarket affair shifted from the individual anarchists and the Chicago police to the way the legal system had dealt with the case" (110). Wallace suggests particularly that Melville had Governor Oglesby's relationship to the whole trial in mind, but more drastic parallels persist

³⁵ Melville had a subscription to *The New York Herald* and certainly could not have missed the reports of the events at the Haymarket (Sealts 25).

between Vere's charge to the drumhead court and the back-to-back remarks made by prosecutor Julius Grinnell and Judge Gary to the jury at the trial's close. Once more, slight fluctuations in the contextual discursive noise elicit considerable interpretive insights into the macroscopic text.

As the trial concluded, Grinnell and Gary made statements that rivaled Shaw's *Webster* charge and once again reflect Vere's prescription for guilt. Indeed, Grinnell's particular statement provides an important source for Vere's own concluding remarks insofar as it makes a similar rhetorical tack. An attorney for the defense, William P. Black, swore an affidavit declaring improprieties in Grinnell's closing remarks, even going so far as to reproduce at length some offending passages for posterity's sake. His plan worked, to some degree, since Grinnell's closing statement cannot be found easily except in quotation, most elaborately in Black's affidavit.

Grinnell's concluding argument warned the jury not "to shirk the issues. Law is on trial. Anarchy is on trial; the defendants are on trial for treason and murder" ("Affidavit" 109). Black took exception, rightfully, to Grinnell's declaration that they were on trial for treason—they assuredly were not. Moreover, Grinnell elevated a particular crime and its ensuing trial to the level of a defense of law in general, and he implicated the jurors as victims of a plot against their way of life, suggesting that "in this country above all countries in the world is Anarchy possible. As I said there is one step from Republicanism to Anarchism. Let us never take that step. Gentlemen, the great responsibility that is devolved upon you in this case is greater than any jury in the history of the world ever undertook. This is no slight or mean duty that you are called upon to perform. You are to say whether that step shall be taken" (102). The notion that somehow the republics of the modern age might be slipping into anarchy was widespread. Matthew Arnold writes of England in *Culture and Anarchy*, which Melville was reading heavily during the trial

and while he was writing *Billy Budd*, that “we are in danger of drifting towards anarchy. We have not the notion...of *the State*—the nation in its collective and corporate character, entrusted with stringent powers for the general advantage, and controlling individual wills in the name of an interest wider than that of individuals” (50–51).

Gary’s charge to the jury carried much of the same partiality of which Shaw was accused. In fact, Gary’s charge was far worse. In a trial of such ambiguity of evidence, the prosecution further muddied the legal waters by continually implying that the defendants were on trial for their political views (particularly in its suggestion of treason). While the defense continually objected to these implications, it had no chance to respond to the judge’s charge to the jury, in which,

The court further...[instructed] the jury as a matter of law, that if they believe from the evidence in this case beyond a reasonable doubt that the defendants or any of them conspired and agreed together or with others, *to overthrow the law by force...that in pursuance of such conspiracy* and in furtherance of the common object *a bomb was thrown* by a member of such conspiracy at the time and that Matthias J.Degan was killed *then such of the defendants*, that the jury believe from the evidence beyond a reasonable doubt, *to have been parties to such conspiracy, are guilty of murder whether present at the killing or not* and whether the identity of the person throwing the bomb be established or not. (“Court’s Instructions” 3, emphasis mine)

But none of the defendants were charged with conspiracy. Judge Gary nonetheless instructs the jury that they can be found guilty of murder if they are guilty in the slightest of a possible conspiracy to revolution, even if “the time and place for the bringing about of such revolution or the destruction of such authorities had not been definitely agreed upon by the conspirators, but was left by them to the exigencies of time, or to the judgment of any of the conspirators” (4). In his broad definition of guilt, it would have been shocking if they had been found not guilty.

So how did Melville view these years of labor–capital tension, culminating in the Haymarket affair? In his analysis of the effects of the labor unrest and Haymarket affair on *Billy*

Budd, Larry J. Reynolds suggests that Melville's apparent conservatism in his poetic works like *Clarel* and *Battle-Pieces*, as well as the nation's press's well-known equation of the strikers with the worst elements of French revolutionary activity, indicates how the reader of *Billy Budd* should understand the work: a plea for law and order in trying times (32–36). Reynolds points to a number of allusions to the revolutions of 1789, 1848, and 1871 in works like *Mardi*, *Moby-Dick*, "Benito Cereno," and *Clarel* (36–37). All of this, Reynolds argues, points to Melville's "Vere-like sense of duty that sustained him" in his later years (38). Reynolds, in fact, goes on to essentially equate Melville and Vere, arguing that Melville meant him as a mouthpiece for his own views. Of course, even while most of wealthy America supported the efforts of the police, national troops, and the Pinkertons in suppressing labor agitation, it recognized the tendency for abuse of power from such figures. Melville, a former mutineer who had railed against harsh naval practices in his polemical novel *White-Jacket*, would have been sympathetic to complaints against such power. Reynolds suggests Claggart represents this side of law and order, his mysterious, possibly immigrant, past an indication of why his method of rule is so disordered (42). In short, according to Reynolds, "In Melville's eyes, Vere...demonstrates a right response to popular violence, when the times are revolutionary" (43).

This reading of *Billy Budd* is incomplete, and at times even foolishly gullible. Some 110 years after it was written, Reynolds argues for a completely straightforward reading of the last work of an immensely complicated author. His argument willfully chooses to simplify the text unnecessarily. In comparing the *Bellipotent* events to those at the Haymarket, Reynolds rightly notes that "like the Haymarket defendants, Billy is an innocent man hung to preserve order during a time of revolutionary strife. Whether like them he is also the victim of a biased judge and unfair trial, however, remains an open question" (27). But Reynolds fails to discuss whether

it would even be *right* of Gary or Vere to “preserve order” by scapegoating. He focuses instead on the question of Vere’s bias and the critical debate over his actions, leading himself and the reader to a false bifurcation.

On the one hand, one can argue that Vere prejudges the case against Billy, uses irregular proceedings to convict him, and then executes him in a gross miscarriage of justice. On the other, one can argue that Vere, though filled with compassion for Billy, acts with a heroic presence of mind during a crisis, preserving the social order by an act of stern yet necessary justice. (28)

For Reynolds, you *must* make your choice between two options: Vere is either unjust or heroic. It appears history requires a similar choice of the Haymarket accused and accusers. In both cases, the truth “uncompromisingly told will...have its ragged edges” (Melville, *Billy Budd* 128).

Despite Melville directly mentioning only the *Somers* affair, and that very briefly, in *Billy Budd*, the discursive noise from the *Somers*, the Webster case, and the Haymarket affair in the personal and national context of the work’s production reveals staggering correlations to the text. While these events are usually considered “extraneous information” in *Billy Budd* criticism, they actually reveal intersections of discursive systems that increase the narrative’s complexity and impart new information into its unfolding meaning. By adapting certain salient features of these events into *Billy Budd*, Melville exemplifies how adaptation operates anarchistically (in the way these events are brought in focus together, implicitly criticizing the ideologies they reinforce together) as well as according to complexity (in the way small fluctuations in the discursive noise of the text’s production effect large-scale interpretive strategies).

Literary context

Loyalty's quite the worst thing
To bring as a gift for our king.

James Thomson, "L' Ancien Régime; or, The Good Old Rule"

Finally, I turn to the literary context in which Melville wrote *Billy Budd*. This issue might be laughably broad given Melville's well-known predilection for reading and his catholic tastes therein. As I mentioned earlier, identification of literary allusions becomes simultaneously easier and harder with Melville. Evidence of classical canonical literature (e.g. Shakespeare, Milton, the Bible) can be found on almost any page in any of his books. The *significance* of that allusion, then, turns out to be much more difficult to prove in the traditional sense. The increase in information means an increase in entropy. In keeping with my conception of the narrative as an entanglement of discourse, though, I will sift through Melville's baseline literary influence and discern those ruptures that propagate and defamiliarize the narrative.

But reviewing Melville's entire known catalog of books in search of possible sources for references is a thankless, and ultimately disorienting, task. Like many people, Melville constantly re-read books he had received even as far back as childhood. Thus, looking over a list of books he obtained in the 1880s might be helpful, but not conclusively so. For instance, he borrowed a number of books from libraries for his daughter and wife, so inferences might have to be drawn concerning Melville's desire to read the novels of Sir Walter Scott or Amelia Edith Huddleston Barr.³⁶ Nonetheless, judiciously (but not *prejudiciously*) comparing that list with

³⁶ Between 5 Nov. 1890 and 5 Jun. 1891, Melville borrowed from the New York Society Library nine Barr novels (Sealts numbers 39–47), historical romances (like Scott's) known for their sentimentality and inevitable happy endings. While I am not disregarding popular novels from Melville's interests, Barr's novels do fit more with the

previous influences in the context of *Billy Budd* itself will ensure a firm sense of Melville's literary context in writing his last novel.

Of course, Melville makes a great number of allusions to history and literature in *Billy Budd*, most notably from three sources: the Bible, Roman mythology and literature, and Greek mythology and literature. Obviously, this is relatively unhelpful in itself given the number of references to all three throughout all of literature, particularly in the nineteenth century. The general Biblical allusions in the narrative have also been discussed extensively in past critical discourse, and I will refer to them in passing as necessary. Melville referenced Christian scripture in all of his works, and to such a degree that the subject has been the focus of many critical works on Melville. But in the text, Melville only quotes directly at any length from only two authors: the Roman poet Marcus Valerius Martialis (Martial) and the English poet Andrew Marvell. Does this coincidence offer any insight into Melville's literary habits and their possible bearing on the import of *Billy Budd*?

In fact, it does quite a lot. And once again according to complexity theory for dynamic systems like narratives, here are small discursive intrusions (seemingly mild literary allusions) that possess considerable sway over a novel's possible meanings, and possess it by virtue of the fact that they are such miniscule perturbations in the text. Importantly, the quotes are made during character descriptions of Billy and Vere. Furthermore, the works of both Marital and Marvell are often concerned with the relation of the city to pastoral nature and the corruption of the latter in the former: a subtle theme in *Billy Budd*. Marvell's poetry on nature—be it in the contemplative tradition, the country-house tradition, or the more traditional pastoral—ultimately centers on man's appropriate relation to it. The preeminent concern in that relation (for Marvell)

fiction his wife and daughter are known to have read. Still, Melville did read books *with* both of them, and these well could have been some of them (Sealts, "Records" 24–25).

is the meaning of the Fall, a concern Melville also consistently held throughout his life and work. Marvell's poetry teases out a number of philosophical responses to the problem of the Fall: if man's manipulation of nature caused the Fall, getting back to the more natural world would be a way to salvation; however, if man's intellect is a gift by God, perhaps it is the natural world (and even man's own natural flesh) that tempts the soul, and the intellect can lead mankind back to general innocence and goodness. The quandary is actually pivotal to *Billy Budd*, but Melville is interrogating the role of law as instrument of intellect in governing mankind's movement "back" to innocence. He thus further implicates the modern, Rousseau impulse in government in the conflict over the nature of goodness and depravity.

In terms of politics as well as poetic theme, J. B. Leishman sums Marvell up well, calling him "singularly uncommitted" (195). Like Martial, whom I will expand on shortly, Marvell was embroiled in the tumultuous politics of his day, and his quoted lines in *Billy Budd* come from "Upon Appleton House," a poem dedicated to an ambiguous figure of the English Civil War, Sir Thomas Fairfax. Fairfax served as a parliamentarian general, a member of the Council of State with Oliver Cromwell, and was called as a judge in the Rump Parliament trial of Charles I.³⁷ Fairfax refused to attend the trial or order Charles I's execution, an act that earned him a royal pardon under Charles II, against whom Fairfax refused to fight in the Third Civil War and whose restoration he supported. Since Vere is a descendent of the Fairfax family, Melville supplies him with a dubious lineage in terms of loyalties.

Melville's particular framing of the quote leaves off the ending lines, which indicate that under Fairfax's severe discipline, "not one object can come nigh / But pure, and spotless as the eye" (lines 725–26), lines that suggest Fairfax's view of English rule and his role in the English

³⁷ In fact, it was Fairfax's retirement and absence from the Third Civil War that led to Cromwell's leadership of Fairfax's army, and subsequently his position as Lord Protector.

Civil War. In the lines following, Marvell ruminates about Fairfax's daughter carrying on his high-Platonic loyalty to perfect goodness, carrying forth eventual male lineage in anticipation of the child that will come when, "for some universal good, / The priest shall cut the sacred bud" (741–42). In this context, the cutting of a bud could be read as salvation *or* sacrificial progeny—is the child sacrificed or merely divided from the mother? In the case of Christ, it was both.

"Upon Appleton House" is widely considered one of Marvell's greatest achievements. Melville thus cites quotations from both Marvell and Martial's well-known works that also reflect Melville's interest in the conflict of nature and culture and the political situations in which that conflict was poetically expressed. For his part, Martial's satirical epigrams suited his time period, "which just preceded the decline of Roman literature," and during which, as Henry G. Bohn further describes (in his introduction to the translation from which Melville quoted),

The city of Rome appears, as we learn from Juvenal, and other contemporary writers, to have presented one universal scene of villainy. The despotism of the Emperors, the luxury of the patricians, the dissipation of the citizens, and the corruption of public men, had then arrived at a climax. Every feature of depravity started from the canvass. The laws of nature were everywhere violated, and *inequity itself acquired a kind of legal acknowledgement*. (vii, emphasis mine)

Quite likely Melville read this, and the italicized last clause echoes loudly Claggart's station on the ship. He is widely disliked, and subsequently considered quite suitable for his job as master-at-arms. Despite Martial's apparent social-mindedness, Bohn goes on to suggest to the reader that Martial was far from faultless. Over a period of years, Bohn argues that he unctuously flattered the apparently despotic Domitian Caesar ("His praises of the imperial monster were boundless and unqualified") who "rewarded the poet not only with wealth, but with the highest

honors...” (viii). After Domitian’s assassination and the senate’s refusal even of funereal honors, Martial completely reversed his praise (viii).³⁸

Melville’s Martial quote comes from the fifth epigram in Book IV of his epigrams; the first and third of that book are dedicated to Domitian.³⁹ The fifth epigram presents an address to Fabianus, presumably the contemporary Stoic philosopher and rhetorician. Under Vespasian, philosophers were banned from Rome, while they were banned from all of Italy under his son, Domitian. Martial satirically and ironically admonishes Fabianus for coming to the city, where he will be unable to “be a pander nor a parasite, nor...corrupt the wife of...[a] dear friend,” but only declare himself “a trustworthy person, a faithful friend” (Bk. IV, Ep. 5).⁴⁰ Martial concludes his prose introduction with a cutting irony regarding this last statement: “That is nothing at all: it would never make you a Philomelus” (Bk. IV, Ep. 5). In Roman mythology, Philomelus was one of two sons born to Ceres, the goddess of the harvest, and Iasion. The twin sons did not get along since Philomelus’s brother, Plutus, was far richer. Out of necessity to support himself, Philomelus invented the plow, and his mother called him Boötes and had him placed in the stars (Hyginus, II, 4).⁴¹

Martial’s satire in the fifth epigram ironically condemns Fabian’s pastoral simplicity, implying that his honest goodness will not be enough for the “industrious” city of buffoons, bawds, flatterers, cheats, false traitors of the innocent, and the gigolos of “rich beldams” (Bk. IV,

³⁸ Exactly how despotic and monstrous Domitian was remains debatable. His legacy is entirely fitting of this chapter since his rule was long described through biased, revisionist history by his enemies. For a counter-history to Domitian’s contemporaries (like Juvenal and Pliny the Younger), and for a complication of Martial’s relationship to Domitian, see Brian V. Jones’s *The Emperor Domitian* (Routledge, 1992). In any case, Melville would only have been familiar with the legacy of Domitian as a horrific tyrant, and would have viewed Martial in that light.

³⁹ In fact, the third epigram, “On the Snow which Fell on Domitian at the Games,” bears forth a strange parallel to Melville’s life, as well as *Billy Budd*. In the epigram and its explanation, Martial suggests that the snow (the kind which Domitian braved easily under “the constellation of Northern Boötes”) fell on Domitian as a sign from his dead son, a circumstance that would assuredly resonate with Melville—whose two sons both died tragically—but also the (probably?) sorrowful Vere.

⁴⁰ Book IV can be found from p. 177 to 219 in the edition cited in the bibliography.

⁴¹ The Boötes constellation is the same Martial mentions in the third epigram of Book IV.

Ep. 5). The invocation of Philomelus is intriguing since it likewise implicates the myth of Philomela, the abused and raped princess of Athens in Ovid's *Metamorphosis* who cannot be silenced and whom the gods subsequently transform into the nightingale—an aviary allusion with surprising import in this overall analysis, as I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter in my discussion of the epigraphs. Not only will Fabianus fail at the “work” of the corrupt city, Martial implies he will fail at telling the real story of the city and should remain in tragic, sacrificed innocence in the country.

In a strange emergence, then, *Billy Budd*'s only full, noticeable quotes come from poets who both apparently reflect pastoral contemplations on city culture, and yet reveal peculiar relationships with despotic figures of executive power who are victims of drastic revolutionary acts. Marvell remained a monarchist for quite some time before he met Milton (one of Melville's great inspirations), and had even thought of converting to Catholicism; yet later he tutored Fairfax and Cromwell's children. And Martial's servile devotion to Domitian is certainly suspect given his predilection for satirizing the city, particularly the panderers and parasites, of whom it seems he is one.

The decades following Melville's last published fiction in his lifetime aid in answering how important these particular poetic choices are. Melville's interest in Marvell and Martial's pastorally-influenced poetry is indicative of his general interest in poetic responses to sociopolitical and religious concerns. Following the 1857 publication of *The Confidence-Man*, Melville entered what many early critics called his “silence” (to borrow John Middleton Murray's phrasing), but in fact entailed his focus on writing poetry that was published to little notice, unfortunately. As Merton M. Sealts, Jr. and Hershel Parker detail, Melville's focused attention to poetry included reading as well as writing it. In his later years, Melville was much

taken with Scottish and English poetry (the reading of which “had been little short of obsessive”), especially James Thomson, Robert Burns, and FitzGerald’s *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* (Parker 26).⁴² Additionally, he continued reading philosophy (especially Schopenhauer) and other non-fiction essays (particularly Matthew Arnold), and even devoted much time to Balzac (Sealts 22–26).

Of these readings, I want to draw attention most specifically to FitzGerald/ Khayyám, Thomson, and Arnold.⁴³ Melville’s fondness for *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* is well documented. He owned three copies: an 1878 American edition; an 1886 edition with Elihu Vedder’s illustrations; and an unidentified edition sent by an English admirer named James Billson, who also sent a number of Thomson’s works with whom he was a friend (Finkelstein 102–03; Sealts, “Records” 24–25). Dorothy Metlitsky Finkelstein’s *Melville’s Orienada* provides one of the most complete discussions of the *Rubáiyát*’s influence on Melville. Finkelstein demonstrates that Melville’s preoccupation with the poems “was to last until the end of his life” (103), a fact thematically unsurprising since they so thoroughly focus on mortality and the failure of religion in its shadow: “Again and again Melville marked Omar’s death images in the poems: Man goes from sleep to sleep; life flies; spring vanishes like the rose; man goes through the door of darkness” (115). *Khayyám*’s influence on Melville is further illustrated by his dedication of his very last publication (*Timoleon*) to Vedder. In accord, Hershel Parker

⁴² Actually, Melville was reading at least two Scottish poets named James Thompson: one from the eighteenth century poet, the other from the Victorian period. In the 1880s, however, it was the latter that took most of his attention. In terms of FitzGerald, certainly *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* is actually Persian in origin (and Melville read a number of other Persian works, most notably Sa’di’s *Gulistan*), but FitzGerald’s own conspicuous contributions to the *Rubáiyát* were also well known.

⁴³ Schopenhauer and Balzac are certainly related to these other writers; Thomson and Arnold reference Balzac specifically and significantly, and Thomson’s poems and essays boil over with Schopenhauer’s influence. Both of their particular influences on Melville are outside the already wide scope of this chapter. I hope it suffices to note that Balzac’s narrative focus was nineteenth-century, post-Revolution, bourgeois French life; and that Schopenhauer’s philosophy is entirely too influential and complicated in its consequences to discuss here. Furthermore, his secular, absurdist, and pessimistic outlook (influential to Melville in its own right) more or less may be folded within discussion of Thomson’s writings.

suggests that Melville's "meditative narrative tone" in *Billy Budd* owes much of its style to FitzGerald's creative translation of Khayyám's rubai (26).

What *Billy Budd* lacks thematically in terms of the *Rubáiyát*'s celebration of the immediate, physical joys of existence, Melville transports to the last poems of his working life, those collected posthumously as *Weeds and Wildings Chiefly: With A Rose or Two* and *At the Hostelry*; and even these link *Billy Budd* with that *tempus-fugit* spirit. In *Weeds and Wildings*, "Butterfly Ditty," for instance, celebrates nature in the pastoral tradition, while tempering it with a *memento mori*:

Summer comes in like a sea,
Wave upon wave how bright;
Thro' the heaven of summer we'll flee
And tipple the light!

From garden to garden,
Such charter have we,
We'll rove and we'll revel,
And idlers we'll be!

We'll rove and we'll revel,
Concerned but for this,—
That Man, Eden's bad boy,
Partakes not the bliss.

In fact, the poem echoes explicitly the seventeenth-century religious poetry of Marvell, Donne, and others. In particular, of course, Melville echoes Marvell, who describes in "The Mower Against Gardens" how

Luxurious man, to bring his vice in use,
Did after him the world seduce,
And from the fields the flowers and plants allure,
Where Nature was most plain and pure.
He first inclosed within the gardens square
A dead and standing pool of air,
And a more luscious earth for them did knead,
Which stupefied them while it fed. (lines 1–8)

As in Melville's "Butterfly Ditty," Marvell meditates on humankind's essential and permanent separation from Edenic nature, despite its best attempts to bridge that gap. Marvell visits this theme more in parallel with Melville's satirically ironic tone in "Bermudas," in which a group of British sailors ride toward a colonial "paradise," led onward (they suppose) by a flattered God who might lead them on to new paradises to spoil:

Oh! let our voice His praise exalt,
Till it arrive at Heaven's vault,
Which, thence (perhaps) rebounding, may
Echo beyond the Mexique Bay. (33–36)

In fact, Marvell's subtle postcolonial attitude toward humanity's corruption of nature reflects his already-discussed political entanglements in a way that also indicates Melville's own sociopolitical concerns still present in his last poetry. The political import of that apparently simple pastoral poetry is signaled by the epigraph to *At the Hostelry*: "Be Borgia Pope, be Bomba King, / The roses blow, the song-birds sing."⁴⁴ The epigram illustrates in two balanced lines how Melville will be using images of flowers and birds and high-spirited living to point to broader political and religious problems. Billy Budd's explicit implication of song-birds (his final words are "delivered in the clear melody of a singing bird") and flowers (in his "as yet smooth face...where, thanks to his seagoing...the rose had some ado visibly to flush through the tan," and his ascension during which he "took the full rose of the dawn"), as well as all things natural, reflect Melville's reliance on the conflict of pastoral simplicity with culture, resonant in Vere (*Billy Budd* 123, 50, 124).

⁴⁴ The Borgias were a notorious Papal family of murderously corrupt leaders (including two popes) in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries whom Alexandre Dumas, père wrote about in his *Celebrated Crimes*. "King Bomba" was a nickname of Ferdinand II of the Two Sicilies, a king who had promised much reform—indeed, he was considered quite liberal in the beginning of his reign—but had resorted to violent suppression of demonstrations against him, particularly during the Sicilian Revolution of 1848 during which he had his navy bombard the city of Messina savagely even *after* they had surrendered: hence the name King Bomb (Berthold 103). The revolution initiated against his regime in 1848 inspired revolutionaries around the world, including those in France. As in France, however, the Sicilian Revolution of 1848 eventually failed.

Melville was clearly taken with the *Rubáiyát*, but he might have had an even greater affinity for the poetry and essays of the late nineteenth-century Scot James Thomson (who wrote under the name Bysshe Vanolis, or B.V.). First, Thomson had written about Melville (in an essay on Whitman) and taken an interest in him. Second, throughout the 1880s James Billson (of Leicester, England, and friend of Thomson) sent Melville various editions of Thomson's essays and poems, and included various essays by Billson and other friends of Thomson on those works, as well as a biography by H. S. Salt after Thomson died (Sealts, "Records" 24–25). In one of these packages, Billson sent along the unidentified third edition of the *Rubáiyát*. The association between FitzGerald's translation and Thomson's poetry and essays is more than materially coincidental, however; both are centrally concerned with religion's failure to adequately respond to humankind's existential condemnation to death, memory, and obscurity.

Thomson's poetry and essays do not end their pessimistic critique only with religion, however. Thomson was a dedicated freethinker and anarchist (the latter in spirit if not explicit theory and practice).⁴⁵ Both his poems and essays invoke and interpret the work of poets like Percy Bysshe Shelley (from whom he derived his pseudonym) and William Blake, whose writings centrally reflect ongoing preoccupation with the project of freedom and liberation after the French Revolution. Indeed, Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*—which Thomson called the "greatest work of our supreme lyrical poet" in a rare essay, which Billson sent Melville (Thomson, "Notes" 48; Sealts, "Records" 25)—underscores the general effect the Revolution had on the Romantic poets like Blake, Shelley, and Coleridge, for whom "the promise and tragedy of the French Revolution was a dominant, indeed, an obsessive concern—'the master theme,' Shelley called it, 'of the theme in which we live'" (Abrams 328). The Romantic poets

⁴⁵ Thomson's "anarchism," which as far as I can tell has never been attributed to him, is unlike the anarchism of his time, which was generally utopian in its theory and praxis. Thomson rejected authority of all kinds, but also despaired of free will or progress (Byron 73).

like Blake and Shelley that Melville returned to recurringly in his last years shared deeply the Revolution's "hope...as the portent of universal felicity," a hope that Coleridge described as sudden, universal, and absolute (Abrams 64, 329).

By the 1880s, however, much of this hope had dissolved in the intellectual heirs of that poetic spirit. Thomson embodies those heirs well, evinced by the publication of his magnum opus (*The City of Dreadful Night*) in his friend Charles Bradlaugh's secular and socialist-oriented *National Reformer*. Within the collection, Thomson's poems like "L'Ancien Régime; or, The Good Old Rule" ridicule in one blow the notion of dictatorial rule as well as "Our king of all kings above" (line 3). Thomson's poetry resounds with pessimism and gloom, as well, without even the *carpe-diem* vigor that Khayyám provides. If the Romantics filled themselves with the hope of the Revolution, Thomson found nothing to fill himself with at all—for Thomson, freedom and liberty are not hopeful but dreadful, even as tyranny and oppression are repulsive.

Thomson's pessimism seems one of his most relatable aspects to Melville. Both men had grown up with deeply held religious beliefs based in Calvinism, and both had come to radically doubt them by the time they had already become personal foundations. Like Thomson, Melville had struggled with doubt until he had "pretty much made up his mind to be annihilated," as Hawthorne famously related. Except Thomson seems to have *completely* made his mind up to be annihilated, whereas Melville, as Hawthorne went on to say,

still...does not seem to rest in that anticipation; and...will never rest until he gets hold of a definite belief. It is strange how he persists...in wandering to-and-fro over these deserts, as dismal and monotonous as the sand hills amid which we were sitting. He can neither believe, nor be comfortable in his unbelief; and he is too honest and courageous not to try to do one or the other. (qtd. in Madden)

Thomson came as comfortable as he could be in his unbelief. But of their mutual time in doubt, Thomson and Melville shared the “anguish of uncertainty” with a thinker they both greatly admired: Matthew Arnold (Byron 69).

In fact, besides Arnold, Thomson and Melville followed many of the same thinkers and writers. Deserving of particular mention is Robert Burns, whose folk–popular poetry inspired Melville, especially evident in his *John Marr* poems. But Thomson describes another way Burns motivated secularist nineteenth-century poets:

He felt scant need
Of church or creed,
He took small share
In saintly prayer,

.....

“The heavens for the heavens,
and the earth for the earth!
I am a Man—I’ll be true to my birth—
Man in my joys, in my pains.”
So fearless, stalwart, erect and free,
He gave to his fellows right royally
His strength, his heart, his brains;
For proud and fiery and swift and bold—
Wine of life from heart of gold,
The blood of his heathen manhood rolled
Full-billowed through his veins. (1–4, 15–25)

Melville had been reading Burns for quite some time, and even gifted an edition of his works as late as 1870 (Sealts, “Check-List” No. 100). Burns’s influence on *John Marr* is glaringly evident, not only through the poetic use of slang but through Melville’s reminiscences in the *Marr* poems which recall Burns poems like “There Was a Battle in the North” and “O, I Forbid You Maidens A” through their dialogic approach to memory and narrative presentation. In addition, Melville drew inspiration from Burns’s satire, work less known to the general public though certainly endearing to his admirers. Moreover, in a tactic less plausible in Thomson and Melville, Burns

masterfully blends the *joie de vivre* of the *Rubáiyát* with his satire, resulting in minor masterpieces like “Love and Liberty,” a cantata of “Jolly Beggars” that more resembles an operetta. The last song of the cantata begins boldly,

A fig for those by law protected!
 Liberty’s a glorious feast,
 Courts for cowards were erected,
 Churches built to please the priest! (lines 1–4)

From these anarchist lines, Burns continues in reverie language prescient of the *Rubáiyát*, and still retains the presiding cultural critique the whole cantata suggests:

See the smoking bowl before us!
 Mark our jovial, ragged ring!
 Round and round take up the chorus,
 And in raptures let us sing:

What is title, what is treasure,
 What is reputation’s care?
 If we lead a life of pleasure,
 ‘Tis no matter how or where! (5–12)

Melville rarely achieves such abandoned glee in his poetry. Thomson’s satire is nearly always coldly ironic, and his contentedly meditative poems usually remain tranquil with a touch of foreboding. Burns’s poetry suggested an existentially liberating way to live out the hope of the French Revolution despite its own crushing failure after Napoleon’s coup. Yet Melville could never achieve that optimism, and Thomson despaired of it completely.

Matthew Arnold was a middle way for Melville. At least he might have been. Melville was reading Arnold’s poetry and essays through much of his late life; that is, in his poetic period, from the 1860s until his death (Sealts, “Check-List” Nos. 16–21). He began reading Arnold as a way to develop his own poetic voice, both aesthetically and commercially, as Walter E. Bezanson argues in “Melville’s Reading of Arnold’s Poetry” (365). After much reading, Melville thought of Arnold as his most serious poetic contemporary (390). His 1860s readings of Arnold’s

Poems and *New Poems* influenced him sufficiently that they were a major resource for his epic *Clarel* (391). Yet as Bezanson demonstrates, the two had a number of notable aesthetic and philosophical differences, including Melville's tacit rejection of Arnold's optimism (391). In fact, one of the most famous poems ("Dover Beach") in Arnold's canon completely escaped Melville's marginal markings and comments, perhaps because it expressed his most essential view of life, as Samuel Lipman suggests (ix). The poem concludes,

Ah, love, let us be true
 To one another! for the world, which seems
 To lie before us like a land of dreams,
 So various, so beautiful, so new,
 Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
 Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
 And we are here as on a darkling plain
 Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
 Where ignorant armies clash by night. (lines 29–37)

Certainly, Melville would concur with a vision of the world without certitude, peace, or help for pain; perhaps Arnold's reliance on love and fidelity as a crutch for the despair of an absurdist world Melville could not abide. Bezanson notices that "whenever Arnold tried to offer enough cheer or optimism to balance off his inherent sense of loss, as he often did, Melville let it go by; occasionally he penciled a refutation" (391).

How is Arnold even a possible "third way" then? First, despite the differences Melville and Arnold had philosophically or aesthetically, Melville continued reading Arnold well into the 1880s. At this point, however—during the period of *Billy Budd*'s composition—he appears to have developed great interest for Arnold's social criticisms, purchasing *Literature and Dogma*, *Mixed Essays*, and *Culture and Anarchy* (Sealts, "Check-List" Nos. 18, 19, 16). Of these, *Culture and Anarchy* suggests the most interest for *Billy Budd* given its focus on the effects of the French Revolution in nineteenth-century Western culture and politics, particularly in terms of

the conflict between authority and liberty. In fact, *Culture and Anarchy* seems *peculiarly* relevant to *Billy Budd*, and most especially in light of the literary and historical context in which it arose.

Quo Modo: The Text and its Rhetoric

I turn now to the text itself and its apparent rhetorical thrust. While many uncertainties remain, a number of facts have been established about Melville's composition of the text. First, he was certainly working on it as early as the first months of 1886, and he certainly developed it from the poem (probably originally meant for his collection *John Marr and Other Poems*) that now ends the text: "Billy in the Darbies." Additionally, the only four extant leaves of Melville's first stages of composition indicate the major motivating force behind his narrative elaboration of the poem, a force which is still apparent in the final text (Hayford and Sealts, "Genetic Text" 274–78). Of these four leaves only one contains prose, which appears to be a summary headnote to the ballad, similar to those in *John Marr*. The three other leaves are drafts of the ballad. The paucity of the remaining leaves of this stage of composition act as reminder of how little we can actually know about Melville's intention through composition, despite whatever pretense we might keep about our possession of his (remaining) manuscript. Below is a very loose approximation of the revisions Melville undertook in the prose leaf. I transcribe it here to indicate 1) how ambiguous and uncertain even the extant revisions are, while 2) many such lost leaves might have suggested Melville's specific intentions for certain plot points and character developments; and 3) how yet some aspects of his rhetorical position are clear.

Billy Budd ~~a rollicking seaman~~ ~~yet more familiarly~~ ~~sometimes~~ known as among his shipmates as Handsome under the nicknames Handsome, **"Beauty"** and The Jewel, ~~he being a man in his~~ ~~in person not only goodnatured~~ he being not only sparklingly pleasant in temper, **genial genial in temper, and sparklingly so**, but in person also goodly to behold; his features, ear, foot, and in a less degree even his sailor hands ~~all indicating~~

~~together all~~ but more particularly strikingly his whole frame and natural bearing carriage all indicating ~~no ignoble lineage some superior stock exceptional and superior stock a lineage contradicting his lot.~~ ~~he~~ He, in war time, Captain of a gun's crew in a seventy-four, is summarily condemned at sea to be hung as the ringleader of an incipient mutiny the spread of which was apprehended **a mutiny** projected under the⁴⁶

From this inchoate headnote and the ballad drafts, a reader can surmise that Melville always had a clear idea about the overall trajectory of Budd's narrative: a "Handsome Sailor"—a foundling, but noble in bearing and loved by all—is condemned to death *as the ringleader* of a budding mutiny. The ballad, a dramatic monologue, expresses Billy's thoughts as he waits to die, reflecting on the story of Christ as told by a visiting chaplain. Of course, with this information comes the knowledge that we are missing all of the manuscript pages in between these initial compositions and the first long, fair copy that remains. Indeed, even that first fair copy is missing numerous pages, its entire scope known only through pagination. Nevertheless, since the original ballad depicted an older Billy, Billy's natural youth and beauty are obviously vital to Melville's inspiration for an inside narrative to the ballad's recreated Story.

Yet more changes in the adaptation from poem to long narrative are evident through further manuscript analysis, and indicate some of Melville's intentions for continuing his adaption of the poem, which also reveal the anarchist critique invoked through the act of renarrativization. Turning to the overall framing of the narrative within its own storyworld, Melville's early addition of impressment as the cause of Billy's arrival—absent from the poem and early drafting—is clearly another significant driving force behind the prose expansion. *Billy Budd's* opening chapter particularly focuses on Billy's impressment and the life he leaves behind on the *Rights of Man* as a "Handsome Sailor." This connection between Billy and the Royal

⁴⁶ In this approximation of revisions, I have transcribed the revisions indicated by the Hayford–Sealts edition, but have not been as precise as their Genetic Text. I urge the interested to seek out their demonstration of his revisions. My reproduction here is meant to highlight the uncertain materiality of a text's composition and the author's intentions, despite whatever final draft goes to print. The very faint font indicates erasure, the bold writing in. The underlined words were underlined in the original manuscript. The text was taken from p. 275 of "The Genetic Text."

Navy (and thus to Vere and Claggart) and its history at the Spithead and the Nore forms an important guide for the Story's meaning, which now takes an anarchist turn from its previous narrativization.

Again considering early (but lasting) decisions in the overall narrative framing, Melville's narrator's opposing his story against an official account from an authorized, weekly "naval chronicle," which in several early drafts ended the novel outright, suggests that Melville meant to envelop the whole story in an overarching irony that began with Billy's forced entrance into the navy and ended with his subsequent vilification by it, despite his innocence throughout. Importantly, this narrative framing also reveals how the very composition of the text depends on the story's presentation as an adaptation of (supposed) historical events. Thus, even if one could not definitively conclude that some event—the *Somers* affair, the Parkman affair, or the Haymarket affair—acted as *the* source for Melville's adaptation into a narrative, the very basic reading of *Billy Budd* is dependent on reading it *as an adaptation*. The narrator of *Billy Budd* is a very specific and real character, and his point, as much as Melville's, is how crucial perspective is in understanding an event. The narrator means to reveal an inside narrative of (a perspective on) some events which more official organs got exactly wrong. But Melville means to reveal how even such an "inside" story is still fundamentally dependent on ideological perspective, and thus still misleading.

Next, as Hayford and Sealts demonstrate in the "Editors' Introduction" to their Reading Text (5), Melville's elaboration of Claggart—instead of Vere—in the first major extant stages of composition, along with the impressment and "inside narrative" framing, suggest that Melville originally conceived the prose expansion as a meditation on the discrepancy between "official" society and a conflict between two exceptionally "natural" figures of good and evil whose

conflict is unwittingly misunderstood even by the narrator. Melville's focus in the narrative is evidently on two figures *of nature* who have been forced into the service of the State, and whose conflict therein is necessarily subsumed by the needs of the State.

Melville's attention to this "inside narrative" of the confrontation between natural men in a "civilized" world-in-a-man-of-war (to borrow from his subtitle for *White-Jacket*) demanded a dramatized point of view. As Hayford and Sealts argue throughout their discussion of the Genetic Text, Melville composed *Billy Budd* through a succession of dramatic embellishments of events he previously editorialized. Vere's late addition to the story reflects another such dramatization. Captain Vere acts as a mouthpiece and metonym for the narrator's viewpoint, as well as the "civilized" world's.

Before completely turning to discursive analysis of the already numerous threads running through *Billy Budd*, I will examine for further interpretive clues its function and rhetorical context as a published novel. At first, functional analysis appears relatively simple. In elucidating Melville's rhetorical strategy, *Billy Budd*'s posthumous publication apparently obviates an investigation into how its public purpose affected Melville's composition.⁴⁷ While he was writing *Billy Budd*, Melville received his last royalty statement from Harper, the firm that published nearly all of his works in the United States, including his first book of poems, *Battle Pieces and Aspects of the War* (1866). Following *Battle Pieces*, Melville's publishing ventures were a disaster. The epic poem *Clarel* (the longest in American literature) was published only through a bequest from his uncle, its unsold copies burned by Putnam when it failed to sell and Melville could not buy them back at cost. When he had finished his third book of poetry, *John Marr and Other Sailors*, his life was in tatters with an estranged wife and two sons dead. In

⁴⁷ I have already explored the critical reception of *Billy Budd* after it was actually published in 1924. Its popular reception from then on has largely extended from the critical reactions, and I will refer more to these when I look at some of the twentieth- and twenty-first-century adaptations of *Billy Budd*.

1888, he privately published only twenty-five copies of the collection. His last collection of poems, *Timoleon*, was likewise privately published at only twenty-five copies. Few must have read it, for at least one copy was given as a gift by his family as late as 1921 (Shurr 151). At the time of his death, Melville had at least one more collection of poems and *Budd* almost ready for publication. But he must have *known* he was close to the end of his life. Still, he made no special efforts to see *Billy Budd* published through more than five years of composition. He plainly meant for it to be a fully realized work, however, given his attention to it. If the story was not for immediate publication, then for what? or for whom? At this time in his life, writing for himself may have been the same as writing for publication. Perhaps shortly after *Timoleon*'s appearance, Melville would have had *Billy Budd* published into twenty-five copies and distributed among his friends; perhaps he meant it for a British audience from whom his early fiction was regaining approbation (Parker 24–27). Nevertheless, given his close attention to poetry in these later years, and *Billy Budd*'s expansion from “Billy in the Darbies,” one can reasonably surmise that Melville's prose interests in *Billy Budd* were closely aligned with his poetic interests, in composition as well as through his reading of Burns, Arnold, Khayyám/FitzGerald, and Thomson.

In 1876, Melville published only his second book of poetry, *Clarel*—one of his most monumental achievements and the longest epic poem in American literature, written over six years at the expense of his entire family's happiness (Shurr 5)—and over the last fifteen years of his life he would write material for at least three more collections. Again, as far as we know, the only full-length prose he wrote was *Billy Budd*, demonstrably adapted from a poem he would have included in *John Marr*. How might his collections of *John Marr* and *Timoleon*—the only two collections published between 1876 and Melville's death—reflect his shifting concerns?

This line of inquiry has been pursued a number of times, actually. William H. Shurr's 1972 *Mystery of Iniquity: Melville as Poet, 1857–91* peaks and concludes with an argument that “*Billy Budd* contains most of the major thematic patterns developed by Melville during his career as poet. The story also synthesizes these themes into a coherent philosophy.... *Billy Budd* is not only the confirmation but the synthesis of the life's work that preceded it” (261). Shurr's synthesis is somewhat vague, but he includes the following as Melville's patterns and themes: concern with the demand and nature of art; problems of appearance and reality, mostly in terms of religious myth, and particularly in terms of Christ's; questions of the nature of fame and memory; and obsession with those who commit “transcendent acts” that pluck them from the ordinary. Robert Milder suggests in a 1987 essay that

John Marr and *Timoleon* show Melville still quarreling with Providence and society, uncertain of the value of his long dedication to art, and divided between a bleak awareness of human tragedy and a fond retrospection. Originating in the nostalgia and despair of *John Marr*, *Billy Budd* developed by 1888 into a last arraignment of God and society—a design that shaped the work, with changing emphasis, until Melville surmounted his anger during the final stages of composition and arrived at the only “testament” he could make, or would ever have wanted to make, a testament to his own spirit. (213)

More directly, he reasons that Billy and Vere “have reached a level of compassion and understanding that has not obviated tragedy but risen admirably to face it.... He [Melville] has arrived at a certainty of inward worth and, thereby, at a qualified peace” (221). And finally—thematically if not chronologically—in his 1964 *Pacifism and Rebellion in the Writings of Herman Melville*, John Bernstein argues that Melville's late poetry, in accord with the rest of his work, is inscribed within a general “philosophy of rebellion,” which *Billy Budd* crowns insofar as it dramatizes how

men are suppressed and victimized by systems of authority....[and though] good men such as Captain Vere often administer these codes, there can be no justice under a system that is inherently wrong. Nor can the cause of justice for all be furthered by a Christ-like

resignation to the authorities who represent this system. . . . This rebellion, as evidenced by the French Revolution, may itself for a time become perverted and act as a tool of injustice. But in the long run, the force of rebellion, which is a combination of social and, in a sense, spiritual protest, is that power which eventually liberates mankind. (213)⁴⁸

But these numerous, desperate attempts to proclaim *Billy Budd* as Melville's final statement of whatever ideology the critic sees in the rest of Melville's work strain a little too much. More likely than *Billy Budd* as Melville's final will and testament, a full summary and apology of his life's work, is that it reflects more specifically his tempered, but still fiery, thoughts *in old age*. The reader who only reads Melville's early work, or *Moby-Dick*'s greatness, into *Billy Budd* does it, and Melville's labor in it, an injustice.

Nevertheless, as the above brief critical summary of *Marr* and *Timoleon* implies, Melville's poetry and prose were quite resonant with each other. While I have just suggested to what great degree critics have agreed with this position, its certainty is apparent even throughout the texts themselves. Furthermore, a look at these texts reinforces the narrative material I have so far specified as fundamental to Melville's rhetorical aims: a young sailor's beauty and innocence; impressment and mutiny; contradictory perspectives on memory and history; the conflict of nature and culture. These texts also foreshadow a number of other, minor themes that I will identify. I turn now to analysis of *Billy Budd* based in the foregoing *quo modo* foundation that includes the 1842 *Somers* affair; the 1850 Parkman–Webster affair; the 1886 Haymarket affair; the poetry of Marvell, Martial, FitzGerald/Khayyám, Burns, and Thomson; and the essays of Arnold.

⁴⁸ Of these arguments, Bernstein's aligns most closely with my own, but with some important distinctions. I will elaborate them more fully a little later.

Narrative Noise and Criticality

As I indicated earlier, the Enlightenment and its revolutionary projects, in all of their fallible glory, formed the basis of Melville's literary investigation and much of his intellectual life. Of the late eighteenth century, Richard Chase notes that Melville felt that its "undetermined momentousness'...[was] unsurpassed in the whole range of history" (260). Surveying the events of the first century of the United States—the great experiment of the Enlightenment—Melville was confronted with a number of discrepancies between the American Dream and its realization. This apparently prompted him to explore his own personal history of the conflict between natural liberty and civil authority, the individual and the State, in conjunction with his nation's own history.

Rousseau suggests in *The Social Contract* that liberty be subject to "the general will," a move that apparently exchanges justice for instinct, imparting morality where it was formerly wanted (435). But who decides that justice? Rousseau and others felt that, given equal voice, a natural balance of partial interests would be achieved in social deliberation, and the general will would out; but the presumption of naturally occurring equal voices was a pipe dream, or at least a concept in need of much more thorough discussion. Melville was concerned with the practical application of Enlightenment principles, and in his own life he witnessed first-hand prominent instances in which the general will was indeterminable—but determined by a "representative" anyway. The ultimate power of the State lies in its determination of reality and history through law. The State creates, ensures, and perpetuates the context of its own legitimation, greatly reducing the need for heavily coercive means of ideological control. And Melville was in a unique position to explore the power of contextual legitimation from the perspective of his own life.

In his later years, Melville was preoccupied with memory, and his writing reflects it. *Billy Budd*'s narration opens contemporaneous with its intended reader, but moves quickly back: "In the time before steamships, or then more frequently than now..." The old sailors in the *John Marr* poems live in the past, finding solace in their memory of simpler times (Chase 290). At the same time, history was a preeminent concern for Melville, as well, again further evidenced by *Billy Budd*'s historical setting, but also by the Roman times of "Timoleon" and the self-aware historical setting of the Civil War testament *Battle-Pieces*. But as I indicated in my introduction, history springs from memory. And yet memory itself is shaped sharply by history; the two are bound in dialectic, each attempting to subsume the other under its dominion (Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* 384–93).

As in that dialectic struggle, the (anarchist) question, of course, is "who gets to represent what happened?" This is also the very decisive question of adaptation and narrative, and clearly it is central to how history is established through memory. Thus, when Melville turns to questions of history and memory in his last works, and most especially *Billy Budd*, the narrative concerning memory and the narrative concerning history must be understood as bound together. Melville in fact makes this almost explicit through the historical sources of his novel: the *Somers* case and the Parkman murder. These cases were of utmost important in his family and personal history (memory), but they also had astounding effects in public history. What is more, the controversy surrounding these affairs stemmed from the same difficulties. Further, attempts to resolve the controversy in each of the affairs had direct and vital bearing on how personal and community identity and liberty were defined in relation. These apparently small fluctuations in the discursive background noise of the text emerge as significant intersections with discursive subsystems that drive the whole narrative to criticality, altering the importance of many of the

other intersecting subsystems, such as the writing of Arnold, Thompson, Marvell, and Martial. And the world-shaking causes, events, and consequences of the Haymarket affair—in the public eye during all of *Billy Budd*'s composition—share hallmarks of the *Somers* and Parkman affairs and likely spurred Melville to writing, perhaps inspiring his modification of those cases by making his State's victim innocent. These events in adaptation, through the complexity of their incorporation into the mass of other discourses that comprise the narrative, lead to an anarchist critique of the ideology that created the controversy they were known for. In the particular case of *Billy Budd*, the critique centers on the question of the State's knowledge in relation to its constant self-legitimizing.

In the *Somers* and Parkman–Webster affairs—again, in which Melville's cousin and father-in-law were completely implicated—the very question of the State's knowledge of reality is questioned. In both cases, what occurred precisely is not known; yet in both cases, the sovereign felt the need to know in such a way that would reaffirm sovereignty. Mackenzie needed complete loyalty and submission from his sailors in his final judgments, and felt that even a return to shore might lead to appeal of that judgment (in the form of Spencer's Secretary-of-War father). Shaw and the prosecution recognized that foul play had occurred, although they could barely state for certain that the body they had was Parkman's, let alone state for certain that he had been murdered, and hardly state at all that Webster did it. Shaw felt compelled to clarify how the jury could still find Webster guilty beyond the usual legal means at the time (by instructing them on how to find guilt beyond circumstantial evidence).

Lack of knowledge is a serious problem for the State. Sovereignty has traditionally rested on necessary infallibility. Through democratic logic, this seems to bear out: if the State as Sovereign (as the general will of the people) is to *represent* the people and discipline them fairly,

it must always reflect its general will, and thus never be wrong about what is happening among them. For authority's sake, and thus for legitimacy's sake, the State cannot appear to *not* be in unison with the people. Of course, in terms of representation, this is illusion; the people are not unified, and representation is not total. But the State eyes with wariness those instances when complete knowledge and control of reality is beyond its grasp because it challenges its very sovereignty. In order to legitimate the revolution that prompted its existence, the State must appear to have the capacity for total knowledge of what it says it constitutes (the people), and appear absolutely correct in that knowledge—even if this means correcting itself eventually. For example, pardons and exonerations “demonstrate” the ultimate fairness of the State for its citizens—in cases when the State is incorrect, it can show the people via pardons, exonerations, commutations, etc. that the State will always *eventually* be just. However, as the recent DNA exonerations in Virginia indicate, the State is not eager to demonstrate that it was incorrect systemically over a period of time, as that undermines the exceptionality of the process and indicts the State as illegitimate in some fundamental way. As Dahlia Lithwick observes about Virginia,

The state's officials know their criminal justice system is riddled with errors. As they investigated the depth of the problem, they have found that indeed many more men—at least dozens, maybe more—might be exonerated using DNA tests. But the state's authorities did not move quickly to suspend these sentences or contact the individuals or families involved. They did not publicize their findings. Indeed, they denied Freedom of Information Act requests that would have shed light on the problem. Rather, Virginia state officials appear to have devised a system of notifying current and former convicts that is almost guaranteed to lead to the fewest number of exonerations.

Such a veiled system ensures the sanctity of the State in the public's eye while providing some plausible deniability.

Some instances of criminality challenge this knowledge and challenge the legitimized authority that seeks to keep the State the voice of the general will of the people. *Billy Budd* is

shot through with challenge, even in those allusions that appear tangential or incidental. First, the novel is clearly addressed to Melville's contemporary American audience through a narrator who is, as William V. Spanos argues in *The Exceptionalist State*, "writing a story about an earlier epochal 'event' of Old World history addressed to a late nineteenth-century American audience deeply inscribed by the myth of American exceptionalism..." (77). This exceptionalism, of course, derives largely from America being Paine's shining example of the Enlightenment revolutionary experiments. It certainly fared better than France in the nineteenth century.

Let me reiterate that the entire story *as told by the narrator* is an adaptation. As such, the narrativization of the theoretical events that inspired the work also defines an anarchist critique of the ideology that prefigured the events. This critique arises subversively against the narrator who is trying to justify Vere and the State, emerging in the glaring inconsistencies he involuntarily incorporates. Nevertheless, the purpose of the narrative according to the narrator is to give an account of the events on the *Bellipotent* concerning Billy Budd that it "be left to vindicate, as it may, its own credibility" (77).⁴⁹ As the reader learns in the penultimate chapter, a short account "appeared in a naval chronicle of the time...[which] appearing in a publication now long ago superannuated and forgotten, is all that hitherto has stood in human record to attest what manner of men respectively were John Claggart and Billy Budd" (130–31). Presumably, the narrator's own account corrects the chronicle's gross mistakes. That the narrative is an adaptation—and thus a selection, representation, and edition of supposedly real events—is continually brought back to the reader's attention. The source of the narrator's knowledge of these events is never revealed, however. If the chronicle's account was the only human record of the events, how does the narrator achieve inside knowledge of Billy Budd, Claggart, and Vere?

⁴⁹ I can presume the narrator is masculine historically given his references to his own seafaring experience in the nineteenth century.

What is his purpose, and what are his interests? In fact, the narrator is ultimately central to Melville's critique of the State and its ideology. Although I will raise this point sporadically, I will return to it most forcefully at the end of my analysis. For the time being, I want to call attention to the fact that the narrator and Melville (obviously) use the same language, but often to cross-purposes. Melville's irony is frequently the narrator's sincerity, and vice versa.

And so, in the narrator's address to an American audience, the tale begins with a lengthy discussion of the Handsome Sailor. While this appears mainly a personal obsession of Melville's, the notion of the Handsome Sailor has an important bearing on *Billy Budd* as a story of individuality and the State.⁵⁰ As the narrator explains, the Handsome Sailor is a man "with the offhand unaffectedness of natural regality" (43). The narrator soon recalls an instance of the Handsome Sailor, "a native African of the unadulterated blood of Ham...[whom a] motley retinue showed that they took that sort of pride in the evoker of it [the tribute of a pause and stare, and less frequently an exclamation] which the Assyrian priests doubtless showed for their grand sculptured Bull when the faithful prostrated themselves" (43–44). Despite the clear racial problems with the narrator's language, and actually because of it, the Handsome Sailor is equated with utterly natural, even Biblical, regality and beauty. Melville uses an African as his example to convey to his reader how exotic (and thus completely natural and "uncivilized") and Biblical (in his "unadulterated blood of Ham") this natural goodness of the Handsome Sailor is. Of course, "the moral nature was seldom out of keeping with the physical make" (44), the narrator continues. And the purpose of the discussion of the Handsome Sailor, of course, is that

⁵⁰ I should clarify that even though Britain as State and America as State seem antithetical, Melville's allusion to the English Civil War (linking Fairfax and Vere) reminds the careful reader that by 1797 Britain was under a constitutional monarchy. The American colonies' grievances with George were sound, of course, because as colonies they were effectively under an absolute monarchy.

“such a cynosure...and something such too in nature, though with important variations...was welkin-eyed Billy Budd” (44).

Billy is a peculiar Handsome Sailor because he does have some defects, although the narrator only focuses on his stutter. Frequently, readers of the novel see this imperfection as some kind of allegorical flaw, a physical embodiment of original sin or the tragic hero's fatal flaw, which in Greek literature (to which Billy is linked, as he is with “the heroic strong man, Hercules”) was rarely an attributable flaw so much as a mistake or accident (51). But Billy has at least one other important imperfection, and that is his silence. I will return to this a little later. As for Billy as Handsome Sailor, the narrator takes great pains to focus on Billy as a foundling, discovered as he was “in a pretty silk-lined basket hanging one morning from the knocker of a good man's door in Bristol” (51). Melville's implication of a foundling in his tale has some biographical connection, for Jack Chase (of *White-Jacket* and Melville's sailing days) was a foundling. Both Chase and Budd “obviously” derive of noble blood, but Melville's particular use of it here seems just as ironic as it is sincere. Certainly, Melville and his narrator want the reader to use their generic knowledge and conceive of Billy as truly noble—this trope is a long-standing one in literature. But the fact that Billy is “a presumable by-blow, and, evidently, no ignoble one” highlights one of the most significant problems of royalty. Illegitimate sons had caused a number of problems for monarchies for centuries. In fact, their very existence and reasonable claims to authority indicated the near-lunacy of entrusting governance of a group of people to successive offspring of random sexual unions. One of those offspring might just as well be a foundling as a prince, might as well be a mutineer as a wild son, condemned or pardoned depending on the State's recognition.

In all, the narrator's invocation of the Handsome Sailor seems uncontroversial, but it contradicts one of Rousseau's axioms for the social contract. As I quoted earlier, Rousseau suggests that "the passage from the state of nature to the civil state produces a very remarkable change in man, by substituting justice for instinct in his conduct, and giving his actions the morality they had formerly lacked" (435). But *Billy Budd*'s central concern with Budd as a Handsome Sailor, apparently an allegorical comparison, actually brings into focus the role of the State in "correcting" those who might be naturally good. The narrator even indicts the civil state inadvertently by noting that "where certain virtues pristine and unadulterated peculiarly characterize anybody in...civilization, they will upon scrutiny seem not to be derived from custom or convention, but rather to be out of keeping with these, as if indeed exceptionally transmitted from a period prior to Cain's city and citified man" (52–53). Rather than transforming instinct into morality, the State seems to deform morality into base instinct. The narrator soon quotes Martial's Fabian line, further stressing the decrepit nature of "Cain's city and citified man," and further questioning the role of the "cultured" in league with the State, as in Martial's role as sycophantic poet to the (probably) despotic Domitian. Is *Billy Budd*'s narrator criticizing the role of the State? In fact, he is an unwitting ally in Melville's critique at the same time that he is also an unwitting object of it.

Regardless, the questionable role of the State as moral and civil authority is brought into relief immediately since Billy's first interaction with the State in the narrative is his impressment into service to the State from the *Rights of Man*. Again, this event is *selected* as the first time the audience sees Billy in narrative action. If the State expresses the general will of the people, its forced (and enforced) enlistment of its own people contradicts this. Even though Billy leaves his *Rights* cheerfully, 'he was, without knowing it, practically a fatalist....in marked contrast to

certain other individuals included like himself among the impressed portion of the ship's company..." (49).

In fact, further implicating the State's problems with impressment, the narrative quickly turns to a relatively lengthy account of the mutinies at the Nore and Spithead. The narrator's purpose in relating the effect of the Great Mutiny on the *Bellipotent* and on the narrative seems to be for the sake of the State: these were difficult times for the State's authority because *some* sailors had real grievances about "glaring abuses" that were addressed after the Spithead. The narrator suggests that the later mutiny at the Nore, an "unforeseen renewal of insurrection on a yet larger scale" with demands that were "deemed by the authorities not only inadmissible but aggressively insolent" (55), was without warrant. While the Spithead troubles were addressed, and their concerns must be considered legitimate since the State made concessions, the Nore mutiny was suppressed *because* they were wrong, borne out "by the unswerving loyalty of the marine corps and a voluntary resumption of loyalty among influential sections of the crews" (55). The logic of the State is circular. Because the Spithead mutiny was successful, it sprang from legitimate concerns partially acknowledged by the State. Because some members within suppressed the Nore mutiny, it was illegitimate. "To some extent the Nore Mutiny may be regarded as analogous to the distemping irruption of contagious fever in a frame constitutionally sound, and which anon throws it off," the narrator concludes in a stand-alone paragraph (55). This bathetic coda to the mutinous troubles at the Spithead and Nore reduces the conflict with authority to minor blips in the "constitutionally sound" legitimacy of the State. Nevertheless, the narrator points out, some of the grievances were not fully addressed, leading to the susceptibility to challenges to authority on the *Bellipotent*. This is meant as extenuation for the State's ultimate "legitimate" actions against Billy.

And who is the State? Allegedly, the State is “for the people” and even “of the people,” but this is actually through representation, which is always selective and empowers certain people over others. The embodiment of the State on the *Bellipotent* is “Captain the Honorable Edward Fairfax Vere,” whose very title carries a denotation of moral rightness. In this first “real” account of what happened on the ship, the narrator introduces Vere as a fundamentally good captain. He is a reflection of the legitimate essence of the State: he is gallant and capable, “a sailor of distinction even in a time prolific of renowned seamen” (60); but he is also a civilian gentleman, whom “any landsman observing...might have taken him for the King’s guest, a civilian aboard the King’s ship” (60). In the following chapter, the narrator further notes that Vere “had a marked leaning toward everything intellectual” (62). He is legitimate martially, civilly, culturally. In fact, he is so equitable and upright, “while other members of that aristocracy to which by birth he belonged were incensed at the innovators mainly because their theories were inimical to the privileged classes, Captain Vere disinterestedly opposed them not alone because they seemed to him insusceptible of embodiment in lasting institutions, but at war with the peace of the world and the true welfare of mankind” (62–63).

While the narrator clearly favors Vere as the best of the State, Melville has a different end in mind. This is not to say that Melville and the narrator even mean different things. Vere *does* embody the best of the State. In fact, he most directly reflects Matthew Arnold’s conception of the State as the great corrective to anarchy (the direct result, Arnold argues, of misunderstanding liberty as “doing as one likes”). “We are in danger,” Arnold warns in *Anarchy and Culture*, “of drifting towards anarchy. We have not the notion, so familiar on the Continent and to antiquity, of *the State*,—the nation in its collective and corporate character, entrusted with stringent powers for the general advantage, and controlling individual wills in the name of an

interest wider than that of individuals” (50–52). Arnold follows Rousseau in his conception of freedom and liberty: liberty should be civil liberty (obedience to a law which we prescribe to ourselves) rather than natural liberty (doing as one likes in the mere pursuit of satiating appetite).

Like Melville, Arnold is not blind to the potential abuses of authority. “We say,” Arnold continues after his definition of the State, “what is very true, that this notion is often made instrumental to tyranny; we say that a State is in reality made up of the individuals who compose it, and that every individual is the best judge of his own interests” (51). Arnold’s concern is Melville’s: how do we practically reconcile freedom and authority? Arnold’s attempt to genuinely answer this question is part of Melville’s fascination with him. Arnold argues that because each of the various classes of society—the aristocracy, the middle class, and the working class—have their own best interests at heart, none can properly rule. No aristocracy likes authority greater than itself, and its members only want “to affirm their ordinary selves, their likings and dislikings” (64); the middle class, “the great representative of trade and Dissent, with its maxims of every man for himself in business, every man for himself in religion, dreads a powerful administration which might somehow interfere with it” (51); and the working class, “pressed constantly by the hard daily compulsion of material wants, is naturally the very centre and stronghold of . . . man’s ideal right and felicity to do as he likes” (51). Each class, he suggests, selfishly wants anarchy, natural liberty, for itself.

His solution to the problem of anarchy, as he conceives it, is for all classes to submit themselves to their best self, embodied in the State. Through the best self,

we are united, impersonal, at harmony. We are in no peril from giving authority to this, because it is the truest friend we all of us can have; and when anarchy is a danger to us, to this authority we may turn with sure trust. Well, and this is the very self which culture, or the study of perfection, seeks to develop in us; at the expense of our old untransformed self, taking pleasure only in doing what it likes or is used to do, and exposing us to the risk of clashing with everyone else who is doing the same! So that our poor culture,

which is flouted as so unpractical, leads us to the very ideas capable of meeting the great want of our present embarrassed times! We want an authority, and we find nothing but jealous classes, checks, and a deadlock; culture suggests the idea of *the State*. We find no basis for a firm State-power in our ordinary selves; culture suggests one to us in our best self. (64–65)

Vere clearly personifies Arnold's notion of the state: authority invested with our best self, cultured and oriented toward the study of perfection. Melville's narrator is attempting to show the tragic fate of Billy, but also defend the State's role in his fate as legitimate. Melville is attempting to show how the State, even as "our best selves," fails miserably insofar as its ultimate goal is its own continuation.

If the tale concerned only Billy and Vere, revealing the failure of Arnold's concept of the State might not have been Melville's intention. But Melville began with a story of Billy and Claggart, opposing manifestations of nature in society. With Vere is added the best possible case for their reconciliation in society. But even when the State is one with culture, as in the case of Vere, its true loyalty is not to our best selves, but its own legitimacy and authority. Before the needs of the people, its own authority needs to be protected. As such, the State bears down on all, Melville argues, not only the naturally good, or the contextually blessed and grieved, but the naturally evil as well. And insofar as the State's goal is legitimacy and not morality, its repression is conditional.

This bears out through the description of the only other officer besides Vere: Master-at-arms John Claggart. Claggart, it seems, has been co-opted into the military, although perhaps not through direct impressment like Billy and some of the other sailors. In fact, if the sailors' stories are to be believed, Claggart may have suffered a worse flagrancy. He was, the gossip goes, of foreign birth and dubious past, probably a capture from the police who "were at liberty to capture any able-bodied suspect, any questionable fellow at large, and summarily ship him to the

dockyard or fleet” (65). In fact, even if Claggart were not a forced enlistment by the police, he might be of a group

where the motive thereto partook neither of patriotic impulse nor yet of a random desire to experience a bit of sea life and martial adventure. Insolvent debtors of minor grade, together with the promiscuous lame ducks of morality, found in the navy a convenient and secure refuge, secure because, once enlisted aboard a King’s ship, they were as much in sanctuary as the transgressor of the Middle Ages harboring himself under the shadow of the altar. Such sanctioned irregularities, which for obvious reasons the government would hardly think to parade at the time and which consequently, and as affecting the least influential class of mankind, have all but dropped into oblivion, lend color to something for the truth whereof I do not vouch, and hence have some scruple in stating. (65–66)

But the source of all of this “knowledge” is gossip, rumor, and supposition, and it is built further by the narrator into a statement of some (how much?) doubt that is likewise not even substantiated except through stories from old sailors and books the names of which cannot be recalled. The narrator even *continues*—reminiscent of a cornered defense counsel unable to construct a better argument for an already undesirable client—and justifies the actions taken by the State in coercing men like Claggart into service, even if one could prove that such actions ever took place:

For reasons previously suggested it would not perhaps be easy at the present day directly to prove or disprove the allegation. But allowed as a verity, how significant would it be of England’s straits at the time confronted by those wars which like a flight of harpies rose shrieking from the din and dust of the fallen Bastille. That era appears measurable clear to us who look back at it... But to the grandfathers of us graybeards, the more thoughtful of them, the genius of it presented an aspect like that of...an eclipsing menace mysterious and prodigious. Not America was exempt from apprehension. (66)

After all this, the narrator suddenly admits:

But the less credence was to be given to the gun-deck talk touching Claggart, seeing that no man holding his office in a man-of-war can ever hope to be popular with the crew. Besides, in derogatory comments upon anyone against whom they have a grudge, or for any reason or no reason dislike, sailors are much like landsmen: they are apt to exaggerate or romance it.... The verdict of the sea quidnuncs has been cited only by way of showing what sort of moral impression the man made upon rude uncultivated natures

whose conceptions of human wickedness were necessarily of the lowest, limited to ideas of vulgar rascality... (67)

But even prior to his legitimating overview of the sailors' uncorroborated gossip, the narrator's entire introduction of Claggart is conspicuous. Of Vere's staff and the other officers, he claims, "it is not necessary here to particularize" (63). Again, the careful reader will notice this further evidence of the narrator's superior epistemological position: the reader does not get to decide whether knowledge of the staff would be necessary or not. Yet despite this apparent supremacy of knowledge, the narrator almost immediately admits inadequacy concerning John Claggart: "His portrait I essay, but shall never hit it" (64). Before any reader makes a final judgment or interpretation, this point should be recalled, along with the epistemological grounding of his views on Claggart.

For the narrator, then, the State's essential function and the threat it faced in the time of the Enlightenment revolutions absolves it of significant wrongdoing through its impressment and enslavement of the prison population. Simultaneously, Claggart is offered up as a man of questionable background likewise swept into martial life at sea with Billy whose fundamental but vague guilt seems *morally* certain. To what purpose? The immediately following chapter to Claggart's entrance is the introduction of the Old Dansker. His very presence in the narrative, as well as the substance of that presence, goes a long way in answering this question.

The Dansker serves partially as a testimonial witness against Claggart and in favor of the State. His recurring appearance in the narrative bolsters suspicions against Claggart after Billy wonders why other sailors might be messing with his gear and hammock. In fact, the narrator returns to ponder Claggart's apparent ill-will toward Billy. He once more draws attention to the narrative as an adaptation of real events, reflecting that he could conjure up a back-story that would explain Claggart's malice, but such an invention adds romance and justification where in

fact there only lies “antipathy spontaneous and profound” (74). The reader should be aware at this point that the narrator’s description of Claggart’s inherent villainy comes by way of analogy, for “to pass from a normal nature to him one must cross ‘the deadly space between.’ And this is best done by indirection” (74). The purpose of this digression is to emphasize that Claggart has a “Natural Depravity,” a kind of evil not even found among common criminals but found more likely in civilization, as it actually “folds itself in the mantle of respectability” (75). The narrator expostulates on the nature of this evil in civilization and its consequences for humankind in general, after all which he declares, “The point of the present story turning on the *hidden* nature of the master-at-arms has necessitated this chapter. With an added hint or two in connection with the incident at the mess, the resumed narrative must be left to vindicate, as it may, its own credibility” (76–77, emphasis mine).

What does the narrator know? What does he assume, conjecture, and surmise? *How* does he know? *How* does he assume, conjecture, and surmise? More questions than answers are provided with each magnified analysis. At various instances, the narrator has complete knowledge, reporting intention as well as action and background information replete with knowledgeable analysis. But more often, the narrator uses mitigating and uncertain language, hedging bets of interpretation through a string of modifiers that nonetheless lead to statements that appear conclusive. For instance, when Billy spills soup in front of Claggart, the narrator explains the incident later in this way: “Now when the master-at-arms noticed whence came that greasy fluid streaming before his feet, he *must have* taken it—to *some* extent willfully *perhaps*—not for the mere accident it *assuredly was*, but for the sly escape of a spontaneous feeling on Billy’s part *more or less* answering to the antipathy on his own” (79, emphases all mine). Yet

previously he had described the incident in more certain terms. When Claggart saw the soup, the narrator relates then, he paused,

he was about to ejaculate something hasty at the sailor, but checked himself, and pointing down to the streaming soup, playfully tapped him from behind with his rattan, saying in a low musical voice peculiar to him at times, ‘Handsomely done, my lad! And handsome is as handsome did it, too!’” And with that passed on. Not noted by Billy as not coming within his view was the involuntary smile, or rather grimace, that accompanied Claggart’s equivocal words. (72)

The narrator’s information from here could come from physical observation or interior knowledge. Does he know Claggart *meant* to say something or does he deduce it? Does he know Claggart meant the tap playfully or does he deduce it? He takes pains to point out that Billy did not note the grimace because he physically could not see it. And based on the other sailors’ responses, no one but the Dansker *would* interpret this as evidence of Claggart’s malice. In fact, so far as the narrative relates, the Dansker never even learns of this incident; it is meant to clarify that Billy is still unaware of Claggart’s apparent malice. This is all in keeping with *Billy Budd* as an inside narrative, a heretofore unknown account of the events leading to Claggart’s murder and Billy’s execution. The narrator is unequivocally a “real” person (in the context of the narrative) who has memories at least fifty years back. Yet the events of the story take place in 1797. The narrator never says so directly, but he could not have been present or even alive for the events on the *Bellipotent*; as he declares once, the times are known through “the grandfathers of us graybeards” (66).

What is clear is that Billy is supposed to be as naturally good as Claggart is supposed to be naturally depraved. This is the premise of the narrator’s argument throughout. Each plays out his part under the auspices of the State under Vere’s command, behaving the way he behaves. In a sense, they reflect “doing as one likes” since both are completely out of sync with the function of the State. According to the narrative, Billy does not understand basic social cues—he salutes

his old ship, *The Rights of Man*, unaware of the pun; he does not understand Claggart's sarcasm; he does not understand the intentions behind the afterguardsman's overtures—and Claggart understands social cues but ignores and manipulates them to follow his own depravity. The tragedy and justification the narrator presents is the necessity of the full moral and physical authority of the State as the manifestation of the culture's "best selves": those only naturally good or naturally depraved will be incapable of and inadequate for such dominion.

Billy Budd, as the narrator's narrative, acts as a not-uncomplicated exoneration of the State and of Billy Budd: although the State's organs of communication were incorrect in Budd's guilt, the State ultimately acted in the right. Of course, the overarching irony inherent in this is that although the official record of the events surrounding Claggart's murder is incorrect in detail, it is correct in its final acquiescence to the State's authority. Nevertheless, as I have already suggested, Melville works at cross-purposes with the narrator, who unwittingly provides a counter reading to his own accusation of Claggart and defense of the State. Melville's own knowledge and use of the *Somers* and Webster affairs, as well as the very direct and present implications of the forced guilt in the Haymarket trial, transform the narrator's account into an indictment not of Billy, Claggart, or even Vere, but of the very State they all surrender themselves to. Melville knew well how the Navy had placed officers sympathetic to Slidell Mackenzie on his court-martial, and permitted him to refrain from cross-examination. He knew well the gross inconsistencies in the earlier court of inquiry and how they had been explained away because Slidell Mackenzie was acting in the interests of the safety of the ship. It was the safety of the State that ensured Spencer's (and Billy's) execution. Melville also knew how reasonable doubt and circumstantial evidence had been overcome in the Webster and Haymarket

cases in the interests of determining someone responsible for tragic death; likewise Claggart is found circumstantially guilty by the narrator for his role in Billy's tragic death.

Melville demonstrates how the State is self-determinedly correct in all narrative instances, either the narrator's or the "authorized" account—whether Vere is uncompromisingly reasonable or mad (or both); Claggart "respectable and discreet...his fidelity...the greater because of his strong patriotic impulse" or naturally depraved (130); or Billy extremely depraved and "no Englishman, but one of those aliens adopting English cognomens whom the present extraordinary necessities of the service have caused to be admitted into it in considerable numbers" or an upright barbarian of unadulterated goodness (130).

In both narrative accounts of the events, knowledge is radically uncertain. In the authorized account, of course, certainty is confirmed, and so because of the "extraordinary necessities" of the State in a time of general rebellion and vulnerability. But lingering doubts of the affair, suggested by reference to fellow officers' later criticism of Vere "in the confidential talk of more than one or two gun rooms and cabins" and the ballad "Billy in the Darbies," necessitated the narrator's tale which subsumes all doubts under its own certainty wherein circumstantial evidence and moral certainty replace direct testimony, corroboration, and doubtless guilt (103). As Shaw argued in his Webster charge, "Crimes are secret.... It is therefore necessary to use all other modes of evidence besides that of direct testimony, provided such proofs may be relied on as leading to safe and satisfactory conclusions..." (Bemis 462, 470, emphasis mine). Similarly, Vere stressed, "Ay, there is a mystery... But what has a military court to do with it? ... "The prisoner's deed"—with that alone we have to do" (108). Vere is morally certain of Billy's essential innocence, Claggart's essential guilt, and the State's essential necessity to keep order by finding Billy legally guilty.

More and more, the narrator rather than any of the characters must come under more than passing judgment. No more can the reader presume his omniscience or implicitly trust his interpretation of events. So infrequent are his claims to inside knowledge that any that are made should be considered deductions based on observation. As I have demonstrated, Melville certainly intended for his readership to appreciate the narrator as a character, with memories and peculiarities to distinguish him. The narrator's "inside narrative" is his interpretation, however well informed, of the events on the ship. He cannot be completely condemned, either, because his interpretation is based on the kind of knowledge even the most immediate participant has, and no evidence clearly arises that demonstrates malicious intent through his narration. But in his good will toward Billy and Vere, the narrator has been unfair toward Claggart.

Thus, the character in most need of exoneration is not Billy, but Claggart. Given the ambiguities presented concerning the narrator's epistemology, a review of the case against Claggart is in order. In fact, there is only one *direct* claim against Claggart as weaving a conspiracy against Billy: "for it was from the master-at-arms that the petty persecutions heretofore adverted to had proceeded" (79). Yet before this statement, the narrator acknowledges that he cannot explain the master-at-arms and that he does not know of his moral failings, only that many men *felt* he was immoral and suspect. The narrator *suspects* that the master-at-arms has a group of "immediate subordinates, and compliant ones" (67), willing to do his bidding. But this is uncorroborated. The narrator simply suggests that Claggart's "place put various converging wires of underground influence under...[his] control, capable when astutely worked through his understrappers of operating to the mysterious discomfort, if nothing worse, of any of the sea commonalty" (67). All he has established is that Claggart probably has the capability of making life difficult for any sailor. This statement is made just after the narrator has spent pages

on the sailors' rumors of the master-at-arms, their "moral impression" of him. As I have already said, this line of reasoning is embodied in the Dansker who makes this connection explicit: he is the star witness. But he has no knowledge; he simply reasons based on his moral certainty of Claggart's guilt and his understanding of the *possibility* of Claggart's ability to conspiratorially hassle Billy. This very line of logic was used to condemn the Haymarket anarchists. Later, the Dansker's feelings are reflected in Vere whom the narrator suggests feels indignant at Claggart's indirection in speech, reference to the Great Mutiny, and accusation of Billy (92–94). The narrator admits/reasons that Vere felt irritation at Claggart's "patriotic zeal," which appeared "rather supersensible and strained" (94). Claggart also apparently reminds him "of a bandsman, a perjurous witness in a capital case before a court-martial ashore of which when a lieutenant he (Captain Vere) had been a member" (94).

Of course, it is everyone's moral certainty of Claggart's guilt that leads to his murder. Billy strikes him in anger at being *maliciously* accused of mutiny. However, it is unclear Claggart is being malicious insofar as he is falsely accusing Billy. He very well might have real cause for concern. Despite Billy's probable innocence, he acts suspiciously. He is a well loved sailor, but Claggart doubts his sincerity, "You have noted but his fair cheek. A mantrap may be under the ruddy-tipped daisies" (94). Is he lying? And from a different perspective than the story provides, Billy could look guilty. He does seem to yell sarcastically a farewell to the Rights of Man upon his impressment, which Claggart notes in his accusation. He has a suspicious meeting with an afterguardsman who acknowledges him with a knowing nod that Billy does not dispute. Most suspiciously, we never learn precisely what sparks Claggart's sudden accusation of Billy. The narrator claims that "the monomania in the man—if *that indeed it were*—as *involuntarily disclosed* by starts in the *manifestations* detailed...was eating its way deeper and deeper in him.

Something decisive *must* come of it” (90, emphases mine). The narrator essentially demonstrates here that he *reasons* all of this.

In fact, the narrator does not let us know what may have caused his concern: “After the mysterious interview in the forechains...nothing especially germane to the story occurred until the events now about to be narrated” (90). The *Bellipotent* spies an enemy ship and gives chase; these events are narrated in little detail. After the pursuit, Claggart approaches Vere to accuse Billy. Why just after the chase? What happened that we do not learn? The narrator does not tell us. He also does not tell us exactly what Claggart says at the beginning of his accusation, but gives us his own interpretive summary:

What he said...was to the effect following, if not altogether in these words...that during the chase and preparations for the possible encounter he had seen enough to convince him that at least one sailor aboard was a dangerous character in a ship mustering some who not only had taken a guilty part in the late serious troubles, but others also who...had entered His Majesty’s service under another form than enlistment. (92)

The most immediate reason for Claggart’s charge against Billy is completely left out of the narrative, which instead focuses on all those events whereby Claggart *might* have demonstrated conspiratorial antagonism toward Billy. But Claggart is dead serious about his allegations. When Vere threatens him with hanging for perjury, the master-at-arms perseveres without pause. Of course, the foundation of his formal charge against Billy comes from circumstantial evidence, “which collectively, if credited, led to presumptions mortally inculcating Budd, “and for some of these averments...substantiating proof was not far” (96).

And so while the narrator is laying out a case against Claggart and in exoneration of Vere and Billy, he simultaneously demonstrates how his very selection of the events implicates everyone involved. Each character (even the Dansker) is guilty to some degree, just as he is innocent to some degree. Each finds one of the others at fault through moral certainty and

circumstantial evidence. Further, their actions are ultimately prompted by the State. Claggart apparently fears mutiny from Billy; Billy strikes Claggart in anger at the accusation because he has “‘eaten the King’s bread and...[is] true to the King’” (106); and Vere has Billy hanged for safeguard of the State’s authority on the ship. Despite the “best interests” of the State being at the heart of the affair, every one of the main characters reaches a tragic end. In their attempts to honor the State, they are only sacrificed to its greatest need, authority: the final right to authoring. Melville critiques the State through his narrative, making it a tragic *and* ironic testament of acceptance *and* resistance. Melville’s entrenched warning is against quiet acquiescence to the State. Characters throughout understand the moral failing of the State’s legal and martial mechanisms. Billy does not say anything about the afterguardsman and allows Vere to speak for him at his trial. Vere acts as an organ of the State, even as he knows Billy is innocent. The Dansker can make Billy understand the animosity he interprets in Claggart, but chooses to allow Billy to continue making mistakes apparently because “years, and those experiences which befall certain shrewder men subordinated lifelong to the will of superiors...had developed in the Dansker...[a] pithy guarded cynicism...” (71). Even the chaplain visiting Billy, who has “been made acquainted with the young sailor’s essential innocence,” does not lift a finger “to avert the doom of such a martyr to martial discipline” (121).

Although he knows Billy’s execution is wrong, he makes no action because he believes it will be

as idle as invoking the desert...[and] also...an audacious transgression of the bounds of his function, one as exactly prescribed to him by military law as that of...any other naval officer. Bluntly put, a chaplain is the minister of the Prince of Peace serving in the host of the God of War—Mars. As such, he is as incongruous as a musket would be on the alter at Christmas. Why, then, is he there? Because he indirectly subserves the purpose attested by the cannon, because too he lends the sanction of the religion of the meek to that which practically is the abrogation of everything but brute Force. (122)

The narrator's general purpose through these acquiescences is to highlight the sometime tragedy of, but always need for, authority. Indeed, his comment in describing the chaplain is the nearest he gets to critique of the State. It seems to be an instance in which Melville's voice most clearly comes through.

While most of Melville's narrative subversion occurs within the direct depiction of events, many of the apparently tangential narrative moments provide an even more obvious subversion, as evidenced above with the chaplain. Another instance occurs in the digressions concerning the surgeon's doubt of Vere's sanity reveal more than even those critics who have noted the force of an officer's immediate doubt of his captain usually admit. The surgeon is called in after Claggart has been struck dead for confirmation. The surgeon overhears a number of strange exclamations by Vere, and the narrator provides an extensive view into his thoughts. In fact, more information is given about the surgeon's interior thoughts than any other character.⁵¹ He is sent away to call up a drumhead court, and in that moment has the entire affair in his control. He can question Vere and to what he knows military policy calls for, "The thing to do...was to place Billy Budd in confinement, and in a way dictated by usage, and postpone further action in so extraordinary a case to such time as they should rejoin the squadron, and then refer it to the admiral" (101). The surgeon's further concern lies with his captain whose "unwonted agitation...and...excited exclamations, so at variance with his normal manner" he recalled (102). Full of righteous doubt, the surgeon does nothing because the captain's madness

is not so susceptible of proof. What then can the surgeon do? No more trying situation is conceivable than that of an officer subordinate under a captain whom he suspects to be not mad, indeed, but yet not quite unaffected in his intellects. To argue his order to him would be insolence. To resist him would be mutiny.

⁵¹ I do not wish particularly to make the argument here that the narrator is some descendent (grandson?) of the surgeon, but the idea is worth pursuing—especially considering the strange and sudden suicide of the *Somers* surgeon the evening before Slidell Mackenzie's final exoneration.

In obedience to Captain Vere, he communicated what had happened...saying nothing as to the captain's state. They fully shared his own surprise and concern. Like him, too, they seemed to think that such a matter should be referred to the admiral.

So the State defeats itself despite its own best efforts to maintain liberty under order. While legal mechanisms are in place to prevent just such situations as Vere creates, the final need for complete submission to the State for its own survival circumvents these internal self-corrections. Ideology wins out over itself.

Melville's final and most damning denunciation of such passivity happens in the preantepenultimate chapter. In every case before, some person in official function of the State—the Dansker, Captain Vere, the surgeon, the first lieutenant, the chaplain—somehow contributed to the failure to stop an essential injustice. In fact, it is their division into various functions that enables this failure. But the supremacy of the State is confirmed after Billy's unjust execution. The entire ship is silent, but some sound suddenly arises from the mass of sailors, "Being inarticulate, it was dubious in significance further than it seemed to indicate some capricious revulsion of thought or feeling such as mobs ashore are liable to... But ere the murmur had time to wax into clamor it was met by a strategic command..." (126). Another lost opportunity arises when Billy's body is slipped into the sea, when "a second strange human murmur was heard, blended now with another inarticulate sound proceeding from certain larger seafowl..." (127).

The superstitious sailors are inspired by their unity with nature, whereby

an uncertain movement began among them, in which some encroachment was made. It was tolerated but for a moment. For suddenly the drum beat to quarters, which familiar sound happening at least twice every day, had upon the present occasion a signal peremptoriness in it. True martial discipline long continued superinduces in average man a sort of impulse whose operation at the official word of command much resembles in its promptitude the effect of an instinct.

The drumbeat dissolved the multitude... (127)

The possibility for solidarity in revolt is ended not through overt force and coercion, but through functional division and sheer habit of discipline; in short, not from without but within. Melville's conclusion with this dissipated revolt seems to echo his own acquiescence to the ultimate power of the State, evidenced even further by the official and unofficial testaments to the affair, which comprise the last two chapters. In his last years, Melville turns to the problem of individual memory and its ultimate management by official history, reflecting through *Billy Budd* and his last books of poetry how time and habitual discipline wear away at bright, natural liberty, closing "Youth's sweet-scented manuscript" like a flown nightingale—the "composer of his own song"—only to be replaced by an official history that exchanges individual identity for the sake of the State's authority.

CHAPTER 3
WORSE THAN ANY ENEMY:
CONSCRIPTION, MUTINY, AND THE PROBLEM OF
CLAGGART AND VERE IN *BILLY BUDD* ADAPTATIONS

The kind of judgment I ask of you is only this, Wyatt: that you recognize your function in this ship.

Captain Vere in Lois O. Coxe and Robert Chapman's *Billy Budd*

In 1948, F. Barron Freeman published his edition of *Billy Budd*, almost twenty-five years after Raymond Weaver published his edition of the maligned manuscript. Freeman's edition was a significant event for the academic world considering its substantial critical intervention on the last novel by a newly canonized author. Consequently, its appearance touched off a firestorm of renarrativizations of Melville's work for decades. At Princeton, two English instructors—Louis O. Coxe and Robert Chapman—immediately began work on a dramatic adaptation of the work, finishing their play (*Uniform of Flesh*) by the end of the year while they sought a Broadway production for it. Chapman convinced a wartime friend, Norris Houghton, to direct it, and Houghton agreed, obtaining a limited run at a small theatre on East Seventy-Fifth Street in New York City. At the same time, across the Atlantic, one of Britain's most distinguished new composers (Benjamin Britten, fresh off conducting the English Opera Group in his acclaimed arrangement of *The Beggar's Opera* at the May 1948 Holland Festival, along with his partner, the tenor Peter Pears, in the role of Macheath) and one of its most revered older writers (E. M. Forster, fresh off his 1947 lecture series at Cambridge on his *Aspects of the Novel*, where he discussed *Moby-Dick* and *Billy Budd*) met at Britten, Pears, and Eric Crozier's inaugural summer Aldeburgh Festival and decided to write an opera together. In January 1949, as the Coxe–Chapman play excited noted New York critic Brooks Atkinson, the four men (Britten, Forster,

Crozier, and Pears) decided to adapt *Billy Budd*. The success of both of these ventures would directly lead to numerous television productions, a major Hollywood film, a rock musical, and several radio productions.

Of these and other numerous renarrativizations, the Coxe–Chapman play and Britten’s opera remain the works of greatest influence. Both were significant milestones, not only for their creators, but for their genres, and for narrativizations of *Billy Budd* in general. Houghton’s successful production of *Billy Budd*, which ran successfully on Broadway in 1951 mainly due to Atkinson’s glowing reviews, helped spur the burgeoning Off-Broadway movement (also championed by Atkinson). Britten’s opera was a return to success for the aging, inactive Forster, and it solidified Britten’s role as (arguably) the greatest of British opera composers, while becoming an almost-instant classic of the repertoire. Most important for this discussion, the two works introduced the tenor of subsequent renarrativizations and interpretations of *Billy Budd* as an abstract, culturally-received story.

Despite being the titular character, Billy Budd changes little across the various narratives that have carried his name; primarily due to the play and opera, Claggart and Vere have been the centers of narrative shifts in representations of the Billy Budd events, but those shifts have concurrently featured a greater attention to the specific political context of Melville’s novel. These shifts in focus occur through additions and deletions to narrative material, strategic modifications in narrational activity, and contextual variations in narrative drive spurred on by virtue of (1) rhetorical choices reflecting creative interpretations of Melville’s text and (2) the form and genre of representation. Due to the *quo modo* in which they occur, the adaptations seem to relieve Melville’s story of its authorial context (i.e. the *Somers* affair, the Parkman murder, the Haymarket affair) while yet revealing how those contextual incidents still echo through the

narrative focus shifts. Thus, the discursive noise created by the *Somers*, Parkman, and Haymarket events (corresponding respectively to martial law anxiety, criminal intent, and exploitation of labor discourses)—along with the discursive constraints and freedoms generated by the *quo modo* of the renarrativization narrative shifts—illustrates how the central concerns of *Billy Budd* adaptations are the twin problem of Claggart and Vere’s motivations and relationship to each other. What was once background, extraneous information to the novel emerges with substantial interpretive importance due to necessary demands of medium and genre. The narrative noise focuses the renarrativizations on an anarchist critique of authority, emphasizing and strengthening Melville’s much more understated subversion of his own narrator who attempts to exonerate Vere and the State and turn Billy and Claggart into moral caricatures.

“Pray for those who must make choices”: The Coxe–Chapman Play

One of the ironies of the fact that Coxe and Chapman’s play and Britten’s opera have so heavily inclined interpretations of the Billy Budd story toward the sociopolitical context of Melville’s setting for the novel is that both works take unrealistic approaches to the tale. As Coxe and Chapman wrote in their notes on the play of their decision to adapt *Billy Budd*, “it may have been the desire to find a theme and action that was inherently poetic and non-realistic. Above all, one idea or purpose seems clear: that we saw in *Billy Budd* a morality play” (88). Yet their search for a non-realistic morality play made sense, as they put it, “for two veterans of a war, a depression, and the moving cold front” (88); that is to say, ironically it made sense for reality. Coxe and Chapman’s approach takes great umbrage at the mid-century impulse to psychoanalyze and contextualize evil, which presumably might excuse social ill rather than solve it. “However hard one may try,” they write, “Freud will turn up and all one’s efforts will post off to the clinic and the analyst’s couch to work out there a modern salvation” (88–89). Rather, the

two men hoped to show those critics who “say...that such a phenomenon as Claggart could never appear in our world with all we know of the psyche and the ego....[that we] are certain that neither a Billy nor a Claggart ever was or could be, and...that the same is true of an Oedipus. But all these personae are true as symbol, figuring as they do certain permanent attitudes, qualities, moral images” (89). But in their attempt to show truths of human nature, Coxe and Chapman ultimately reveal truths of human society.

The play is organized into three acts. The first act primarily shows Claggart’s bullying a sick maintopman (Jackson) to go aloft, after which he falls, dies, and is buried. During this time, the sailors try to challenge Claggart, and Vere intervenes to keep order. Billy talks with Claggart, after which Claggart reveals his hatred for Billy to Squeak and the Dansker, and forces Squeak to set up Billy for minor infractions. The second act depicts the men while chasing a French ship, after which Ratcliffe recommends Billy for promotion. Vere agrees, but Claggart objects. For past wrongs and for Jackson’s death, another maintopman (Jenkins) tries to stab Claggart at night, but Billy prevents it. Both Vere and Wyatt (an officer) note that Jenkins and Billy are out, but do not press the matter. Claggart gets Squeak to tempt Billy into mutiny, and Billy strongly rejects his advances. Claggart makes his accusation to the captain, who calls Billy in, whereupon Billy strikes and kills Claggart. The third act is Billy’s trial, conviction, and execution. Upon waiting for death, Vere calls Billy to his cabin and speaks with him. The next morning, Billy is hanged despite his mates’ objections and brief attempts to mutiny.

In their attempt to turn Claggart into a kind of unrealistic Satan, Coxe and Chapman emphasize an anarchist critique of labor exploitation by heightening the threat of mutiny on board through an emphasis on the hatred of the men for Claggart, even showing them trying to

kill him.⁵² Instead of a morality play, then, they vividly recall the 1797 setting of the novel, and further stress the menace of rebellion, which is only mentioned in the novel insofar as it aids certain plot points. In turn, Coxe and Chapman are somewhat forced, by the contemporary demands of Broadway theatre, to more elaborately involve Vere in the conflict between the sailors and Claggart. In the opening scene of the play, Claggart orders the maintopman Jackson to go up to his post, despite given leave by his petty officer and despite his evident and debilitating sickness. As sure as Jackson predicts, he falls by the end of the scene, greatly angering several of the men (particularly Jenkins) who make a rush at Claggart with knives. At this point, Vere steps in and angrily reminds them, “This is a wartime cruise, and this vessel sails under the Articles of war. Volunteer or ’pressed man, veteran seaman or recruit, you are no longer citizens, but sailors: a crew that I shall work into a weapon. One...spurt of rebel temper from any man in this ship, high or low, I will pay out in coin you know of” (24). This is the audience’s first introduction to both Claggart and Vere. Unlike Melville’s novel, Claggart and Vere appear on deck together, linked in authoritative function. Claggart’s inexplicable personal malevolence instead becomes a sign of capricious, vicious dictatorial rule.

This dual entrance is wholly appropriate to the historical context, but vastly different than its source novel, in which Vere and Claggart are introduced separately by narration. Vere, “though practical enough,” is described as separate from the men and even his other officers, a captain who “upon occasion would at times betray a certain dreaminess of mood. Standing alone on the weather side of the quarter-deck, one hand holding by the rigging, he would absently gaze off at the blank sea” (Melville, *Billy Budd* 60). This is Melville’s ironic image of one of the Arnoldian “best selves” of human nature. And Claggart, as I noted in the previous chapter, is

⁵² Claggart is almost cartoonish in his evil. In a number of scenes, he tells the Dansker directly that he plans on killing Billy: “I can destroy him, too, if I choose it!” (56). For whatever reason, the Dansker doesn’t do anything about it.

described by the narrator through gossip, rumor, and supposition, which the narrator even feels “some scruple in stating,” although he does so anyway since it lends “color to something for the truth whereof I do not vouch” (66). Melville’s narrator, as he admits, is using Claggart for a narrative purpose—in this case, suggesting that the only reason discipline might be warped is if an unusually and irreparably evil person bent it so. Melville’s point, as I argued already, is to use the novel as a medium—as a physical work as well as a mode of representation—to permit and encourage reader ambiguity regarding Vere and Claggart. As much of an “inside narrative” as the narrator pretends the work is, Melville demonstrates how the narrator’s account leaves questions unanswered, and instead raises more. The novel is an exercise in demonstrating the power of the narrator’s superior epistemological position with regard to the events and the ultimate unknowability of certain historical events. In a play, however, characterization is being depicted in front of the audience. While the audience obviously still interprets the events unfolding, it gets to use its own eyes and ears to do that interpretation; it is interpretation of sensory data, rather than interpretation of interpretation. One need not wonder if Vere suspects seditious activity on board: he has witnessed and silenced it on his first appearance. Relatively minor demands of the dramatic form introduce apparently small discursive disturbances but effect large-scale anarchist critiques through the narrative.

Coxe and Chapman’s attempts to make Claggart so unremittingly evil in contrast to Billy’s unrelentingly ignorant goodness even further highlight the political undertones of the story. Their attempt to make an abstract, timeless play introduces enough smaller discursive perturbations that the play introduces further specific political undertones to the Story in general. In only the second scene of the play, after Jackson has fallen and died and they have buried him at sea, Billy walks up to Claggart to talk with him. Claggart responds to Billy’s polite small-talk

about the calm sea, “The sea’s deceitful, boy: calm above, and underneath, a world of gliding monsters preying on their fellows. Murderers, all of them” (30). Claggart very quickly, directly, and poetically reveals his misanthropic mania, and Billy’s response (“I’d like to know about such things, as you do, sir”) likewise reveals his complete ignorance of evil. Claggart cannot believe at first, of course, that Billy is so innocent as to be completely unafraid of him, but he acquiesces, noting, “you’ll learn to fear me like the rest. Young you are, and scarcely used to the fit of your man’s flesh” (31). Claggart’s quip is telling of the recurring anxiety over martial law owing to the demand for standing impressment of merchant sailors into an already harsh military service; in much the way Billy was impressed into military duty not of his choosing, so was he ’pressed into living.

Claggart’s comment, apparently only a simple derogatory comment against Billy in a longer exchange between them, actually resonates with the original title of Coxe and Chapman’s play: *Uniform of Flesh*. The title was rejected by Norris Houghton, along with the blank verse the work was originally written in, but the theme was retained in the final script. Besides Claggart’s conspicuous use of it, Vere recalls the very same metaphor in the climactic drumhead court scene, in his final speech to his officers:

VERE. The kind of judgment I ask of you is only this, Wyatt: that you recognize your function in this ship. I believe you know it quite as well as we, yet you rebel. Can’t you see that you must first strip off the uniform you wear, and after that your flesh, before you can escape the case at issue here? Decide you must, Wyatt. Oh you may be excused and wash your hands of it, but someone must decide. (77)

Given Coxe and Chapman’s words about their own work, the *Uniform of Flesh* title suggests that the playwrights are using the military as a general allegory for mankind. But Vere’s desperation shows through in this scene as he confronts Wyatt’s idealism, and his use of the flesh-as-uniform comparison seems more of a reason to wash his own hands of the deed by connecting his

military duty with his duty as a human being in obeying law. Vere is claiming that they must decide simply because someone will decide; that they can no more step out of their uniforms than they can their flesh; that they are all implicated in Billy's condemnation due to the nature of humanity, and the way men such as they hold mortal influence over other individuals. As lofty as this seems, though, in effect Vere uses the notion of the man-of-war as a microcosm of the world as a self-justification for the very real responsibilities he cannot accept.

Vere's obsession with his own role in Billy's death resounds throughout the play, and in fact threatens to pull the entire narrative in to its own vortex—yet another example of complexity at work in intersecting discourses. Indeed, Vere's last words to Billy in the play are, "And when you are on the mainyard, think of me, and pray for those who must make choices" (82). This is an almost revoltingly self-centered thing to say to a condemned man, particularly one who is morally innocent. Even in the second scene of the play, after he encounters the men trying to attack Claggart, Vere talks with his first officer, Seymour, about the nature of their role in keeping law and order. He knows Claggart sent Jackson up the mast sick, and wishes aloud, "Would to God I could take this power of mine and break him now, smash all the laws to powder and be a man again" (35). Following this extreme of "natural liberty"—or as Matthew Arnold put it, "doing as one likes"—Seymour's response is simply Rousseau's definition of "civil liberty," the obedience to a law which we prescribe to ourselves: "We must serve the law, sir, or give up the right and privilege of service. It's how we live" (35). But as his wish for "natural liberty" suggests, Vere is challenging the Enlightenment notion of civil liberty. Coxe and Chapman's abstract, philosophical dialogue, reminiscent of Greek and Shakespearean tragedy, strengthens the implicit anarchist critique of Melville's novel by forcing verbalization of Vere's internal struggles. He fires back at Seymour, defiantly hopeful, "No man can defy the code we

live by and not be broken by it" (35). But this is his question more than his statement, and his first officer senses this. Seymour reminds him that he as captain *is* the law. This is Vere's very problem, left unarticulated in Melville's novel: he is the law, but he has not fully accepted it. "Keep an order we cannot understand," he replies, "That's true. The world demands it: demands that at the back of every peace-maker there be the gun, the gallows and the gaol. I talk of justice, and would turn the law gentle for those who serve here; but a Claggart stands in my shadow, for I need him" (35). Vere acquiesces here, in the first scene of his appearance, to this notion that every ship-of-state needs a Claggart in its shadow. When forced into testing that axiom upon the officers' pleas to acquit Billy at his trial, Vere demands that they all agree with him that subjugation and unflinching compliance to the law (as opposed to justice) is the only way to maintain order.

That such submission is necessary is far from clear. Vere's reasoning is as specious as it is wanting. Vere has heretofore struggled with his role as captain, hoping for a way out of the unnecessarily violent oppression it represents. As he wonders after Billy strikes Claggart, "Struck dead by the Angel of God...and I must judge the Angel. Can I save him? Have I that choice?" (63). In Melville's novel, Vere famously states after Claggart's death, "Struck dead by an angel of God! Yet the angel must hang!" (101). Coxe and Chapman, however, emphasize and depict, rather than imply, Vere's struggle with his own role, but in a way that reveals his selfishness and thus the very selfishness of the State.

Despite his apparent certainty during the trial, Vere vacillates over his condemnation of Billy. Just before the court is called, Vere discusses the situation with Seymour, his first officer. Seymour objects to the possibility that Billy might have to hang for his actions since Claggart

had well-known designs on Billy. Vere disagrees, citing that “Claggart was authority” (65). The two argue:

SEYMOUR. Then authority’s an evil!

VERE. It often is. But it commands, and no man is its equal, not Billy, not I. It will strike us down, and rightly, if we resist it.

SEYMOUR. Rightly! What power gives evil its authority? We should thank God the man’s dead, and the world rid of that particular devil.

VERE: Our life has ways to hedge its evil in. No one must go above them; even innocents. Laws of one kind or other shape our course from birth to death. These are the laws pronouncing Billy’s guilt; Admiralty codes are merely shadows of them.

SEYMOUR. That’s tyranny, not law, forcing conformity to wrongs, giving the victory to the devil himself!

VERE. I thought so once. But without this lawful tyranny, what should we have but worse tyranny of anarchy and chaos? (65)

Vere’s submission to the law stems from fear of a false binary: either society is governed by law, howsoever tyrannical, or it is thrown into “anarchy” (presumably violent disorder) and chaos. But this binary is only a failure of imagination, not iron-clad logic; he readily admits that he believes life is *always* shaped by “laws of one kind or other” (65). Vere simply cannot conceive of a world without law, even tyrannical law. This obedience to Law blinds him to the fact that life does not always have a way of hedging evil in.

During the trial, Vere passes on his fear to his officers, telling them, “Your clemency *would be* accounted fear, and they *would say* we flinch from practicing a lawful rigor *lest* new outbreaks be provoked. What shame to us! And what a deadly blow to discipline!” (Coxe and Chapman 73, emphasis mine). Vere’s true colors come out in his language here, for as I emphasized in the quote, his decisions are based on his judgments on how the men *might act if* they are thinking what he *believes* they *might* be thinking. This is true in Melville’s novel, as well, of course. Melville’s depiction of the events during the court’s recess reflect the very problem Vere struggles with even more explicitly in Coxe and Chapman’s play. As Melville’s Vere says of the other sailors when asked if Billy can be convicted with a mitigated penalty,

“Even could you explain to them—which our official position forbids—they, long molded by arbitrary discipline, have not that kind of intelligent responsiveness that might qualify them to comprehend or discriminate” (Melville, *Billy Budd* 112). Vere makes plain here that the very problem with submission to unconditional State authority *is* submission to unconditional State authority. Vere knows that *justice* demands Billy be let go, but he reasons that *law* must have him condemned to death. As Vere’s response to the sailing master reveals, the only reason justice cannot be given is due to the longevity of law’s practice. Vere decides that the officers must keep harsh martial order simply because the sailors are used to harsh martial order. In the play, mutinous resentment is certainly brewing against Claggart, and such resentment would likely have been completely quelled with his death. Indeed, Vere and the other officers recognize that Claggart abuses his position, so it makes sense the men would rise up against him. They are thrilled when it is announced that Billy killed him:

JENKINS. Billy! Did you, boy?

VOICE. Good lad!

VOICE. Serves him proper!

KINCAID. Hi, Billy! Hurrah! (Coxe and Chapman, *Billy Budd* 85)

And as Seymour, Wyatt, and Ratcliffe feared and predicted, the men try to rise up when Billy’s sentence is announced. But the reader of Melville’s novel knows much, much less about the ship’s atmosphere. One must take Vere’s word. The forced articulation in the drama illustrates how complexity is introduced through media demands. In this case, the play draws anarchist attention to Vere’s power of representation in the novel.

In effect, Coxe and Chapman’s play reveals the validity of the men’s decision on board to rid the ship of Claggart and save Billy: both are actions Vere knows to be just, yet both are actions Vere cannot take due to his function as a State authority. And the very reason Vere must maintain such harsh martial order is due to the nature of harsh martial order: the men only know

the State as relentlessly stentorian and can only encounter it as such. In Melville's novel, this particular subtext is buried beneath the complicated discursive tug-of-war occurring among Melville, the narrator, and the many men's thoughts, words, and actions represented by that narrator. But in the medium of theatre, the audience is no longer "burdened" with such textual ambiguity. Rather, the play provides a surfeit of determination by revealing the events directly to the audience through action and words on stage.

One of the most interesting aspects of the Coxe and Chapman play's *de facto* focus on the logic of harsh martial rule is the way it develops an anarchist critique of how the State justifies its treatment of the very citizens it purports to protect and defend. As I argued at the end of the previous chapter, Melville's novel uses an unreliable narrator to hint at the State's need for complete knowledge and authorial control and how it acquits itself of all wrongdoing when it fails to maintain either. Coxe and Chapman's play more explicitly suggests that Vere is struggling with his own role as the figurehead of the State, and in his final self-justification of his position, when he is coercing the court to accept his rationalization of their duty, Vere reveals the crux of the problem: intention. Because Vere knows Billy should be freed, he must direct the court's attention in a way that justifies the State's actions so that the State is not wrong. The only way to do this is to limit the scope of the State's gaze and judge based on that scope. Instead of focusing on intention, Vere forces the court's attention on context-less action. The extended court scene then recalls Shaw's attention to intention in the Webster case, which intensifies that legal discourse and invites anarchist critique of the drumhead court's power and motives of representation.

Thus, when Seymour, Wyatt, and Ratcliffe argue that they cannot condemn Billy's action because he was "answering with his arm... The motive was clearly justified," Vere responds,

“Aye, but was the act?” (64). Nevertheless, the three officers decide to base their acquittal on Billy’s intentions:

RATCLIFFE. You don’t hang a man for that, for speaking the only way he could.

WYATT. If you condemn him, it’s the same thing as condoning the apparent

lie...[Claggart] clearly told.... The boy is clearly innocent, struck him in self-defense.

RATCLIFFE. Aye. I’m ready to acquit him now.

SEYMOUR. Good. Then we can reach a verdict at once. (71)

Vere intervenes, however. Previously the witness, he then stays the court’s actions, forcing Seymour to wonder “if you speak now as our commanding officer or as a private man” (72). Vere reminds them, “I summoned this court, and I must review its findings and approve them before passing them on to the Admiralty” (72). Betraying how unusual it would be for the captain to contradict the court’s findings, Seymour replies, “Aye, sir, that is your right,” to which Vere feels compelled to equivocate rhetorically: “No right. Which of us here has rights? It is my duty, and I must perform it” (72). He pleads inevitability over which he has no control. Despite having a verdict, which Seymour again protests, Vere presses on, reminding them, “The Admiralty has its code. Do you suppose it cares who Budd is? Who you and I are?” (72). The other officers are nonplussed. Wyatt reminds Vere that he even says Budd is innocent, but Vere vacillates: “In intent, Wyatt, in intent” (74). Wyatt is aghast: “Does that count for nothing? His whole attitude, his motive, count for nothing?” (75). Once again, Vere invokes the Admiralty’s code to hide behind, “Tell me whether or not in our positions we dare let our consciences take precedence of the code that makes us officers and calls this case to trial” (77).

The court came to their unmistakable conclusion based on their personal knowledge of the situation, particularly Billy and Claggart’s obvious intentions. Nevertheless, a greater threat raises its head, as Vere suggests. The “brute facts” of the Nore and Spithead, which “must not come again” (72). Over all things—justice, truth, even actual legitimacy—the State (in this case,

through Vere) must maintain its “legitimate” supremacy and authority, and it is under this self-imposed necessity that Billy is crushed. By persuading the other officers of their necessary, impersonal, and inevitable roles in the machine of the State, Vere manages to wash his hands of his own involvement by acting as an intermediary between the State and the martial court, both of whom condemn Billy. But in doing so, Coxe and Chapman’s Vere also reveals how the State only functions through the actions (and inactions) of particular people in particular roles, just as Melville demonstrates by depicting the failure of various sailors and officers to stop Vere’s wrong-headed conviction and execution of Billy. The State can only persist as long as people surrender their selves to its determination and decide not to “dare let...[their] consciences take precedence of the code...” (77). This complete surrender to the State is encapsulated well in Vere’s final speech to the court: “We are the law; law orders us to act, and shows us how” (77). This statement also indicates how the play transforms the novel into a more explicit anarchist critique: the dramatic form orders us to act, and shows the audience what was left implied before.

“I doubt that it’s ignorance which motivates their actions”: The Ustinov Film

William Russo and Jan Merlin write appropriately in their exhaustive, informal survey of *Billy Budd* adaptations that “no property resists the ultimate immortality that the big screen may bestow” (91). However limited this statement may be to the present-day, it rings indelibly true for that time. Of course, it was anything but certain that a novel like *Billy Budd* would ever be made into a Hollywood production. Nevertheless, a coincidence of historical events ensured not only its production, but one fast-tracked with some of the most high-profile talent at the time. The film version of *Billy Budd* further complicated culturally received notions of the Billy Budd events by maintaining a systematically detached filmic discourse of the story while providing more focus on details of the events between Claggart, Vere, and Billy. This focus further

complicates Vere's role in the affair, but also humanizes Claggart and Billy while accentuating the events' strained sociopolitical situation even more. Since choices in the film's production were broadly influenced by the film's function in the market, I will spend some time on the production context. As with the play, demands of the filmic form, particularly due to its profit function in society, ensure an even further intensification of the anarchist critique implied in Melville and made more explicit in the Coxe–Chapman play. So after an introduction to the film's context, and an explicatory investigation of the opening scenes of the film, I will discuss the effects on Billy, Claggart, and Vere in turn.

Despite its impression on subsequent renarrativizations of *Billy Budd*, the Coxe–Chapman play might have been lost to history had it only survived through theatrical productions and print, but its production into a major Hollywood film ensured its long-standing influence on the general cultural reception of *Billy Budd*. Nevertheless, director Peter Ustinov's vision for the film differed radically from his source script, even as he preserved much of the language of most scenes. Thus, in a way reflective of complexity theory, a number of smaller, local discursive disturbances between the play and Ustinov's film account for critical shifts in the narrative events.

Again, a Hollywood film version of *Billy Budd* did not need to happen inevitably; it is difficult to imagine it getting produced today, for instance. But during the 1950s, from the opening of the Coxe and Chapman play off Broadway, through its run there and then in various academic and community theatres around the country, "the play was always in production somewhere" (Russo and Merlin 47). During that time, the show's Broadway producers were trying to sell an option for the play to various studios, even though Melville's story was in the public domain (92). Ostensibly, Paramount was working on a production of the work in 1953,

when Warner Brothers announced a major production of *Moby-Dick* starring Gregory Peck (94). This was their third film adaptation of Melville's great work: the first two starred celebrated stage and early-film star John Barrymore in the role of Ahab, while the third would star Peck in the role, directed by John Huston. The film finally saw release in 1956, at which time Warner Brothers had already done fairly well with sea tales, including 1955's *Mister Roberts*, whose great Broadway success had inspired Coxe and Chapman to see *Billy Budd* through production. Huston hoped to do a film of Melville's *Typee* right after. The continuing success in Hollywood of sea pictures (Columbia released the successful *Caine Mutiny* in 1954 and *Damn the Defiant!* in 1962, while Twentieth Century Fox released *South Pacific* in 1958 and *Sink the Bismarck!* in 1960), and now even Melville pictures, encouraged an option war for a *Billy Budd* picture.⁵³ To add to the luster of a new Melville sea picture, in 1961 MGM was producing *Mutiny on the Bounty* with Marlon Brando, a sure-fire success. Many presumed Warner Brothers would end up with the much-desired rights.

In the mean time, Paramount's announced *Billy Budd* production had fallen through. By 1956, the year of Warners' *Moby-Dick* release, Twentieth Century Fox had the rights to the Coxe–Chapman play, but they lapsed and were picked up by United Artists (Russo and Merlin 94).⁵⁴ In any case, presumably because United Artists workhorse and former Allied Artists producer Walter Mirisch was then busy as president of the Screen Producers' Guild, the option to the *Billy Budd* play found its way from United Artists to Allied Artists (although United Artists

⁵³ Studios were even hiring the same directors to film obviously competing pictures. Lewis Gilbert directed both Columbia's *Sink the Bismarck!* (1960) and Fox's *Damn the Defiant!* (1962).

⁵⁴ At the time, Walter Mirisch, who had started as an assistant for the head of the Poverty Row company Monogram, had convinced his boss to create a sub-company (Allied Artists) to make bigger pictures and the parent company had merged with its erstwhile subsidiary. By 1956, Mirisch had left Allied Artists and with his brothers (Marvin and Harold) formed the Mirisch Company, signing a deal to release films through United Artists, which by the 1950s was primarily a financing venture headed by Arthur Krim and Robert Benjamin who backed artistic directors such as John Huston, Billy Wilder, and Otto Preminger, many of whom also had distribution and production relationships with the Mirisch brothers (Mirisch 52, 64).

still distributed the film in France). Allied Artists chose Peter Ustinov for their endeavor, who had acted to great acclaim in Stanley Kubrick's 1960 *Spartacus* (winning an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor) and who had directed the 1961 film version of his successful, Tony-Award-nominated play *Romanoff and Juliet*.

Unlike Coxe and Chapman who boasted their poetic, unrealistic version, Ustinov had long wanted to craft a "near-realistic historical picture" (Thomas 145), and he used the significant budget granted him to compete with the major studios of Hollywood to shape precisely that. This rhetorical move, encouraged by market forces, defamiliarizes the poetic language of the play and deepens the anarchist critique it had already developed from the novel. Such was the demand for verisimilitude that the film's executive producer, A. Ronald Lubin, secured for exterior shooting off the coast of Spain the *HMS Victory* (Russo and Merlin 96–97), Nelson's flagship at the Battle of Trafalgar where he died in 1805, the very ship Melville had visited in awe in 1849 and which also drew E. M. Forster and Eric Crozier exactly one hundred years later while they wrote the libretto for Britten's *Billy Budd* (Cooke, "Britten's *Billy Budd*" 39).

"You know too much, too well": The Opening Credits and Conscription Scenes

Ustinov's claim to verisimilitude is certainly the strongest of all *Billy Budd* adaptations, and as I have already indicated it significantly reinforces the anarchist critique from Coxe and Chapman's play, from which the film script was derived. Further, Ustinov's interpretation of Vere, Claggart, and Billy is focused through the filmic discourse that approach entails and is additionally transformed by Ustinov and DeWitt Bodeen's script, which amplifies the play's only slight questioning of Billy's intent and its accidental attention to the problems of martial law. Each of these rhetorical choices is informed by the market considerations determined by the

competitive studio atmosphere of the 1950s, particularly through the small studios' attempts to compete realistically with the major studios of the Golden Age of Hollywood.

All of the above conditions make themselves known immediately in the opening scenes of the film. First, the script. Despite the drastic shift in tone and intention from the play, Ustinov and Bodeen deleted very little from Coxe and Chapman's play, but did arrange its scenes differently and added material in such a way to achieve an effect much more aligned with the one I argued in the previous section that the Coxe–Chapman play managed to achieve anyway. As I just mentioned, Ustinov's opening credits and scenes mark some of the most pointed narrative material digressions from the Coxe–Chapman play, and illustrate the way in which narrative media (particularly insofar as they participate in a capitalist market) help dictate the way in which story events are changed in renarrativizations. Many of the play's scenes, with much of the same dialogue, are still worked into the film, but the medium of film permits Ustinov to reveal directly many aspects of the story's events that were left to the imagination of the play's audience, such as encountering the *Rights of Man* and impressing Billy, as well as the actual pursuit of the French ship. Additionally, the dramatic pacing of a film is very different from that of a play, and given the context of the film's production, Ustinov was under enormous pressure to film a work that could compete with the epic, "high-brow," literary sea adaptations that MGM and Warner Brothers were producing to great success. As a result, while Ustinov and Bodeen use much of Coxe and Chapman's literary language and keep many of their scenes, those scenes are extended in such a way to fit Hollywood film pacing that underscore and showcase the acting talent of the cast, and Ustinov further extends them to highlight the film's battle scenes and on-location shooting. Market-wise, Ustinov's film was competing with fans of well-respected actors (Gregory Peck and Marlon Brando) and of the source novels (Melville's *Moby-*

Dick and the *Mutiny on the Bounty* novel) who still desired epic, on-location scenes of historical battle. *Spartacus*, the 1960 film for which Ustinov received an Academy Award, was just such a production. Ustinov even shot in a 2.35:1 aspect ratio using the anamorphic CinemaScope lens in order to compete with these other films (MGM's *Mutiny on the Bounty* used Ultra Panavision 70 for a 2.76:1 aspect ratio, while Twentieth Century Fox's 1962 *Damn the Defiant!* also used CinemaScope for a 2.35:1 ratio).⁵⁵

After the credits, the film opens on scenes which dramatize Billy's impressment onto the *Bellipotent/Indomitable* (called the *Avenger* in the film). These events, represented to some degree in Melville's novel, are left out of the play, likely due to staging constraints but perhaps also because it establishes more explicitly the historical context of the narrative. Ustinov expands on the scene to set an illustrative tone for the film. By thoroughly and realistically depicting how a British ship might have encountered a merchant ship and impressed some of its men, Ustinov demonstrates his commitment to historical accuracy. At the same time, the scene exposes the strained atmosphere within the Navy itself over the mutinies at the Spithead and the Nore, as well as the severe resentment all of Britain (and particularly its merchant sailors) felt at the Royal Navy's power to impress any men at sea. Most important, Ustinov reveals crucial aspects of Vere's character which will color the narrative events; I will turn to them after this discussion of the opening scenes.

The *Avenger* officers sight the *Rights of Man*, whose captain (Graveling) and crew the audience sees are drastically underdressed compared with Vere and his men. They wear simple, wrinkled white shirts, open at the chest, covered by worn, brown vests; the *Rights of Man*'s general sailors hardly differ from their captain. The British officers, however, are in full uniform,

⁵⁵ Information on these films' technical specs, as for all others, comes from the Internet Movie Database (imdb.com).

with blue frock coats, white waist coats, and bicorne hats; their sailors are not even on screen until a boat is sent over to the *Rights of Man*. At that moment, the first words spoken by one of the *Avenger*'s men are from Jenkins, who says of Ratcliffe descending the ship to the boarding party boat, "If I spit now, I'd get him fair and square, man." Kincaid (who later tries to knife Claggart) responds, "Why do you waste it on him? He's not so bad." Jenkins's rejoinder indicates the level of animosity between the sailors and officers: "There's no difference between any of them." Claggart walks up behind him, in his first appearance.

The *mise-en-scène* of the shots demonstrate how disassociated the *Avenger*'s workers are from its commanders, which the *Rights of Man* shots oppose. Immediately, then, a sharp, visual distinction is drawn between the two vessels, a distinction that is reinforced by how the two captains command their ships. Captain Graveling is questioned by his men, but in genuine, respectful ways—there is room in his kind of authority for discussion. He responds respectfully in turn, for his actions *are* peculiar; he does not pretend they are not. Rather than expecting mindless obedience, Graveling clearly favors respecting his sailors enough to explain his actions to them. His first mate wonders why Graveling is not ordering the boat to "heave to" (slow to a halt by bracing a side of the boat against the wind): "Weren't it better to heave to, sir? She's a man-of-war." After asking his first mate to clarify that the ship is not an enemy, the captain kindly responds and explains to his first mate, "It's worse than any enemy. If she's British, I'll not heave to. If she's French, she only wants to sink us. Every seaman leads his life in the expectation of being sunk. If she's British, she'll only want to take my best men from me, and I'll not stand for that." He has the men hoist the topgallant sails, and asks Billy to sing a song. All of the men sing along with him, further suggesting a content labor force that works in relative equality with the captain and his first mates.

The response of the *Avenger* officers to this reveals the dynamic aboard their ship, as well as the relation of the Royal Navy to Britain at large. The turn to verisimilitude underscores impressment discourse and calibrates the discursive noise from Melville's apparent background to the novel into relevant and inescapable anarchist critique. Seymour comments that they are singing, to which Vere dryly and somewhat impatiently answers, "Yes." Ratcliffe asks him, "Are they so ignorant they cannot understand our purpose?" Vere's response, unlike Graveling's, is understated and sardonic: "Oh, I doubt that it's ignorance which motivates their actions, Mr. Ratcliffe." The other officers naïvely wonder if it could be a French vessel in disguise, and Vere reveals his understanding of the Navy's unpopularity: "Her refusal to heave to proves she's one of ours. But I *will* be obeyed." Vere's next actions mirror his later condemnation of Billy: he orders his officer to have the men fire a warning shot across the *Rights of Man*'s bow. But his order is spoken with little confidence, in a lower tone with his eye darting to the side to see if he is being obeyed, as he mutters, "We're at war, Mr. Seymour," even pausing slightly before the word "Seymour." Vere evidently reveals his discomfort at having to lead, and his insecurity that he is even being followed. He clearly feels the need to have ready physical dominance to bolster his orders, even as he second-guesses them.

Ratcliffe boards the *Rights of Man*, as he does in Melville's novel, and Ustinov retains some of the tone of Graveling and Ratcliffe's encounter, the events of which the play and the opera significantly ignore because Billy's impressment and Graveling and Ratcliffe's reactions to it are outside the purview of a set of events concentrating on Claggart's evil, Billy's goodness, and Vere's tortured position of authority. Ustinov's decision to retain an encounter between men of each ship allows the audience even more narrative time to focus on the historical reality of Billy's conscription, emphasizing its importance in the subsequent plot. Ustinov and Bodeen's

script echoes Melville's depiction of Ratcliffe and Graveling not in wording, but in capturing the casual, almost discourteous nature of the visit. In fact, the two conscription scenes differ widely. In Melville's novel, Ratcliffe boards and quickly and arbitrarily chooses Billy as his only choice, the narrator only guess whether this is because "the other men when ranged before him showed to ill advantage after Billy, or whether he had some scruples in view of the merchantman's being rather short-handed..." (45). Given his ensuing behavior, though, it seems unlikely that Ratcliffe would care much about Graveling's ship. He "unceremoniously" invites himself down the captain's cabin, "and also to a flask from the spirit locker," from which he drinks prodigiously since "his duty he always faithfully did; but duty is sometimes a dry obligation, and he was for irrigating his aridity, whensoever possible, with a fertilizing decoction of strong waters" (46). Melville's Ratcliffe is clearly concerned with less weighty matters than forced conscription, or the fact that Graveling is losing "the best man...the jewel of 'em" (46). After Graveling's long description of Billy's effect on his men, the narrator says that Ratcliffe had been listening "with amused interest...and now was waxing merry with his tipple..." (47-48). Melville makes it clear why sailors were rebelling against their officers.

If Ustinov does not represent this particular exchange exactly, his Ratcliffe certainly preserves Melville's in terms of his snobbery. In Ustinov's film, Graveling immediately and irritably confronts Ratcliffe, who remains amused and unconcerned:

GRAVELING. I never thought I'd see the day when I'd pray for a French sail on the horizon.

RATCLIFFE. A French sail? Why?

GRAVELING. Then the Royal Navy could do its duty for a change: protect its merchant ships instead of preying on them.

RATCLIFFE. You have ideas of your own, captain.

GRAVELING. I'm not alone in that.

The shot, heretofore a two-shot, cuts to a pan of the line of grumbling sailors on the *Rights of Man*. These sailors all know about the Spithead and the Nore, Billy included, and Graveling's overall response to the impressment demonstrates the general reaction to the events by everyone else in Britain. As Graveling says, "They're talking about reforms in the House of Commons. You know what that means. It means the reforms are nearly a century overdue." Ratcliffe just smiles. When Graveling angrily reads the Rights of War to Billy, explaining his impressment and asking him if he understands it, Billy nods to it all, to which Graveling replies, "You understand too much, too well." In all of the narrativizations of *Billy Budd*, he has never been accused of knowing too much, let alone knowing it too well. Billy's clear knowledge of the mutinies and Graveling's not-ignorant assessment of Billy's understanding of his conscription (and whatever else Graveling may mean by his knowledge) suggests a new course for Ustinov's renarrativization. Ustinov's focus on the historical conditions of *Billy Budd*, which strengthens the Story's inbuilt anarchist attitude, lead to small narrative disturbances between the film and other narrativizations of the story that encourage and highlight less-considered interpretations that further reveal that anarchism, such as the nature of Billy's later actions on board Vere's ship. Does he act out of irony or ignorance?

As I have implied in my above discussion of the script, Ustinov's shot choices in the same opening scenes cooperate appreciably with script in his overall rhetorical approach. The opening shots suggest an objective, realistic "narrator" primarily through the voice over and pattern of shots. The opening establishing shot tracks in over ocean waters (which are actually off the coast of Spain), tilts up, and then zooms in on a close up of the aft of the *HMS Avenger*, at which point a male narrator flatly states:

1797, the year of the mutinies of the fleet at the Spithead and at the Nore, and of the continuing war with republican France. August the 16th, His Majesty's frigate *Avenger* on a war time cruise with orders to reinforce the British squadron off the coast of Spain.

The camera dissolves to the bow and slowly zooms out to a long shot while each of the main actors of the crew on the *Avenger* (Ustinov's name for the *Bellipotent/Indomitable*) reads his character's name and position in voice over as the actor's name appears in the credits. The shot cross-fades and zooms in on a close up of the aft of the *Rights of Man*, the narrator continues: "On the same day, at the same hour, the merchant ship *Rights of Man*, out of Dundee, bound for the West Indies with a cargo of manufactured goods." Immediately, the shot dissolves to the bow and slowly zooms out to a long shot while each of the main actors of the crew on the *Rights of Man* reads *his* character's name and position in voice over as the actor's name appears in the credits.

The voice-over states what the ships are doing with presumed authority, given his separated and apparently omnipotent position, while the shots of each ship precisely mimic each other, demonstrating a journalistic equality of coverage. The men read out their names and positions as if on roll call. In the remaining shots of the credits, the camera tracks out, leaving the ships in a high-angle two-shot, dissolving to a bird's-eye track over the ships before dissolving again to a high-angle, extreme long shot of the two ships isolated on the ocean. The viewer is left in no doubt of the veracity of the narrator's eye and voice—the narrator's voice having dryly introduced the ships' names and functions while his "eye" demonstrated an impossible contemporary mastery over the surroundings by freely swinging over and around the ships at will. Through these relatively innocuous discursive additions, gone are Melville's unreliable narrator and Coxe and Chapman's poetic non-realism. But again, as I have indicated, although Ustinov apparently distances himself from his sources, the credits' end reveals how interrelated

the three narrativizations are in Ustinov's film. The credits cite the authorship as based upon the play by Coxe and Chapman, from the novel by Herman Melville, with a screenplay by Peter Ustinov and DeWitt Bodeen. And Ustinov does combine a number of key themes and ideas from Melville's novel as well as the play, although his use is somewhat hidden by the verisimilitude of the filmic medium as well as his more noticeable deviations from those sources.

**“Not for the likes of us to know; just to witness”:
The Character Development of Vere, Claggart, and Billy**

The preceding look at how the opening shots illustrate the film's narrativization of the Billy Budd events also provide keys to understanding Ustinov's directorial choices in the actors' and director's interpretation of the main figures of Vere, Claggart, and Billy. I have already partially demonstrated how Vere's character is developed through Ustinov's realistic, historical lens and by the atmosphere of martial law anxiety, and I will now expound on that analysis and establish that Ustinov's Vere is the more rhetorically forceful version of the Vere that arises from Coxe and Chapman's play: namely, the selfish, self-justifying captain ill-at-ease with his own authority. While Ustinov's film accentuates the anarchism of the novel and play through the necessities of its medium, as well as its functional role at the time of its release, Ustinov also knowingly develops this anarchism in a more forceful way than Coxe and Chapman. In fact, Ustinov said it in an interview with Tony Thomas, "...as so often happens, it's the slightly weak man who makes a firm decision at the wrong moment, and the anguish of Vere is that he knew he was not up to the job he was given" (146). Just as he weakly had his men fire a shot across the *Rights of Man's* bow, so throughout Vere directs his men cowardly but inflexibly.

Vere's cowardice is more evident and frustrating in Ustinov's film because it is so apparent that he understands what is happening on his ship. It is clear to Vere even from Billy's

arrival on board that Claggart and Billy will have some kind of conflict. After Billy's assignment to the foretop, the first major scene involving the whole ship is the flogging of one of the sailors. That the scene takes place is in itself particularly interesting since just such a scene is described briefly in the novel, but not in the play. Furthermore, Ustinov's direction of the scene is notable given what the audience knows of Billy's time on board the *Rights of Man*. All of the men are lined up to watch the flogging, administered by Claggart and the boastwain. Dissimilar to what the novel purports to reveal, the film's audience is not permitted any inside knowledge of what any of the characters are thinking during the flogging.⁵⁶ As Squeak says to Billy when the newly 'pressed man asks about the reason for the flogging, "It's not for the likes of us to know; just to witness. See?" Instead, the audience must piece together a succession of shots accompanied only by the sound of the whip hitting the sailor's back and his accompanying grunts. Apparently, these shots are objective and neutral—even uncomplicated—revealing only facial expressions. But the expressions themselves are ambiguous, and made even more so by their complex relation to each other through the shots.

The beginning of the flogging is an establishing long shot from the aft, holding most of the ship in the frame, the officers watching from the bow, Claggart and Squeak watching from the port side, and the remaining sailors watching from the starboard side. A drum beats through the first few shots as the men assemble and Billy and the man about to be flogged look at each other through an eyeline match in a shot/reverse shot. The last part of the shot/reverse shot holds on Billy's face, after which the camera pans left and then right as Billy looks at the men's faces standing next to him. Their faces indicate that the flogging is both routine and taboo. The drum stops just as Ustinov cuts to Claggart, who orders the start of the twenty lashes, which begin on another long shot from the aft. The sound bridge of the drum, and the abrupt cut when the drum

⁵⁶ Billy is "horrified" by the flogging (Melville, *Billy Budd* 68).

stops, indicates that for the audience Billy's reaction to the man's flogging should take rhetorical precedence. Indeed, of the thirteen remaining shots in the flogging, Billy is the focus of six (four of them close-ups), while Claggart accounts for four. The three remaining shots are of Vere, Jenkins, and a low-angle, medium shot of Claggart, Squeak, and the whipped man. Of all of the shots in the flogging sequence, only four do not center on Billy: two shots of Claggart looking solely at the flogged man (once at the beginning and once at the end), the one of Jenkins presumably glaring at Claggart and the officers, and the medium shot of the flogged man. Given these shots, Ustinov clearly wants to focus the audience's attention on Billy's reaction to the flogging, and particularly his reaction to *Claggart's* reaction to it.

Obviously, Billy's face in these shots is central to understanding his relation to Claggart—although understanding his face is impossible without understanding who and what he is looking at. Thus, the first two shots are reaction shots of the flogged man: the first is Claggart's fairly obvious pleasure at watching a man being whipped; the reverse is Billy's apparently numbed shock at looking at the same. After the brief medium shot of the flogging scene, Ustinov cuts to a close-up of Billy, who turns his head to look at the *Rights of Man* sailing away. In another eyeline match (a technique this sequence thrives on), Ustinov cuts to a long shot of the ship, and then surprisingly zooms out to reveal the back of Billy's head in the right side of the frame as he looks at the ship, after which he turns his head to stare steadfastly at Claggart. Again, the audience knows Billy stares at Claggart by showing Claggart next through an eyeline match. Claggart's reaction is hermeneutically pivotal. He looks up and is visibly taken aback by Billy's stare, appearing even a little frightened. In another shot/reverse shot, Ustinov shows them staring very intently at each other, both appearing very challenging. Immediately following this shot/reverse shot is a medium shot of Vere, Wyatt, and Ratcliffe, in which Vere

looks startlingly at Claggart staring at Billy and Billy staring at Claggart. Vere clearly sees the animosity between the two and Claggart is given a very understandable reason for disliking Billy—his apparent challenge of the flogging through what seems an undaunted, condemning stare. Of course, by only showing facial expressions, the “omniscient” film narrator admits a level of unknowability more akin to the narrative ambiguity of Melville’s text.

The flogging scene is one of Claggart’s most important first scenes and underscores Ustinov’s intentional anarchist critique. Up until this point, Claggart has functioned merely as an authority presence, lurking on the decks and assigning Billy to his position in the foretop. But Ustinov provides a very different entrance for Claggart than Coxe and Chapman did. Instead of pure malevolence on the order of Iago, Claggart obviously feels Billy is specifically threatening him. And given how charming Billy is in the following scenes, his intense and immovable distrust and then hatred is understandable. After Kincaid is flogged following Jenkins’s death, and just before Squeak tries to trick Billy into mutiny and falsely accuses him to Claggart (who in turn falsely accuses Billy to Vere), Billy engages Claggart in a conversation based on a similar scene in the first act of Coxe and Chapman’s play. The film’s interview is significantly longer and much more realistic. Robert Ryan’s Claggart questions Billy much more than the Coxe–Chapman Claggart does, and Billy responds with *much* greater intelligence than he does in the play. Claggart seems genuinely interested in trying to understand Billy, and discovers that Billy has quite complex and definite thoughts concerning Claggart. In fact, Billy declares that he understands Claggart, and provides very convincing proof of it, suggesting that maybe Claggart sometimes hates himself. For his part, Claggart seems to have come to a point of self-doubt. When he warns Billy to “curb his tongue” around him if he wants to make a good impression on him—referring to Billy’s telling the truth to Vere—Billy responds, “Now, sir?” Claggart laughs,

corrects him, and then asks, “Can it be that you really don’t understand my words? Is it ignorance or irony that makes you speak so plainly?” His question resounds in Ustinov’s film because Terence Stamp’s performance is inscrutable, his face remaining placid and unreadable even when he is speaking lucidly and naïvely.

The flogging scene illustrates thoroughly how interrelated Vere, Claggart, and Billy’s performances and interpretations are, and the remainder of the film further complicates their intermingled performances. By amplifying the historical background of the events, Ustinov has crafted more fallible, human characters in Billy and Claggart, and underscored Vere’s problematic role in mediating their conflict. As I mentioned, Ustinov holds close to the Coxe and Chapman script in a number of ways, and while nearly all of the ways he moves bits of dialogue and events around are noteworthy, I want to focus on the most obvious shifts as they have the most significant influence on Ustinov’s interpretation of the *Billy Budd* events.

The most obvious shifts after the added opening scenes described above are an interview between Claggart and Vere and a sailor uprising after Billy’s execution.

In terms of the interview, I want to mention first that Coxe and Chapman’s Vere indicates that he knows of Claggart’s dishonest exercise of his duty; Ustinov’s Vere does, as well, but Ustinov also depicts a long confrontation between the men, which in the play is simply a questioning of Billy’s trustworthiness among Claggart, Vere, Seymour, and Ratcliffe. But Ustinov takes Claggart’s words from the Coxe–Chapman script and forges an entirely new scene between Claggart and Vere alone. That exchange reveals how Ustinov’s concern with Vere centers on Vere’s problematic relationship to the “wise Draco” aspect of authority, which in this case is Claggart. In the film’s interview, Claggart’s persistent protestation against Billy angers Vere, after which Claggart boldly questions Vere’s decision to give Kincaid (who cursed

Claggart after Jenkins fell) only ten lashes (“Ten lashes would seem to me a mild sentence under peacetime conditions”). For their discussion over the lashing, Ustinov draws on an exchange in Act I of the play that occurs between Vere and *Seymour* just after some of the sailors have tried to attack Claggart and Vere has spoken to them. Ingeniously, Ustinov puts most of Seymour’s words in Claggart’s mouth, a decision which gives Claggart a reasonable, even pitiable, defense of his cruel treatment of the sailors. Seymour had gently argued with Vere’s speculation about taking “this power of mine and break[ing] him [Claggart] now,” and responded to Vere, “We must serve the law, sir, or give up the right and privilege of service. It’s how we live” (Coxe and Chapman 35). Vere eventually gives up, declaring pessimistically but with a hint of defiance, “No man can defy the code we live by and not be broken by it.... The world demands...that at the back of every peace-maker there be the gun, the gallows and the gaol” (35). In the film’s interview, it is Vere who stops Claggart to question him, much as Claggart questions Billy, trying to understand something beyond his knowledge. The ten lashes for Kincaid quickly agreed upon, Vere calls Claggart back, wondering if he thinks the sentence is just. Claggart does not, as I mentioned, and suggests a hundred, citing this axiom: “We must serve the law, sir, or give up the right and privilege of service. It is only within that law that we may use our discretion’s according to our rank.” Vere is stunned, and questions Claggart:

VERE. You are so lucid and so intelligent for the rank you hold, master-at-arms.

CLAGGART. I thank you, sir.

VERE. Yes, that’s no flattery, Mr. Claggart, it’s a melancholy fact. It’s sad to see such qualities of mind bent to such a sorry purpose. What’s the reason for it?

CLAGGART. I am what I am, sir, and what the world has made me.

VERE. The world? The world demands that behind every peacemaker there be the gun, the gallows, the jail. Do you think it will always be so?

CLAGGART. I have no reason not to, sir.

VERE. You live without hope.

CLAGGART. I live.

VERE. But remember, Mr. Claggart, that even the man who wields the whip cannot defy the code we must obey and not be broken by it.

Claggart's statements here are stunning because at once Ustinov and Bodeen could be drawing on Melville's description of Claggart ("of...[a] depravity...invariably...dominated by intellectuality...[folding] itself in the mantle of respectability"), but may also be allowing the possibility that Claggart has been warped by authority, has surrendered himself wholly to the same specter of authority that Vere combats but also ultimately yields to (Melville, *Billy Budd* 75).

Given Claggart's initial eye contact with Billy at the first flogging, and given his talk with Billy about his probably self-loathing nature, Ustinov's depiction of Claggart through Ryan's performance is a doomed existential hero, a polar opposite to Vere not in goodness but in boldness. Where Vere fears to tread, Claggart has already accepted and moved forward in confidence. Like Vere, Claggart believes the world "demands that behind every peacemaker there be the gun, the gallows, the jail," but unlike Vere he has no reason to hope it be otherwise. As he succinctly responds to Vere's suggestion that he lives without hope: "I live." Claggart has not shored up around him abstract notions at odds with the world he actually lives in. He is authentic, *eigentlich*, as Heidegger means it. As he says, he is what he is, and what the world has made him. Ustinov's film thus suggests a psychological explanation of Claggart's "natural depravity," dependent on the very authoritarian world Vere defends in his execution of Billy: "I am what I am, and what the world has made me."

While Claggart has emerged as an unlikely existential hero, Vere has surfaced as a weak-willed, existential cautionary tale—a man faced with his own severe doubts of the world he has pledged to obey, defensively and incorrectly clinging to its most stringent rules in extenuated circumstances. The result of Claggart's devotion to a world where "only the strongest teeth survive" is a random accident, but the result of Vere's unwilling and overcompensated

submission to it is his own crushing sense of failure, leading to his abdication of all leadership even in the face of an enemy attack.

In Ustinov's film, Billy's final blessing of Vere just before his hanging serves as the coup de grace to Vere's resistance to his own doubt. In Billy's final words (however he may mean it), Vere sees the astonishing extent of his martial authority: an innocent's total acceptance of his own execution. When Vere visits Billy in his holding cell, he asks Billy to promise him his "fury and resentment" that Billy might conquer his fear. Billy simply replies, "I'm not afraid, sir. I did my duty. You're doing yours." Vere is horrified by this response, and suddenly calls for the sentry, leaving quickly. Whether Billy means this ironically or ignorantly, Vere sees in Claggart and Billy a devastating ability to accept the martial order he embodies but distrusts. Ustinov's performance of this silent moment confirms his anarchist criticism of Vere's authority.

In the moment after the execution, then, each of the men who had blindly, boldly, or stubbornly submitted himself to martial law has been defeated and silenced. In the wake of such obvious injustice, Ustinov adds a coda to the events, elaborating on a rebellious spirit hinted at in Melville's novel and heightened in the play. Prior to Billy's execution, the film basically adheres to the play's representation of the event—the men threaten to revolt. But the play ends with Billy's final words and hanging. The film, however, lingers on, and takes the hint at stirring rebellion in the novel (indicated only by a "muffled murmur" thereafter silenced by the simple command: "Pipe down the starboard watch, Boatswain, and see that they go") and extends it into a full-blown rebellion. Vere removes his hat, metonym of his authority, and all of the sailors turn and stare at the officers. Seymour, unsure of what to do, asks Vere twice, "Permission to dismiss the men, sir," to which Vere responds, "You may do as you wish, Mr. Seymour. It's of no further concern to me." Ratcliffe presses him:

RATCLIFFE. Sir, a decision must be made.

VERE. A decision has been made, Mr. Ratcliffe. I'm only a man, not fit to do the work of God or the devil.

The men are dismissed, but do not move. Chillingly, each of the petty officers calmly dismisses his party, but they all remain, indicating that the rebellion has been coolly and independently decided by every man present. The officers, unsure like Vere was, resort to violence, just as Vere did. Seymour orders the captain of the marines to fire into their ranks, but as they aim to do so, the French appear. And even when the French begin attacking, the men still don't move. When they do, it is at Kincaid's command: "Come on, lads! Let's punish the French for showing up late!" The irony here is that the hanging was supposed to keep the ship a well-run fighting machine. Instead, they only decide to fight of their free will, and in revenge rather than for the state. Vere lies dead in the wreckage. The film ends with the narrator's voice over: "The rest belongs to naval history. But if the sacrifice of Billy Budd has served to make men more conscious of justice then he will not have died in vain. Men are perishable things but justice will live as long as the human soul, and the law, as long as the human mind." As with Billy, the audience is not sure if the narrator speaks in ignorance or irony. Did Billy's execution make the sailors conscious of justice? Or is this the intended irony of the historical narrative that appears at the close of Melville's novel? Yet again, is this the unintended irony of Melville's narrator in his own account of the events?

"I could have saved him": The Britten Opera

When Terence Stamp received a call from his agent to meet with Peter Ustinov and his casting director (Robert Lennard) about *Billy Budd*, the young actor had only heard of the story because of Benjamin Britten's still-recent opera (Soderbergh and Stamp). In 1961, Britten was in the prime of his career—the four-act version of *Billy Budd* appeared in 1951 and he was only a

couple years from the premiere of his revised two-act version, which would be the principal one performed from then on. In the intervening years, he had written four other operas, including *The Turn of the Screw* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which was first performed in 1960. Prior to *Billy Budd*, he had already written some forty-nine compositions, including five operas, a ballet, fourteen orchestral works, seven concerti, and a large number of smaller works for voice and solo instruments. Britten was widely venerated in Britain, particularly admired for his contribution to English opera through the compositions of *Peter Grimes*, *Billy Budd*, and *The Turn of the Screw*, as well as his creation of the English Opera Group, which toured Europe with his own setting of *The Beggar's Opera*.

Like Brecht, Britten had a number of collaborators who aided his creative output throughout his life; unlike Brecht, he usually acknowledged their contributions. Britten's collaborators ranged among writers (W. H. Auden, Eric Crozier, Myfanwy Piper), artists (John Piper), singers (Peter Pears), and composers (Frank Bridge, Lennox Berkeley), and many of them worked with him over a number of years. Britten's *Billy Budd* was the product of a major collaboration among Eric Crozier, E. M. Forster, Peter Pears, and John Piper, although primarily involving Britten, Crozier, and Forster. Piper designed the influential premiere production of the work in 1951 at the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden. Pears served, as he often had before and would again, as an inspiration for the main tenor part, an apparently minor fact that turns out to have significant interpretive influence, namely introducing an even greater anarchist focus on the tensions between the men and the Navy. The complexity of the dynamic system of discourses comprising the work, particularly in terms of the consequences of the operatic genre and medium, give rise to a thus far unique interpretation of the *Billy Budd* Story that still evokes anarchism.

As I mentioned earlier, Forster, Crozier, and Britten decided on creating an opera of *Billy Budd* in early 1949, Britten and Forster having discussed collaboration the summer before at the first Aldeburgh Festival. Forster had met Britten in 1941, when Forster was 62 and Britten 28, after Britten and Pears had heard Forster read an article of his on the poet George Crabbe, inspiring Britten to write *Peter Grimes*. The two struck up a somewhat unlikely friendship, encouraged partly because Forster, like Britten and Pears, was gay. In fact, as Mervyn Cooke points out, “the homosexual implications of *Billy Budd* were a prime reason for the story’s attractiveness to Britten and Forster” (“Britten’s *Billy Budd*” 27). Indeed, the opera’s emphasis of the latent homoeroticism in Melville’s *Billy Budd* constitutes one of its most impressive contributions to interpretations of the Billy Budd story. At the same time, this hermeneutical attention, while interesting in its own right, threatens to obscure some of the more audacious rhetorical moves Britten, Forster, and Crozier make. Nonetheless, the biographical drive to explore homoerotic themes in Melville’s writing also served as a major guiding force behind those daring rhetorical moves.

Let me begin with the opera’s elaboration of the sexual conflict implied in *Billy Budd*. Britten and Forster were both the primary creative energy behind this rhetorical choice, although it was obviously left to Forster to ensure the theme’s literary expansion throughout the whole opera. The two men were enamored with Melville’s work. In fact, when they enlisted Eric Crozier’s help, they sat him down, he recalled later, with “some food and coffee...[and] handed me a small black-jacketed volume—William Plomer’s 1946 edition of *Billy Budd*—and left me alone with it” (qtd. in Russo and Merlin 53).⁵⁷ According to Crozier, they paced around waiting

⁵⁷ It is quite important that Plomer’s edition served as the apparent literary source of the opera. Up until 1948, it was the only stand-alone edition of the work, although not available in the United States (Hayford and Sealts, “Editors’ Introduction” 15–16). The collaborators most certainly knew of the 1948 Freeman edition, but it was a newer, more expensive edition than the one Forster and Britten had already read.

for him to finish it, excited at the prospect of restricting an opera to an all-male cast isolated on one set: a ship. Crozier was unenthusiastic and objected, complaining that “you would miss out just as much on a contrast of emotional conflict as on a contrast of vocal colors or locale. And this neither of them would admit to, because they were both homosexual; and I wasn’t. They felt it was a positive challenge” (53). Still, Crozier claimed that he never discussed homosexuality with Forster and Britten in terms of the opera, let alone in terms of their personal lives (54).

As in Melville’s novel, the sexual conflict most evident is between Claggart and Billy. Billy, of course, is the Handsome Sailor, a naturally magnetic beauty who enthralls all of the men on the ship. Thus, a common, and easily discernible, explanation of Claggart’s hatred of Billy has been his “repressed sexual desire towards Billy,” which Forster spells out more clearly than Melville had (Matthews 103). As David Matthews suggests, “Forster would perhaps have liked to make it still more overt, but this was impossible at the time. What Forster could say, he expressed in Claggart’s great monologue ‘O beauty, o handsomeness, goodness!’ which Forster told Britten ‘is *my* most important piece of writing’” (103). Nevertheless, as Matthews also points out, “For Britten, as for Forster and Crozier, Vere is the central character of the opera, and his redemption is the culmination of the drama” (104).

Why this split attention? If Vere is the central character of the opera, why would Claggart’s “O beauty, o handsomeness, goodness!” aria be Forster’s most important writing? The answer partly lies with Pears and partly with the demands of the operatic form. As I mentioned, Pears was always set to sing the tenor part; but he was forty at the time of composition, so it was unlikely he would work as Billy. At the time of the opera’s first inception, then, the most surprising, controversial, and nonnegotiable decision Britten made was making Vere, not Billy, the tenor. In the history of opera, characters of supreme goodness or innocence tended to have a

high-pitched vocal part (tenor or soprano). But Britten took it for granted that Pears would be Vere, though, thus forcing the character into a tenor role, Claggart naturally acquiring the bass part, leaving Billy a baritone. Britten's instance that Pears play a role in his new opera also practically guaranteed his role would be the most important.

This fundamental fact of the opera's composition and eventual production led to a number of striking decisions for the work's organization. Britten, Forster, and Crozier were faced with the fact that Vere does not actually appear very much in the novel, except during the trial. As I described in the previous chapter, Vere was a relatively late addition in the writing process. And largely due to his relative absence elsewhere than the trial, Vere is not a very sympathetic character. Furthermore, Vere dies by the end of novel with nary a word of regret on his lips. Such a role would be unsuitable for Pears and the opera form alike. Pears's importance in the formation of Britten's opera indicates the degree to which a medium and its generic consequences can influence creativity. As such, I will first explore briefly how opera differs from other narrative media and summarize some of its major motifs and themes, keeping in mind how this information affects interpretations of Britten's *Billy Budd*. After this examination, I will scrutinize Claggart, Billy, and Vere's roles and identify the opera's dominant thematic trends, particularly within the context of other narrativizations.

As a performance mode and genre, opera is poorly understood. In twenty-first-century America, opera is frequently perceived and regarded an art form of and for the rich; as such, it is also despised. And it did begin as a preconceived genre, developed by intellectuals and scholars for sixteenth-century Italian royalty. However, by the early decades of the eighteenth century in London, John Gay was frustrated enough by the immense popularity of *opera seria* on the London stage to write a parody of it: *The Beggar's Opera*. Howsoever the general public may

not know and care for it, even within the more specific bounds of musicology opera is not a well-defined mode of performance. Debates over opera's meaning are at least as old as the thing itself, but they intensified in the nineteenth century, particularly after Wagner's "Oper und Drama," and have continued into the twenty-first century, hardly settled even with regard to Wagner's theories. In fact, Wagner's preference for the dramatic over the musical is the point of greatest contention. At this time, one point has been agreed upon, articulated succinctly by Joseph Kerman in his influential *Opera as Drama*: "Opera is excellently its own form" (16). Regardless of debates over the *predominance* of music over drama or drama over music in opera, Kerman argued passionately against mid-twentieth-century attitudes toward opera as simply either "a low form of music...[or] a low form of drama" (16). Instead, opera tends to fluctuate on a spectrum between the "operatic" and the "verbal," the operatic reflecting meaning through performative, extravagant, and gestural qualities, the verbal through referential or mimetic qualities. In *Opera: The Extravagant Art*, Herbert Lindenberger suggests that "if we look at any two works—whether musical or spoken drama—in juxtaposition to each other, one of these is always likely to seem closer to the operatic end of the spectrum than the other" (76).⁵⁸ Opera does its "thinking" through a multiplicity of discourses (music, drama, movement, costuming, and so on) that convey symbolic imagery as directly and totally as possible.

Above all, opera is resolutely unrealistic, raising its "actions to a mythical level...evident [for instance] from the fact that operas are usually set in times and places far removed from the worlds of the audiences for whom composers write" (Lindenberger 51). Comparing opera to other narrative forms, Lindenberger suggests, "Whereas spoken drama and film encourage us, at least much of the time, to suspend our disbelief, an opera, even with the most 'realistic'

⁵⁸ A larger point of Lindenberger's is to suggest that certain dramatists or writers can be considered more "operatic" than others. He suggests that Dickens and Whitman, for instance, owe quite a bit to the operatic, as opposed to George Eliot or Tennyson (77).

costumes, scenery, and acting, does not allow us to forget that people do not actually converse with one another (or to themselves) in song” (130). As obvious as this point is, it has some important implications, particularly with regard to the inherent artificiality of the mode. Robert Donnington explains how “the presence of music as an integral constituent of the drama is not only unnaturalistic but also time-consuming, circumscribing even as it intensifies the elaboration of the plot” (3). Opera intrinsically transforms narrative focus.

These last points particularly indicate the possibilities of a renarrativization of *Billy Budd* as an opera. And even though opera is, more so than any other narrative mode, largely a genre of adaptation, reactions to operatic adaptations have often been quite negative. Herbert Lindenberger claims that

the transformation of literature into opera is analogous in the reactions it elicits to that more recent phenomenon, the adaptation of literary works into films. In both instances critics and audiences are more likely to dwell on losses than on gains and to ground their opinion in traditional literary values without fully considering the differences in the media they are examining. And, needless to say, during their most creative periods both opera and film have been relegated to a lower aesthetic status than the various literary genres they have drawn upon. (41)

In fact, most reactions to adaptations *in general*, regardless of the narrative mode, are negative; in all instances “critics and audiences...more likely dwell on losses than on gains...” (41).

Lindenberger further contends that for many composers, “the composition of an opera on a classical text becomes a means of creating a dialogue with this text... The audience is...invited to participate in the composer’s connection with the earlier text” (42). By renarrativizing stories into opera, composers and librettists render the referential and mimetic into an unrealistic, affective display, formulating narrative events partly through musical discourse and thus subject to new narrative logic.

**“O beauty, O handsomeness, goodness!”:
Claggart, Vere, and Billy in Dynamic**

While it remains an irreducibly complex work, Britten–Forster–Crozier’s *Billy Budd* indicates that two of its most pressing narrative concerns remain similar to Melville’s: the problem of memory in relation to history (and history to memory), as well as the troubling role of authority in times of national crisis as depicted through Britain’s harsh exploitation of labor through its late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century impressment and conscription practices.⁵⁹ In fact, as in Ustinov’s film, Britten’s opera opens in such a manner as to point toward all of its overarching thematic concerns. And in fact, those opening scenes—particularly in the 1966 BBC television production—reveal that Melville’s preoccupation with memory and authority dominate the opera despite the outward plot of Billy’s tragic death in a parable of good and evil in the world. This forceful return to authority in terms of the dialectic of memory and history is due to Pears’s casting as Vere, a narrative disturbance based on an unpredictable influence from the composer’s life as well as the demands of the operatic genre. The complexity of the operatic narrative system induces a self-driven criticality in its *konkretization*, shifting perspective on what was just noise to the general reader of the novel: Melville’s preoccupation with memory, history, and authority, indicated through his very slight invocation of the Webster and Somers affairs, as well as in his personal reading of the *Rubáiyát*.

Given Britten’s need to make Vere an admirable hero, Britten, Forster, and Crozier had to determine a way by which Billy could still be condemned after Claggart’s death without really faulting Vere. They did so by making the officers (as metonyms of the British navy) an antagonistic authoritative force that ultimately vindicates Claggart. Furthermore, as I said above,

⁵⁹ From here on, when distinguishing the opera from other narrativizations, I will refer to the opera as Britten’s *Billy Budd*, for brevity’s sake. When explicitly discussing particular wording in the libretto, as opposed to words being sung, I will refer to Forster and Crozier.

Britten et al. could hardly have Vere die an ignoble death months after the events, as Melville had depicted. So Forster and Crozier organized their plot ingeniously around Melville's narrative construction: a personal account, rather than an omniscient narrator. As the opening Prologue to the opera reveals, Vere is remembering all of the events that take place in the opera from old age; the first words in the libretto are, "I am an old man who has experienced much" (Britten 1–2). Other than the obvious difference of opening with Vere's recollection, though, the libretto does not make it clear at first that the opera will be substantially different from Melville's novel. Vere's opening Prologue simply reveals that "much good...and much evil" have been shown to him, that "the Devil still has something to do with every human consignment to this planet of earth" (3–4). This provides effective suspense for the viewer, who would likely be familiar with the story already and might wonder at the star lead inhabiting such an unfavorable role. But the music foreshadows the major conflicts in the opera, and as the Prologue ends, the music and scene change to the deck of the *Indomitable* and begin already to reflect that foreshadowing and reveal how the opera's hero ended up in tortured, regretful old age.

Britten's shift to the deck is striking, and in performance particularly the change highlights the opera's narrative construction and thematic concerns. First, the music shifts tonally in an understated, arresting, and complicated way. The Prologue begins with an indication of Vere's memorial and moral uncertainty and then moves toward a clearer musical sign of the core of Vere's mental anguish, after which—as verbal recollection turns to narrative depiction for the audience—a new tonal conflict is introduced that clarifies the orchestra's Prologue accompaniment. Second, the various productions of the opera—but most especially John Piper's design for the premiere—have clearly established that, as Piper said in 1951, "we must never lose sight of the fact that the whole thing is taking place in Vere's mind, and is being recalled by

him” (Coleman and Piper 21). Britten was particularly adamant about this point, and the premiere’s producer, Basil Coleman, thus stressed that for the Prologue and Epilogue, Vere should be as close to the audience as possible, warning, “I am against his being on stage level. He should be raised, with no particular locality suggested anywhere” (21). The major authorial voices have suggested for future productions, then, that the setting change from the Prologue to the main action be as radical and dramatic as possible. And still, even as the Prologue must occur in “no particular locality,” the ship’s action must also take place “in Vere’s mind.” This stresses an understated point in the novel: the importance of *who* represents the action. Again, formal demands evoke anarchist critique.

Beginning with the music, I want to first note that the opera opens at once in tension. The score seems to suggest an apparent pull between C major and A minor (the two key signatures indicated by the absence of any flats or sharps), but the battling imperfect consonances of the minor-within-major thirds of the ostinati in the violins and lower strings actually indicate a struggle between B minor and B-flat major. These half-step-differentiated ostinati (vacillating contrapuntally between B-natural and D in the high strings and B-flat and D in the low strings) foreshadow the dissonant conflict that appears throughout the opera between a number of parties—including Claggart and Billy, Claggart and Vere, and the officers and the men. This unstable conflict is reinforced and ironically calmed almost immediately, however, by the entrance of the woodwinds and harp playing the minor-in-major thirds followed by a brass A-flat, the flattened subtonic common to both tones. The uncomfortable timbre of the crawling, contrapuntal strings is suddenly ceased by the rounder sound of the wind instruments halting all movement with sustained proclamatory chords. As Philip Rupprecht argues, the Prologue is a classic example of “an atmosphere of uncertainty [that] complicates the definition of functional

tonal relations in Britten's music" (311), introducing "tonal uncertainty" characterized by "chromatic opposition of two tonal strata, and moments of harmonic integration" (319), as with the A-flat. In fact, Britten's opening tonal uncertainty "is an uncertainty that encapsulates the crux of the opera's allegorical action" (319). The uncertainty also reflects Vere's memory and the men's rebellion. The music, as a necessary component of the opera form, draws much more attention to the mutinous atmosphere than any narrativization I have discussed. It is pervasive and foundational to everything else in the opera.

Vere's singing over the tonal uncertainty of the Prologue functions in two crucial ways. First, the orchestra's accompaniment signals his "ambivalent psychological state," as Britten himself has stated (Rupprecht 319). Second, the floating tonality of his Prologue leads to a clear tonal resolution (B-flat) that points toward Vere's own *soi-disant* salvation through Billy. As I mentioned, Vere's singing along with the orchestral accompaniment reflect the major motifs and themes of the opera. However, after Vere sings of imperfect goodness, always with some "flaw in it, some defect, some imperfection" to the accompanying C-sharp trill and sporadic major-third/perfect-fourth arpeggios motif to which the orchestra abruptly shifts whenever Billy stammers, the most glaring musical conflict comes when Vere sings passionately, "O what have I done?" against the horns' proclamation phrase in the most significant musical motif that recurs throughout the opera. The horns play a variation of a recurring musical phrase comprising a pair of sixteenths followed by a longer note, often of a quarter-note length or more. This phrase opens the first scene on the ship, and often announces some sort of new action on board the ship. The horns play a third inversion of a B-natural perfect fifth with a suspended minor seventh, employing the same fifth interval that Vere sings across in his "O what have I done?" motif: B

and F-sharp. Whereas the orchestra adds and inverts a minor seventh, Vere includes the minor sixth, making for an unsettling tension between the singer and orchestra.

Vere's sudden self-incrimination brings the Prologue to its climax and completes its reflection of the major conflicts in the rest of the opera. Vere sings a motif that appears at the very end of the opera in a slight variation of another motif that appears a number of times in the next scene. Vere's motif is simple, moving over an eighth and a dotted-eighth a perfect fifth up from B-natural to F-sharp, and then stepping a half-note up and back over sixteenths. It is repeated with increasing elongation and variation three times, the first two times over the words, "O what have I done?" but the third time accompanying the single word "Confusion" (Britten 4–5). The resolution of this repeated motif is through a recitative-like conclusion, "...so much is confusion!" (5), which moves from D down to B-natural, after which Vere pointedly slides down to B-flat on the word "confusion" as the orchestra silences completely. The orchestra returns with a variation on the opening ostinati and Vere now sings fluctuating primarily between B-natural and B-flat, until on the questions, "Who has blessed me? Who has saved me?" (6), he ends resolutely on B-flat. The tension between the B minor and B-flat major of the Prologue is resolved to B-flat, a reflection of Billy's coming role in "saving" not only Vere, but the ship's men as well. The major key resolves the tension, as Billy's singing often does.

As the first scene after the Prologue begins, however, it is solidly in B minor. This resolute tonality, which introduces the ship's officers directing the men to clean the deck, begins to elucidate some of Vere's psychological ambiguity: part of his "tonal struggle" relates to the officers' harsh control. Now, the Prologue's B-natural/B-flat struggle might indicate the struggle that will occur between the overworked, enslaved men and the officers who rule them. In any case, despite the clear tonality with which the scene opens, it still develops a tonal uncertainty

while a number of the motifs and tonal conflicts from the Prologue are crystallized in a new context. This is nowhere more evident than in the sudden and almost immediate return from the Prologue of the proclamation motif that now begins the scene. This phrase preceded Vere's "O what have I done?" and here reflects the rigid, demanding structure of life on a man o'war. The relentless echo across a number of instruments of the pair of sixteenths and a long note (of quarter-note length or longer) open up from a tight minor third through a major third and on to a unison B in octaves, confirming that the B minor of the Prologue reflects the B minor key of the ship's command. As the intervals open up, the horns die away, and the officers' harsh commands slow, the strings pick up as the men sing a mournful work song, "O heave! O heave away, heave! O heave!" in B minor, but stubbornly evading resolution to the tonic, centering instead on the supertonic and dominant. The musical motif used here, "this innocuous phrase," as Eric Walter White calls it, "is associated with the idea of mutiny" (185). Later, when talking with Vere in his cabin, "the officers...identify the phrase with Spithead and the Nore" (185). The B-flat resolution (instead of B-natural) with which Vere ends the Prologue becomes much more complicated, then, as does his "O what have I done?" phrasing that follows the proclamation motif. If the men's somber work song follows the proclamations, how does Vere's clear discomfort with that same musical motif relate to them?

The answer does not come until the end of the opera, after Billy is hanged. Britten depicts musically the inarticulate murmur that spontaneously arises following Billy's death, and does so by having the men sing in a "dark vowel—like *ur* in *purple*, or the French *un*," moving to "a straight *ah*" when coming to the climax (Britten 335). Interestingly, though, the vowels are sung to a very slight variation of Vere's "O what have I done?" phrase. The motif starts low in the second basses, followed soon by the first basses who repeat the motif a minor third up. The

second tenors soon follow a perfect fourth up, and the first tenors come in an augmented fourth above that. The strings play in accompaniment, repeating a variation of its opening ostinato, mixed with the same melody as the men's singing. The accumulating voices and orchestral heft have the effect of a rising against the officers, slowly growing, moving into unified singing. Once all of the men are singing, they begin to sing the motif together, the top and bottom parts in unison, while the middle parts mimic each other in mirror reflection. The phrasing soon modulates into a variation of the "O heave!" phrasing from the first act, linking Vere and the men against the other officers. This spontaneous rebellion, prompted by Billy's unjust death, is likewise inextricably linked with Vere's own failure in his position of authority ("O what have I done?"), as well as the men's collective memory of their brutal service to the British navy.

Why would Vere be connected so to the men? The answer, musically at least, is Billy.

When Billy arrives on the ship in the first act, Britten keeps his farewell to his old ship, the *Rights of Man*. Billy is singing exuberantly about his new position in the foretop:

Billy Budd, king of the birds! Billy Budd, kind of the world! Up among the seahawks, up against the storms. Looking down on the deck, looking down on the waves. Working aloft with my mates. Working aloft in the foretop. Working and helping, working and sharing. Goodbye to the old life, don't want it no more. Farewell to you old comrades! Farewell to you forever! (Britten 43–45)

But he gets carried away and sings, "Farewell, old *Rights o' Man*! Farewell..." and mimics precisely the men's "O heave! O heave away, heave! O heave!" motif, sending the officers into a frenzy: "What's that? Down sir, how dare you! Clear the decks!" (46–47). From the perspective of the end of the opera, Vere's opening reflections on his time aboard the *Indomitable* reveal his lingering regret of his inaction in stopping Billy's execution, of his complicity also in supporting the very practices that required the laws that hanged him. The first scene on the decks indicates why sailors were rebelling at the Spithead and the Nore, and those same officers who whip their

men and force them into military service are the ones who sing in fear of the mutinies, asking God to “preserve us from the Nore! The floating republic!” (104). They, too, direct the proceedings against Billy, Mr. Flint, the Sailing Master, noting, “He might have been a leader,” and Lieutenant Ratcliff recalling, “Billy Budd, I impressed him” (297). Indeed, during the trial against Billy, Vere remains only a witness, leaving the conviction up to his officers, adamant instead that “I myself am present as witness, the sole earthly witness” (283). When they beg him again, he still insists, “No, do not ask me, I cannot” (300), singing in B-minor tonality. Unlike his fluid role in Melville, Coxe and Chapman, and Ustinov’s narrativization, in Britten’s opera, Vere maintains a clear role as witness, recusing himself from judging the proceedings.

All of the conflict here discussed had its first hints musically in the Prologue, but how do production stagings affect interpretation? As I mentioned, John Piper said, “we must never lose sight of the fact that the whole thing is taking place in Vere’s mind, and is being recalled by him” (Coleman and Piper 21). Thus, as Mervyn Cooke notes, Piper designed a set for the 1951 Royal Opera House premiere in Covent Garden that would reflect the fact that “the action might...be expected to seem somewhat out of focus...” (“Stage History” 135). Cooke notes also that the premiere performance lit the set brilliantly and set it against a black background, suggesting “a wider ambiguity beyond ...” (136). A 1974 Chicago production, designed by John Dexter, introduced a new idea that has been influential on all productions since; indeed, the same design was used at the New York Met in 2012. As Cooke describes it, the set is “lavish and ambitious in both its scale and emotional breadth” (143). The ship, he describes, is “in a quadripartite lateral cross-section showing both interior and exterior: an arrangement flexible enough to adapt itself to all the requirements of the stage directions” (143). The levels rose and fell “in order to isolate the deck appropriate to each scene” (143), a practical decision that still reflected the opera

as Vere's memory of the events. The elaborate on-stage construction also enabled the director to maintain "the ever-present threat of mutiny...starkly expressed by the perpetual positioning on the upper deck of the armed marines..." (143). In the opera's staging, the already pervasive attention to memory and mutiny prompted by the music is further reinforced, attuning *koncretizations* of the opera to the noise caused by Melville's knowledge of the Webster, Somers, and Haymarket affairs.

Still, stage productions of *Billy Budd* will be less influential than mass media productions. Live opera remains accessible to smaller portions of the population than music recordings or DVDs. Thus one of the most influential productions of Britten's *Billy Budd* would be the 1966 BBC television production. The production was actually "one of the most ambitious television opera productions ever mounted by the BBC, with a set designed by Tony Abbott that created the illusion of a full-manned English man-o'-war of the correct period" (Reed 153). Basil Coleman, the producer for the premiere, directed this production, but he did not follow precisely his choices from his stage productions. Indeed, his and Abbott's dedication to verisimilitude seems at odds with his earlier commitment to ensuring that the action on the ship be understood as part of Vere's memory. But Coleman uses the television medium cleverly to convey the sense of evoked memory. The transition from the Prologue to the first scene aboard the *Indomitable* very clearly indicates this sense of memory. Just as the proclamation motif sounds, the shot lingers on Vere's fireplace in the room of his reminiscence. Coleman employs a very slow dissolve to the next scene, overlapping the fire and the action on the ship. Rather than a simple transition of scenes, this slow dissolve indicates to the viewer that this transition is a transition into Vere's memory.

But Coleman uses his camera throughout the action on the ship to make direct thematic connections. Two of the most distinctive and forceful uses of filmic techniques bookend Vere's first entrance.⁶⁰ After the Novice's whipping and the men's praise of "Starry Vere"—for which the men are sent below for exhibiting too much passion—the camera slowly tracks a marine walking along, watching the men settle in, each of them eyeing him suspiciously as he passes. Claggart and more marines appear, walking about. The monotony of the marines marching about solemnly is carried through to a shot of the marines guarding Vere's door, as a boy hands out a food tray to a man wearing a liberty cap. Vere's heavily guarded cabin, symbol of his position in the ubiquitous naval command, is juxtaposed visually with scenes of the material foundations of his command: Claggart and the marines patrolling. At the same time, the dependence of this command on the men's service is underscored by the shot of the man in the Jacobin hat in the foreground of the two marines in front of Vere's door, who takes Vere's tray away to be washed and eventually replenished.

Toward the end of Vere's first scene in the cabin with his officers, Coleman makes an interesting thematic choice through the camera's shots during what would otherwise be a lulling orchestral interlude. The interlude occurs between Ratcliffe's announcement of a sighting of land and the men's "Blow her away" shanties, as Vere listens to the men singing far off, "Blow her away! Blow her to Hilo!" and as he prepares for entering enemy waters. During the interlude, the shot dissolves back to Vere in old age as he looks around his room as if it were his old ship. For the span of the interlude, the shot dissolves back and forth between Captain Vere readying for possible battle and Old Vere recalling it. The parallel of the shots is reinforced by dissolves that

⁶⁰ The BBC television production used Britten's two-act revision. Thus, Vere's first entrance is in his cabin, when he calls his officers in.

give eyeline matches to Old Vere's glances around the room. He looks down at his desk and the shot dissolves to Captain Vere kneeling at a table, praying.

As I have been demonstrating, the music, singing, acting, staging, production design, filming, and costuming all contribute to the overall effect of an opera. I have so far indicated how Britten and his various collaborators contributed to an overall thematic return to Melville's concerns in his novel with the role of memory in understanding history, as well as the limits of authority in times of national crisis. I want to conclude with a scene in the BBC production of *Billy Budd* that illustrates how the myriad aspects of opera can unify in conveying an artistic statement, and also demonstrate how the logic of opera can influence the effect of an adaptation.

In all of the narrativizations of *Billy Budd*, just following Billy's death, the men stir toward some kind of rebellion. In Melville's novel, the rebellion is muted, the spontaneous, inarticulate murmur of man and nature against obvious injustice. It is quelled by habit without having really begun. Coxe and Chapman's play emphasize the threat of mutiny throughout, but leave the moments following Billy's death to the imagination of the viewer, as the play ends abruptly following his hanging. Ustinov's film most dramatically depicts an actual rebellion—prompted not by a sound of any kind, but by complete silence as the men are dismissed—that is only cut short by an enemy attack. How does Britten's opera depict the events following Billy's execution on the *Indomitable*?

I described above how Britten employed music in the scene after Billy's death, which occurs off stage. Coleman's direction of the scene in the television production indicates how the logical discourses of opera affect adaptation. This event—which in Melville's novel, Coxe and Chapman's play, and Ustinov's film takes a very limited amount of discursive time and space—is necessarily prolonged by the form of opera. Furthermore, while large groups in novels, plays,

and even most films, are not conducive to action on stage, they are a common characteristic of and advantage to opera. As Herbert Lindenberger notes, “In post-classical drama, larger groups have traditionally functioned as a negative force.... But opera affords opportunities for the use of crowds that are largely lacking in all but the most ceremonial forms of spoken drama” (34–35). The inarticulate murmur of Melville’s novel that is over almost as soon as it is described is here developed into an elaborate musical moment, spurred on by the large chorus assembled for it, and also necessitating staging by the director. In his role as a television director, Coleman further has to form a sequence of shots for the scene. Unlike Ustinov, however, Coleman has a longer, less naturalistic span of time in which to stage the insurrection.

The positive connotation of a crowd in opera, along with the artificially extended length of time for the uprising, encourages Coleman to stage the spontaneous rebellion melodramatically and symbolically. Rather than forced to depict an action sequence or a quick dismissal of the men, Coleman can carefully depict the quelling of the rebellion as the men’s song continues. He begins by panning across the men’s faces as they begin singing their “dark vowels,” emphasizing how the various parts are slowly coming together. Once the voices are singing together, the camera pans across larger groups of the men, revealing them to be slowly banding together and advancing toward the officers with torches. The officers then send the marines down to force them off the deck. The marines line up directly against the advancing men and begin pushing them back. Here, Coleman sets up the shot to block all of the marines with a single marine in a medium shot in the foreground. His head and feet are cut off by the frame, and his body acts as a symbol for a looming, crushing authority against a throng of men. In effect, the shot implies one officer moving all of the men back, slowly and with authoritative assurance. The other officers follow at a safe distance behind. As the marines push the men back, the

camera tracks along, keeping the foregrounded marine filling most of the right side of the frame, his sword pushing through the entire left side. As the men's song dies away, they are moved below deck, and the shot dissolves to a high-angle shot of the other officers advancing across the deck behind the marines, leaving Vere alone, motionless.

Coleman's staging and shooting of this sequence, necessitated as it was by the opera form, nonetheless reinforces Britten's musical allusions in the scene. This moment is the crux of the entire opera since Vere remains frozen, leaving Billy to die, prompting his loyal men to rise against him, and allowing his officers and marines to subdue the righteous rebellion. As Britten ties together Vere's anguish over his inaction and acquiescence to his own authority with the men's rebellion and Billy's own exuberant spirit, so Coleman reinforces in his staging and shot sequence, which leaves Vere alone on the upper deck, the shot zooming out and dissolving back to the fireplace for the Epilogue.

As the various narrativizations of *Billy Budd* reveal, the logic and demands of media and genre significantly influence the rhetorical, structural, contextual, and functional aspects of any adaptation, and in these cases reveal how slight discursive noise in a source narrativization (like the Webster, *Somers*, and Haymarket affairs in Melville's novel) can evolve into anarchist critiques through later narrativization *koncretizations*. What is required is consistent attention to discursive noise, something attuning audiences to look for the information it contains rather than viewing it as extraneous or superfluous. In doing so in analyzing these *Billy Budd* adaptations, I have illustrated how each successive narrativization manages to draw attention to the ideological influences on previous adaptations by virtue of its own ideological influences, as through the demands of the dramatic and operatic forms. In *Billy Budd* narrativizations, as in all persistent crime narrativizations of certain sets of events, the anarchist tendency in the adaptations reveals

itself in the content as well as the form. In the next part, I turn my attention to two other sets of narrativizations—the Molly Maguireism in nineteenth-century Pennsylvania, and the lives and various depictions and transformations of the eighteenth-century British criminals Jonathan Wild and Jack Sheppard—and the way their adaptations shift narrative focus and expose the ever-persistent anarchist principles in crime narratives.

PART TWO

**“EVERY MAN ROUND ME MAY ROB, IF HE PLEASE”: COMMUNITY AND CRIMINAL
IDENTITY IN MOLLY MAGUIRE AND NEWGATE ADAPTATIONS**

CHAPTER 4
“THE POOR MAKE NO NEW FRIENDS”:
THE MOLLY MAGUIRES IN ADAPTATION

The sailors of the *Bellipotent* in Melville and Ustinov’s *Billy Budd* just miss their opportunity to challenge their world-on-a-man-of-war, a society so obviously ordered against their own interests. Ending with a discussion of that failure, Part One not only demonstrated a comprehensive illustration of my method for ideology-critique in adaptation studies, it demonstrated how an adaptation of historical events identifies the way principles are warped into ideology, and revolutions into governments, through their necessity of authority for authority’s sake. In my exploration of the historical events that influenced *Billy Budd*’s composition, I also revealed how this authority inserts itself into the very fabric of legal and social relation, particularly through its obsessions with the eradication of doubt and the proliferation of evidence, so the State can claim full knowledge (and thus full representation) of its people.

In Part Two, I turn my attention to the persistence of the “creed” and “initial energy” of the foundational principles of American democracy and some of its consequential promises and myths that have propagated through the years.⁶¹ Since American ideology necessarily excludes potential challenges to its authority and legitimacy, many marginal individuals and groups in American history have found ways to fulfill promises of the American dream through extra-legal means, a course that can still lead to its own ideological constraints. This present part is dedicated to exploring how adaptations of crime narratives influence American culture regarding the role of criminality in American identities.

⁶¹ In using these terms, as well as those in the following sentence, I am referring to Ricoeur’s definition of ideology, as quoted in the introduction (see p. 6).

“Tho’ all the world betray thee”: The Molly Maguires in History

Billy, Claggart, and Vere were all subsumed *within* the State, their identities and memories to the community replaced and represented by official organs of the sovereign. Yet an existence wholly *without* the State leaves even less of a trace of existence, memory, history, and thus identity. Nevertheless, just such an existence the Molly Maguires of the anthracite coal region of Pennsylvania chose for themselves. In the following chapter, I examine their relation to American identities and ideologies and how subsequent narrative and fictional adaptations of their story have shaped their historical reception and understanding. As such, my *quo modo* analysis focuses primarily on the way the Molly Maguires’ historical reality has played out in correlation with the various historical, structural, rhetorical, and functional situations of those adaptations.

Kevin Kenny, the preeminent historian of the Molly Maguires, says emphatically, “Virtually everything we know about the Molly Maguires is based on accounts left by others, and these accounts are almost invariably hostile. The Mollies themselves left no evidence of their existence except for a few confessions tailored to the needs of the prosecution at the trials” (“Molly Maguires” 27).⁶² Consequently, over the years a few narratives of the Mollies have been offered in explanation, “from sociopaths and terrorists at one end of the spectrum to innocent victims and proletarian revolutionaries at the other” (Kenny, *Making Sense* 3). The Mollies’ loss of self-representation indicates already how an anarchist critique will emerge from adaptation. Based on what I discussed in the *Billy Budd* chapters, Molly Maguire adaptations will tend to fill

⁶² Kenny’s late-1990s work in researching the Molly Maguires, culminating in the 1998 *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, has been indispensable not only to my research but labor history in general because the history of Molly Maguire history is sparse and largely polarized. As Kenny himself points out, “That a book published as long ago as 1936 should be the best account of the subject available today indicates a significant hiatus in the historiography of the Molly Maguires” (*Making Sense* 4). Kenny’s work seeks to understand the Molly Maguires themselves as much as how history has done so by examining them in a transatlantic context, exploring how the Irish Molly Maguires, a rural vigilante group, came to influence the American Molly Maguires in their industrial context, and how various American interests molded the organization’s notoriety into a part of larger nativist and anti-labor movements.

gaps in representation. In criticism this tendency is stronger. For instance, in 1932, International Publishers—a Marxist publisher founded in 1924 by A. A. Heller and Alexander Trachtenberg—released Anthony Bimba’s *The Molly Maguires*, a book “composed and printed by union labor,” as it states on the copyright page. In the preface, Bimba situates his history of the Mollies in the tradition of labor struggle, frustrated that “many of the earlier struggles have been almost entirely neglected or forgotten by the labor movement, leaving the field clear for unsympathetic or openly hostile writers and historians.... Much of the material relating to these events must be excavated and the ‘forgotten chapters’ in the history of the American working class be reconstructed” (5). His opening chapter judgmentally attacks officially sanctioned history, noting that “although at least nineteen men died on the gallows as Mollies, there was no organization by that name... It was a fiction created in the course of a fierce class battle” (9). As openly biased as Bimba is, and as misleading as he sometimes is, he quite rightly points out that up to that point “the real nature of this bloody episode has been obscured and distorted by the historians whose chief sources of inspiration have been the writings of F. P. Dewees, coal company attorney, and Allan Pinkerton, founder of the notorious labor-spy agency, who supplied the mine owners with detectives and provocateurs” (16).

And yet despite such attempts to balance history, Kevin Kenny accurately notes that one narrative has still been dominant: “the Molly Maguires as inherently evil Irishmen who terrorized the anthracite region for two decades before being brought to justice by the heroic exploits of James McParlan, a Pinkerton detective” (3). As such, any historiography attempting to be fair to those who literally did not “write the history books” (and who may even be uncritically defended or attacked because of that exclusion) must be deeply skeptical and thoroughly analytical.

Kenny concludes his study, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires*, with this definition of the group: “The term *Molly Maguires* referred to a sustained but sporadic pattern of Irish collective violence” in the 1860s and 1870s (285). Unlike Bimba, Kenny maintains (and demonstrates) that they were certainly a secret group of some kind, but also notes that many acts of violence were readily attributed to the Molly Maguires with no foundation; the term was a handy and “ubiquitous explanation for violence in the lower anthracite region” (186). And although they certainly existed, in what precise manner and to what degree remain uncertain. They very well may not have been a particularly organized group, but rather a loose affiliation of like-minded Irish miners. In any case, those akin to descriptions of the Mollies still comprised a relatively distinct group of mine laborers in northeastern Pennsylvania, rooted in Irish tradition and supposed (or at least accused) by their capitalist enemies to be an irrationally violent shadow organization of the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH), as well as the coal workers’ union, the Workingmen’s Benevolent Association (WBA). Of course, nearly all of the Irish immigrants in the area belonged to both of these organizations, so the Mollies overlapped with their populations anyway. At any rate, despite questions of their exact organization, we can still speak fairly specifically about a group called “The Molly Maguires.”

While their ultimate end came from a conflict with the towering coal industry of Pennsylvania, their history cannot be completely explained by the simple opposition of capital and labor, but must also be understood in the context of labor–ethnic conflict among Welsh, English, and other Irish immigrant workers. Many immigrants of Anglophonic origin came to America in the nineteenth century looking for escape from Old World woes, either agricultural, economic, political, or religious—or in the case of the Irish Potato Famine, all four. But the Irish especially would find little different in the New World; as Catherine Wynne points out,

“Absentee landlords were replaced by absentee mine owners; wages were equally low; and workers were often compelled to shop in the company store, where prices were exorbitantly high” (*Colonial* 39).

Since a variety of laws in Ireland had severely restricted the rights of Catholics for generations, the Welsh and English immigrants tended to be more skilled and from better economic circumstances. In the Pennsylvania coal mines, the Irish started out at the bottom again, and “all the past hatreds and slights came welling up again, and the mining patches were quickly divided, physically and socially, along ethnic lines” (Broehl 85). The Irish émigrés traded rural poverty under oppressive Protestant landowners for an urban counterpart. Michael Burleigh relates, “Life in the urban Irish ghettos of the US...was primitive. The Irish were also heartily disliked by the Protestant aristocracy that dominated the US” (3). A general, ethnic gang rivalry among the Welsh, English, and Irish of Pennsylvania persisted amidst labor conflict (Broehl 70). The Molly Maguires were one of a variety of gangs of European origin who also included the Welsh Modocs and the Irish Sheet Iron Gang (a.k.a. Kilkennymen, the Chain Gang, or the Iron Clads). These groups warred with each other as much as (if not more than) against the coal companies.⁶³

This intra-labor and intra-ethnic conflict in the American Mollies is not at all surprising given the origin of their name and practices from the Irish Molly Maguires, a group of vigilante agrarians involved in direct, violent retribution against disruptions to their traditional landholding and land-use practices (Kenny, *Making Sense* 18–19). It is also not surprising given that the

⁶³ One of the first recorded incidents of Molly-Maguire-like activity in the anthracite region happened in 1846 when a man with a whitened face (later legally determined to be Martin Shay) killed the Welshman John Reese, who had shot and killed an Irish mine worker named Thomas Collahan, but had been acquitted of murder. At Shay’s trial, a number of witnesses provided him an alibi, although he was still convicted and sentenced to hang—a sentence that strangely does not seem to have been carried out (Kenny, *Making Sense* 80–81). While these events took place in and around the Schuylkill County Delaware Mines, the conflict was entirely ethnic and retributive.

source of the conflict still ultimately lay in the opposition of labor and capital.⁶⁴ This included retributive violence even against some Irish, as well as against the English landowners. “Far from being irrational or bloodthirsty,” Kenny continues, “the violence had a specific purpose and ‘legitimizing notion,’ namely the attempt to restore traditional conceptions of a just society and economy in the face of innovations and intrusions” (19). When unskilled Irish immigrants came to America, they still encountered systematic social repression by nativist Americans as well as established and/or skilled Anglo-immigrants, and they found solace and justice in the extra-legal, mummer-like practices of their forefathers in the old country. Thus a quintessentially Irish group became Americanized through their attempts to ensure their hitherto frustrated social mobility in industrial America through rural-style vigilantism.

Ironically, the New World problems the Irish faced helped solidify the incipient Fenian movement among the Irish diaspora. The Fenians were fraternal organizations dedicated to the establishment of an independent Irish state. The term was first applied to Irish-American groups and derives from the Gaelic *Fianna*, which were small, wandering warrior groups in Irish mythology. Even in brief summary, the similarity to the Molly Maguires is striking. Lawrence McCaffrey argues that “in response to the pressures, hostility, and prejudices of Anglo-American Protestant nativism, Irish nationalism gelled and flourished in the ghettos of urban America as a search for identity, an expression of vengeance, and a quest for respectability” (109). This transnational growth of Irish nationalism was not so strange for the Irish themselves. As William R. Polk points out, “For nearly a thousand years, the Irish have struggled against, been overwhelmed by, or been forced into accommodating foreign rule. Consequently, their history is a virtual catalog of the various aspects of resistance and insurgency” (54). This of course

⁶⁴ As with the African slave trade, the British ethnic and racial attitude toward its colonies (in India and Ireland and elsewhere) served to justify capital’s slave labor rather than cause it.

includes carrying on guerrilla tactics and terrorism against perceived imperial powers wherever they may be, particularly if they find themselves in former colony of their most recent oppressor. To Irish immigrants, the United States with its entrenched, aristocratic, Protestant British history and postcolonial development was simultaneously a present reminder of colonial oppression and a present promise of its potential end. While British and Welsh and certain Irish immigrants continued a tradition of Catholic Irish oppression, the United States was still a site of quarrel with the British, which reached a fever pitch in the first year of the Civil War with the *Trent* Affair.⁶⁵ “The [Fenian] strategy,” Michael Burleigh shows, “...was to transform British imperial difficulties into Irish opportunities. The imperial difficulties included...crises in British relations...with the US in the 1860s...” (3). While the British appeared to unofficially support the Confederacy, many Irish-Americans (already conscripted into the army from their northern ghettos) contributed greatly to the war effort.⁶⁶ The United States government, for its part, “was culpably indulgent toward Fenian terrorism, as it would be for the next hundred years” (3).

Those who found the Molly Maguires most detestable were the capitalist coal and railroad owners (most especially Franklin B. Gowen, notably a Protestant of Irish descent) and “free labor” Republicans (such as Benjamin Bannan, long-time editor of the influential *Miners’ Journal*). The free labor ideology stemmed essentially from the (somewhat) contradictory mingling of the guiding principles of capitalism (“the profit motive, accumulation, expansion,

⁶⁵ The United States had learned of the Confederacy’s attempt to send two envoys (James Mason and John Slidell) to establish diplomatic relations with Great Britain and engage them in conflict with the U.S. In their tracking of Mason and Slidell, one captain (Charles Wilkes of the USS *San Jacinto*) learned of their passage on a British Royal Mail paddle steamer (RMS *Trent*), and fired two shots across its bow to stop it. A lieutenant from the *San Jacinto* boarded the *Trent* and, after a near political disaster, secured the two diplomats and their secretaries. The incident enraged the British, and nearly led to military engagement between the two nations. Incidentally, John Slidell was the older brother of Alexander Slidell Mackenzie of the USS *Somers*. For more on the *Trent* Affair, see Gordon H. Warren’s *Fountain of Discontent: The Trent Affair and Freedom of the Seas* (Boston: Northeastern U P, 1981).

⁶⁶ Things were not uniformly harmonious between the Union army and the Irish immigrants, as the 1863 New York draft riots demonstrated. As I will relate very shortly, the harsh treatment the Irish received in the United States directly instigated their vicious competition with emancipated blacks in the North.

exploitation of wage labor”) with American founding principles (government with equality, liberty, justice, and the consent of the land-owning governed), and has subsequently and indiscriminately been considered the crux of what is now often called the “American Dream.”⁶⁷ Now, by suggesting that the mingling of capitalism and American founding principles is “somewhat contradictory,” I mean that most current citizens of the United States seem to believe that the founding principles of their nation is government with equality, liberty, justice, and consent of *all* the governed. To some degree this is true, but it is also very clear in the nation’s founding documents that the “Framers” only meant to include *land-owning* white men. This very particular, but very important, distinction provides for the possibility of contradiction or non-contradiction between capitalism and American representational democracy. If one interprets American principles as strictly equality, liberty, justice, and consent of the governed, capitalism is inconsistent.

Nevertheless, “free labor” was an attempt to reconcile capitalism with the best interpretation of America. As Kenny describes the ideology of the time, it emphasized

social mobility as an inherent element of economic expansion, and it employed a category of “labor” that embraced all producers of wealth, not just the minority who worked for wages. Labor was free in the sense that it was dignified and independent. In an economy that centered on the independent, business-oriented farm and the small shop, rather than the factory system, the social paradigm was the small, prosperous, self-employed entrepreneur, and the goal of labor was to achieve economic and political independence. (*Making Sense* 75)

In effect, Bannan and Republicans like him envisioned a steady progression (to put it in Marxist terms) from labor to petty bourgeoisie to bourgeois capitalist.⁶⁸ In this conception, the

⁶⁷ The itemized list of capitalism’s guiding principles comes directly from Fredric Jameson’s *Representing Capital* (9).

⁶⁸ Again, if one thinks of free labor ideology as the logical capitalist extension of the *de facto* principles of American republicanism in the late nineteenth century (which were the *de jure* principles at its founding), then the philosophy is a strategy for whites “held down” by wage labor. But as David Roediger (in *The Wages of Whiteness*) and Noel Ignatiev (in *How the Irish Became White*) both argue so powerfully, upon their arrival after the famine, the Irish were generally treated by established Americans the same as Northern free blacks, their closest labor rival. Indeed,

unfortunate circumstances of labor are ostensibly temporary and escapable. But such a progression was practically impossible for unskilled Irish immigrants. The systematic bias against many Irish workers prohibited any kind of progression from the start, and the subsequent obvious “failure” of most Irish to rise above their initial position in American society served only to persuade free-labor Republicans like Bannan that the Irish must somehow be racially incapable of hard work and improvement. The Molly Maguires were the very embodiment, they suggested, of Irish depravity and Irish incoherence with American society.

While there was certainly much overlap in opinion between the capitalists and free-labor Republicans of the era, the side of the capitalists was decidedly less complicated. At the heart of it: the mine operators despised the control the unions had over the workers (as I partly described in the last chapter). Whether this aversion arose from greed or righteous anger at union tyranny—or some combination therein—is certainly debatable. Anyway, almost every immigrant worker—skilled and unskilled, Welsh and Irish, old and new—was in a trade union, the largest and most successful in the anthracite region being the WBA (Kelly, *Making Sense* 111). These unions (and the WBA in particular) were steadfastly pacifist, though, and criticized Molly Maguireism (112). Nevertheless, the railroad and coal companies found easy scapegoating in the Molly Maguires, and through them a quicker end to union control.⁶⁹

For whatever combination of reasons, then, Franklin B. Gowen (president of Philadelphia and Reading Railroad and its subsidiary, the Philadelphia and Reading Coal and Iron Company)

as Roediger notes, there were a number of similarities between the two groups’ American experience, and their early shared history is largely one of camaraderie (134). White America treated them as such, and, “In antebellum Philadelphia, according to one account, ‘to be called an “Irishman” had come to be nearly as great an insult as to be called a “nigger”’” (133). Both groups were considered wild, bestial, and savage. “In short,” Roediger continues, “it was by no means clear that the Irish were white” (134). Thus, the Irish in America were so low on the social ladder, a pattern of Irish-American discrimination against blacks developed in an effort to establish racial (and thus socio-economic) supremacy. By the Civil War, the Irish had moved from a generally antislavery, antiracist position to one of white supremacy on the order of the Ku Klux Klan, all in a relentless attempt to assert whiteness as a placeholder of social capital (136).

⁶⁹ In fact, it was just such scapegoating that drove much of the Haymarket affair.

hired the Pinkertons to take down the Mollies (and by extension the WBA).⁷⁰ As Gowen saw it, the WBA “really controls almost every man who is engaged in mining coal” (Pennsylvania 14).

In fact, he suggested,

There never, since the middle ages, existed a tyranny like this on the face of God’s earth. There has never been, in the most despotic government in the world, such a tyranny, before which the poor laboring man has to crouch like a whipped spaniel before the lash, and dare not say that his soul is his own. Can it be for a moment supposed that we, in whose hands are millions of dollars, invested by women and children, who depend for bread upon it, shall stand idly by without making some little effort to save it? Such a thing has never been heard of before under Heaven. I do not charge this Workingman’s Benevolent association with it, but I say there is an association which votes in secret, at night, that men’s lives shall be taken, and that they shall be shot before their wives, murdered in cold blood, for daring to work against the order. . . .and it happens that the only men who are shot are the men who dare to disobey the mandates of the Workingmen’s Benevolent association. Is this to last forever? Can there be no redress?
(19)

Gowen continued, speaking to the Pennsylvania Committee on the Judiciary, General, suggesting that the WBA even had control of the Pennsylvania legislature, and wondered aloud if the legislature could even really do anything about it.

Allan Pinkerton’s agent, James McParlan, suspiciously happened to find exactly the evidence needed to prove Gowen’s points. Indeed, in subsequent years, McParlan was accused many times of being an *agent provocateur* and generally inventing conspiracy for the purposes of certainty through dramatic narrative (Bimba 81). As Kenny notes, “The chief source of the allegation that the AOH and the Molly Maguires were the same organization was James McParlan” (*Making Sense* 234). This is most evident in the conviction, execution, and 1979 pardon of John Kehoe, at whose trial McParlan “gave his most detailed account of the inner working of the AOH. . .” (234). “Black Jack” Kehoe was an unusually prominent Catholic

⁷⁰ The fact that a major railroad company and a major coal company in the region were operated by the same person should be some indication of the leeway capital had in the late nineteenth century. Who this person was is even more indicative. As Wayne G. Broehl notes, “Already his life was full of contradictions. He was of Irish descent but a Protestant, a long-time resident of the coal regions but now its absentee master—holding his power as president of the rail and coal companies the economic life of the region” (132).

Irishman in Girardville—he was a tavern owner and a county delegate for the Hibernians—and his conviction was considered essential to the defeat of the Molly Maguires by McParlan, who encouraged the popular belief that Kehoe was the “mastermind of the entire Molly Maguire conspiracy” (Kenny, *Making Sense* 227). Nevertheless, Kehoe’s 1877 conviction for an 1862 killing had no real evidence.⁷¹ His conviction came anyway from the judge’s biased charge to the jury, as the conviction in the Webster trial had (228).

While no conclusive evidence against him was discovered in the Molly Maguire affair, McParlan was largely discredited in the aftermath of the assassination of ex-Governor Frank Steunenberg of Idaho, during which time he coerced confessions and intentionally modeled his overall case against the leaders of the Western Federation of Miners on the one against the Molly Maguires (cf. Lukas 197 and Kenny, *Making Sense* 283). Again, McParlan seems to have been a master of public relations and understood, as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle after him did, that the public were eager and ready to believe in secret, conspiratorial societies as the primary source of social ill, and he used this eagerness to lend credence to his similar claims in the Molly Maguire and Steunenberg affairs. Nevertheless, whereas McParlan’s testimony was the sole requirement for the conviction of a number of Molly Maguire defendants, such a tactic no longer worked in the 1908 Steunenberg affair. At any rate, historians have since widely noted the ludicrous pageantry of the Molly Maguire trials. They were sensational and farcical, much like the Haymarket trial. Kenny quotes Harold D. Aurand’s general observation of the whole affair as indicative:

⁷¹ The 1862 killing was the first attributed to the Molly Maguires, although they were not accused so at the time (Kenny, *Making Sense* 85). Langdon made incendiary remarks against a number of Irish mine workers who attacked him as he left. He died the following day. That Kehoe, one of few successful Catholic Irishmen and thus a dangerous anomaly to Protestant nativists, would be convicted of the oldest memorable crime attributed to the Molly Maguires has a conclusive suggestion: the most successful Catholic Irish are really just the criminal leaders of hoodlums responsible for the most dastardly, unexplainable events in recent years; they are responsible for it then as they are responsible for it now.

The Molly Maguire investigation and trials marked one of the most astounding surrenders of sovereignty in American history. A private corporation initiated the investigation through a private detective agency, a private police force arrested the supposed offenders, and coal company attorneys prosecuted—the state provided only the courtroom and hangman. (qtd in *Making Sense* 213).⁷²

Howsoever unfair the trials were, the Mollies were accused and convicted of inciting and perpetuating excessive industrial and personal violence, including assassinations and industrial sabotage, and were thus “brought to justice” in 1877 after which twenty of their number were hanged and another twenty were imprisoned (27). Gowen himself played a significant role in the actual trials, and as Kenny points out, “That the railroad president who hired the Pinkertons to spy on the Molly Maguires also served as a prosecutor in their trials is a measure of the type of justice that was being dispensed in the anthracite region in the 1870s” (30). After 1877, the Mollies effectively were no more.⁷³

What is clear from this brief account, and even clearer from a further perusal of their history, is how thoroughly anarchist the Molly Maguires were. Having escaped social and institutional injustice in their home country, Irish immigrant laborers came to America only to discover that the freedom and self-determinism of American ideology was likewise denied to them. As they were misused by the imperial English, so they found they were similarly misused by the robber barons of the industrial revolution. Systematically disenfranchised and disempowered, a loose group of Irish immigrants sought recompense the only way they felt available to them: sporadically, secretly, using guerilla tactics. As William R. Polk explains, “the Irish experience has involved invasion and colonization, guerrilla warfare and

⁷² Aurand’s quote is from his unpublished dissertation.

⁷³ A telling indication of the full-scale defeat of Molly Maguireism is the surprising absence of labor agitation in the anthracite coal region during the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, during which much of the worst violence happened elsewhere in Pennsylvania (most notably in Pittsburgh and Scranton). Ironically, some of that violence was contemporaneously attributed to Molly Maguires driven out of Schuylkill County, but such an accusation is without evidential foundation (Kenny, *Making Sense* 278).

counterinsurgency, genocide and emigration, partition and ‘nation building,’ terrorism and internment” (54). It was logical that such violence would continue under analogous repression. That Irish violence has persisted for so long is strong verification that “the war of the Irish for independence can claim to be the longest lasting in world history” (54).

Nevertheless, the retributive justice the Irish sought for actions by various repressive groups sometimes merged with personal vendettas and petty crime. The differences were (and are) difficult to ascertain. (Again, though, this indistinct difference between individual and community action is an indication of the anarchism of the Molly Maguires.) And so, after all of this, another fact becomes clear. The distinctions among terrorism, insurgency, guerilla fighting, and a successful “legitimate” revolution are fluid and determined after the fact, mainly through historiography. The fluidity of these distinctions is readily apparent in many of the most significant events in American history: the American Revolution, the Spanish-American War, the Philippine Insurrection, the Vietnam War, and the War on Terror, for instance. In most of these cases, terrorist acts and guerrilla tactics were the defining reason for “victory” (the American Revolution, the Vietnam War, and the War on Terror) or were at least significant (the Spanish-American War).⁷⁴ Generally speaking, popularly-supported guerrilla fighting against foreign forces can only be defeated effectively by virtual genocide, as William Polk affirms (xvii). He notes that “we [Americans] came close to genocide in Vietnam” (xvii), but the lost lesson in U.S. history is the Philippine Insurrection, a U.S. victory, during which some historians

⁷⁴ In the case of the American Revolution, the Vietnam War, and the War on Terror, victory has been “unconventional” in the traditional sense—that is the underestimated insurrectionary forces fatigued the larger forces into retreat and withdrawal rather than defeat them by direct force in “conventional” battle. The British planned poorly against the guerrilla-fighting Americans and were unwilling to commit the resources needed to defeat them; the Americans faced a similar problem in the Vietnam War and still do in the on-going, unwieldy War on Terror. As of this writing, Taliban forces in Afghanistan continue considerable terrorist and guerrilla tactics against the military forces that “represent” an increasingly disapproving American population. Ironically, the continuing “unconventional” victories of guerrilla tactics make them very much conventional at this point in history.

estimate Americans were responsible for the genocide of 1.4 million Filipinos.⁷⁵ But in the United States, the various legacies of these events have been represented through the lens of American legitimacy.

In the case of the Pennsylvania Molly Maguires, the pattern of vigilante terrorism in the anthracite coal region should be understood in relation to a burgeoning, transnational Fenian insurrectionary movement against British imperialism. That the Irish took to terrorist means in the similarly oppressive conditions of industrializing America makes perfect sense. As Michael Burleigh simply states, “Dynamite terrorism was the tactic of the weak in an otherwise impossible conflict” (13). Polk agrees, noting that “terrorism is often the first stage of insurgency” (xix). Nevertheless, continuing terrorist tactics are not necessarily an indication of the success of an oppressed people nobly rising up. In the case of the Irish, Burleigh relates, “The early Fenian notion of a people’s army representing the oppressed nation’s will through insurrectionary violence was gradually displaced by that of terror campaigns designed to sap the morale of the more mighty imperial enemy” (11). As Burleigh goes on to explain, such continuing terrorism occurs largely because there is not widespread support for insurrection, and the Mollies certainly did not have such support. Unsuccessful insurrection begins and ends in terror.

“Citizens of the same world-wide country”: Sherlock Holmes and America

The events of the 1877 Molly Maguire trials captured the public’s imagination and led to a number of popular narrative expressions of the conflict, including a ghost-written book by the Scottish Allan Pinkerton entitled *The Molly Maguires and the Detectives*, published the very year

⁷⁵ After fighting the Spanish *with* the Filipinos (who significantly helped Americans through guerrilla fighting), the United States committed many of its worst atrocities *against* them. Its actions against the Philippines read like a list of the worst horrors of the 20th century: concentration camps, village massacres (including children), water torture, and much more. The first-hand descriptions are appallingly brutal.

of the trials. Besides the Pinkerton account, several serials and paperbacks were circulated with varying interpretations of the motivation and guilt of the group.

But at present, these “dime novels” are only known or seen if they are specifically sought out. The most likely introduction to the mysterious Mollies will be through one very popular source: Sherlock Holmes. In the last Sherlock Holmes novel (*The Valley of Fear*), Holmes learns of a plot by Moriarty’s gang to kill a man named John Douglas, only to discover that the murder has already taken place. Holmes discovers that the disfigured victim is in fact Douglas’s attacker, that Douglas has been hiding in an attempt to fool the authorities. In a separate narrative, apparently deriving from an account Douglas wrote while in hiding, the reader learns of a man named Jack McMurdo who joins a secret society of murdering, vengeful coal workers (named the Scowrers) in Pennsylvania. McMurdo turns out to be a Pinkerton agent (named Birdy Edwards) paid to inform on the Scowrers, and who is ultimately pursued for his treachery toward the society to the point that he changes his name to John Douglas (the apparent victim at the beginning of the story) and leaves America for England.

If *Billy Budd* provides an exemplary first case-study, the present examination of one of the narratives permeating Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s *Valley of Fear* likewise thoroughly warrants its place in any study of adaptation: Sherlock Holmes is the most portrayed character in major film history.⁷⁶ Even this year, as the BBC’s modern-day adaptation *Sherlock* continues to garner popular and critical acclaim, CBS is beginning production on its own contemporary adaptation entitled *Elementary*, just after the British director Guy Ritchie released his successful Sherlock Holmes sequel (*A Game of Shadows*) through Warner Bros. (with a third Ritchie–Downey, Jr.

⁷⁶ There is some disagreement among enthusiasts of Sherlock Holmes and Dracula as to who definitively deserves the title of most filmed character. Broadly speaking, Dracula has been in more filmic representations (including television and foreign and international productions), but Sherlock Holmes has been in more major film productions. In any case, the Guinness Book of World Records gives the title to Holmes.

film already in production). And as this “arms race” of productions suggests, Sherlock Holmes’s success has always been transatlantic, even as his identity has been inextricably linked with Britishness.

In fact, Sherlock Holmes’s success perhaps owes as much to American enthusiasm as almost anything else. The first Holmes tale Doyle wrote (*A Study in Scarlet*) concerns America very specifically: a Mormon revenge story with half the story depicting Americans in Utah without Holmes or Watson around. The second tale published—the novel that rescued Holmes from being just a memorable character in a one-time historical–detective novel—was wooed and commissioned by Philadelphia’s *Lippincott’s Magazine*. After Holmes’s “death” and years of pestering by the general public (and his mother) to bring the beloved detective back (and after the teasing success of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*), Doyle finally acquiesced to continue his Holmes writing only after a generous contract from the *American Collier’s Weekly*.

Of course, the American connection bears out thematically, too, in the plots of many of the tales. In the first series of stories especially, America is the source of a number of adversaries. And of course, in addition to *A Study in Scarlet*, *The Valley of Fear* also depicts almost half of its events exclusively in America, specifically in Pennsylvania and specifically about a group that is essentially the Molly Maguires. That this might be the only place by which a person may come to know about the Molly Maguires is unfortunate since even within *The Valley of Fear*, the group is known as the Scowrers, and their depiction is decidedly lopsided, generally following Kevin Kenny’s description of the most dominant Molly Maguire narrative, that of the “inherently evil Irishmen who terrorized the anthracite region for two decades before being brought to justice by the heroic exploits of...a Pinkerton detective” (*Making Sense* 3).⁷⁷

⁷⁷ The purpose of this chapter, of course, is to complicate that view, so please possess your souls in patience, as Holmes said on a number of occasions (including in *The Valley of Fear*).

Even during—and of course long after—his initial appearance in publication, Sherlock Holmes has found continued international success in adaptation, and again, most auspiciously in America. Yet Doyle’s interest in and use of American themes and motifs seems to run counter to America’s own interest in and use of Sherlock Holmes. At the same time, they also parallel each other in a strangely suitable way. As Doyle uses America as a mythic land of secret organizations (the Avenging Angels of the Mormons, the KKK, the supposed Red-Headed League, the Scowrers/Molly Maguires) and romantic origins (the Jersey girl Irene Adler, the Californian Hatty Doran)—all of dubious and suspicious nature—so America often uses Sherlock Holmes as a metonym for all things (they believe to be) Victorian: gas-lamps and hansom cabs; castles and manors with secret passages; scandal among royalty; young women mistreated by monstrous financial upstarts; horrible family secrets; snooty banter and dry wit; a dedication to manners and elocution even in the most dire situations. And at the center of all this Victorian Britishness is an eccentrically individualistic character who could be of American lineage and who expressed early and loud acclamation for America:

It is always a joy to meet an American...for I am one of those who believe that the folly of a monarch and the blundering of a minister in far-gone years will not prevent our children from being some day citizens of the same world-wide country under a flag which shall be a quartering of the Union Jack with the Stars and Stripes. (Doyle, “Noble Bachelor” 298)⁷⁸

As such, it is ironic but still rather unsurprising that the most thoroughly American of the Sherlock Holmes stories were less frequently adapted than the others. Sherlock Holmes gave America an Americanly-palatable Britain, and they generally wanted America left out.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ A number of Sherlockians, including Franklin D. Roosevelt, have put forward the theory that Sherlock Holmes is actually an American. The name “Holmes” was came from Conan Doyle’s admiration of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., whom the reader may recall played so vital a role in the Webster murder trial.

⁷⁹ A few films, such as the Rathbone–Bruce *Sherlock Holmes in Washington* (1943), do emphasize the fish-out-of-water relation of Holmes with Americans, but this is mainly for comic effect, placing Holmes’s Britishness in stark contrast to the United States.

This “American absence” is not particularly noticeable, or even noteworthy, among the adaptations of the many stories. For instance, although Irene Adler hails from New Jersey, her American association enters into “A Scandal in Bohemia” in no particularly plot-relevant way. This is likewise true of Hatty Moran in “The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor,” and of “Altamont” in “His Last Bow.” But the fundamentally American focus of *half* of the Holmes *novels* would seem to indicate there would be a greater emphasis on their adaptation among the many in existence. While *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and *The Sign of Four* have been adapted a great number of times (*Baskervilles* being the most filmed of all), both *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Valley of Fear* have been relatively disregarded in terms of their full adaptation. When either has been adapted, the scenes concerning America are often condensed or excised altogether. The major dramatic adaptations of *A Study in Scarlet* that have included the controversial section about a secret murderous organization of Mormons have come from the BBC, the Soviet Union, and Australia.⁸⁰ *The Valley of Fear* has been similarly Bowdlerized with respect to the second half (the Scowrers section). In most adaptations, the plot concerning these Scowrers is kept to a minimum, and the Pinkerton Birdy Edwards’s relation to them stated explicitly at the outset. Sometimes, his back-story is even relegated to simple diegetic dialogue narration. Why?

Of course, understanding *The Valley of Fear* in adaptation and the glaring absence therein of the Scowrer subplot also necessitates a look at the broader context of Conan Doyle’s life and work, and particularly the historical situation of its composition and publication with regard to Irish–British relations. The most conspicuous fact concerning *The Valley of Fear* is its use of Moriarty in the plot, for other than “The Final Problem,” the “Napoleon of crime” is nowhere else involved in Holmes’s adventures. The relative absence of Moriarty, one of the most famous

⁸⁰ Recently, in 2007, an American radio production (from Jim French) including the Avenging Angels plot premiered on Sirius, but it has had a negligibly small audience.

arch-villains in literary history, and his very particular association with *Valley of Fear* makes the paucity of its adaptations even more puzzling.

Another strange aspect of *Valley* is its late publication in terms of the other Sherlock Holmes stories. Of the four Holmes novels published, two (*A Study in Scarlet* and *The Sign of Four*) were published between Christmas of 1887 and February of 1890—just a little over two years. The third novel (*The Hound of the Baskervilles*) appeared serialized between 1901 and 1902, a full seven years after the last story up to that point (“The Final Problem”). *The Valley of Fear* was serialized beginning in September of 1914, in the beginning months of World War I. Between the two novels separated by twelve years only six stories appeared (published between 1908 and 1913). From the time of Holmes’s first appearance to his last novel, the detective story had changed quite a bit. The first substantial hard-boiled detective fiction began appearing in *Black Mask* only five years after *The Valley of Fear*. The world had changed, too. In British affairs alone, Queen Victoria had passed away, the Irish had moved steadily toward Home Rule (and achieved it belatedly in 1922), Australia had federated, and a number of calamitous events culminated in the outbreak of World War I.

How are these changes relevant in relation to *Valley*’s publication? Conan Doyle’s reaction to its coincidental publication with the start of World War I, and *The Strand*’s counter-response, answers fittingly enough. As Daniel Stashower relates, Conan Doyle “regretted the ‘bad luck’ of saddling Greenhough Smith [the founding editor of *The Strand*] with so trivial a manuscript at a time of national crisis,” but “the editor was glad to be able to offer such a plum to his readers, who were getting more than enough war coverage in the newspapers” (314). Conan Doyle’s audiences now expected him to provide them a quaint retreat to late Victorian England as an escape. It is little wonder they so disliked the presciently hard-boiled American

labor subplot. Like most writers burdened with an immensely popular creation, Conan Doyle was punished for his attempts to remain relevant. Holmes exclaims fittingly but unintentionally, then, in the opening passages of *The Valley of Fear*, “We pay the price, Watson, for being too up-to-date!” (475).

Besides its conspicuous publication date, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s last Holmes novel occupies an awkward critical place in the Canon.⁸¹ As I have just intimated, its publication date and reception are linked inextricably. As Conan Doyle readily admitted, Herbert Greenhough Smith was paying him handsomely for this first Holmes tale—and a novel, at that—in six years. So the serialization did not disappoint financially. But as scores of reviewers have suggested, “*The Valley of Fear* remains one of the detective’s least popular outings” (Stashower 314). Predictably, his audience disliked the second half, during which Holmes is completely absent. One of its few early champions was John Dickson Carr who (gracelessly) defended it against leftist critiques of Conan Doyle’s portrayal of the Pennsylvania coal region

Some critics have been inclined to play down *The Valley of Fear*. They dislike what they think is the ‘political’ aspect of the second part, the Scowrers in the coal fields, and then profess to wince at the technique. It is often the complaint of those Left Wing writers who themselves can’t construct a plot for beans. (234)

Such a defense through an attack on the left must have been quite popular in 1948 when Carr’s widely acclaimed Conan Doyle biography was published. Carr’s rhetorical approach attacks any attempts to criticize Conan Doyle’s technique in splitting the story between Holmes and the Scowrers by calling it ideologically motivated. In any case, he goes on to defend the novel exclusively based on Holmes’s detection in the first half ignoring the Scowrers part altogether. In almost all cases, the first half of the novel is defended *despite* the second.

⁸¹ In Sherlockian scholarship and fandom, the “Canon” (always capitalized) refers to the 56 short stories and 4 novels published between 1887 and 1927. Although Conan Doyle wrote a few other Holmes related pieces (apocrypha) during those years (including a play), the stories serialized in *The Strand* and the novels have traditionally defined the gospel of Sherlock Holmes.

A measured estimation of the book, if perhaps misleading, comes from Don Richard Cox, who notes:

The Valley of Fear has drawn a very mixed reaction. In some ways it is the best of the Holmes novels; in some ways it is the worst.... [The] flashback, based on Allan J. Pinkerton's book *The Molly Maguires and the Detectives*...is very much a self-contained story and, although interesting in its own way, totally destroys the narrative line of the novel. The mystery has been solved, and, except for a few details, the story has essentially been told when the long flashback is begun, making for a very extended and anti-climactic filler. (131–32).

I call this assessment misleading since it ignores the book's publication purpose and reception.

Evaluations of the novel have been unable to take the narrative construction on its own terms, far too preoccupied as they are with the absence of Holmes, as the novel's contemporaneous readers were. *The Strand's* readers wanted a classic, escapist Holmes story, not what amounted to an extraordinary meeting of various crime genres (locked-room mystery, spy, hard-boiled detective, gangster) in one narrative. It is no surprise then that the novel's biggest fans have chiefly come in recent years. Michael Coren's 1995 biography very simply sums the novel up thus: "The book turned out to be one of Conan Doyle's greatest creations" (150).

"That veiled civil war": A. C. D. and the Irish Question

Many of these publication and reception difficulties with the plot are more obvious to twenty-first-century readers than one that was likely a *predominant* difficulty with it at the time: the specter of Fenianism and Irish terrorism. For one thing, the years of *The Valley of Fear's* composition and publication were marked by a number of major developments in Irish affairs of which Conan Doyle was fully aware. Conan Doyle began work on the novel toward the end of 1913 (Stashower 313), in the very time-crucible of Irish–British conflict. British Parliament had finally responded to repeated demands for Home Rule in 1912, but this led to its own crises (Kee 468). In September of 1912, nearly half a million Protestant Irish and English men and women in

Ulster signed the “Ulster Covenant and Declaration,” pledging unwavering loyalty to the crown and its Empire, and set up the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) to resist Home Rule, by force if necessary (476). Irish nationalists responded with the formation of the nationalist Irish Volunteers, a military group comprising members of the Ancient Order of Hibernians amongst others which would also go on to form a part of the Irish Republican Army (IRA). These developments greatly troubled Arthur Conan Doyle, who wrote to *The Times*, “as one who has been converted to Home Rule by Imperial considerations I have never been able to understand why Southern Home Rulers should refuse to the North the very justice which they have so long demanded for themselves” (“Nationalists and Exclusion” 199–200).

But when he was directly writing *The Valley of Fear*, the most present and visible sign of unrest was the Dublin Lock-out, one of the most severe labor disputes in history and certainly the most important Irish one. The conflict was inextricably tied to the question of Irish nationalism, too. The heart of the entire affair was the Dublin employers’ opposition to trade unionism. The employers were led by William Martin Murphy (chairman of the Dublin United Tramway Company, as well as wide-reaching businessman of department stores, hotels, and newspapers) who specifically wanted to defeat the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union recently formed by James Larkin. On August 19, Murphy locked out some known trade unionists from work. On August 26, Larkin led unionized tram workers in general strike, while Murphy organized employers all over Dublin to force their workers to sign agreements preventing them from joining in sympathy strike (a tactic developed by Larkin). The bloody confrontation between labor and capital lasted until January of 1915, while Conan Doyle worked steadily on his own tale of labor and capital conflict. During that time, Larkin and James Connolly formed

the Irish Citizen's Army to retaliate against widespread police brutality. This citizen army would fight in the 1916 Easter Rising.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's decision to write about terrorist Fenians at this time is striking, then, although many twenty-first-century readers might not initially notice. Since Conan Doyle was born in Edinburgh, and since that Scottish capital even laudably celebrated the sesquicentennial of his birth there, present-day readers might be forgiven for forgetting that Conan Doyle was thoroughly Irish Catholic on both sides of his family. He and his descendants hardly forgot this, but he did have a complicated relationship with Ireland, particularly with regard to the question of Irish nationalism.

At any rate, Conan Doyle maintained strong interest in Irish affairs throughout his life. Conan Doyle's family had historically identified more strongly with the liberal nationalists (i.e. Home Rule enthusiasts). His Catholic, landowning grandfather (John Doyle) had emigrated from Ireland in 1815 to escape the harsh Penal Laws that had legally oppressed Irish Catholics since the eighteenth century (Wynne, "Mollies" par. 5). John Doyle's son, Charles Altamont Doyle, carried forth his father's deeply nationalist convictions, but such beliefs were much harder for his son, Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle, to hold. His full name, let alone his surname (just Doyle when he was young), marked him inextricably as Irish in Edinburgh, where his native ethnicity comprised only four or five percent of the total population (par. 6). Additionally, in Arthur's childhood days, anti-Irish sentiment was strong due to a number of Fenian terrorist activities. Catherine Wynne relates that in December of 1867, when Conan Doyle was eight, Fenians blew up a wall at the Clerkenwell Jail, injuring and killing a number of innocent bystanders; "after this incident, popular opinion troublingly elided Irishness with Fenianism" (par. 7).

It was a particularly unfortunate time to be growing up Irish in imperial Britain. “It was during this period,” Wynne notes, “that the Irish were to become increasingly politicized both constitutionally, through the Home Rule Movement, and unconstitutionally, through the physical force separatism advocated by the Fenians” (“Mollies” par. 8). Given this troubling childhood introduction to Irish–British relations, Conan Doyle’s subsequent, conflicted treatment of the Irish in his fiction and his long-developing views on the question of Irish government follow logically. Wynne argues that

Doyle’s rapprochement of his Irish lineage permeates his fiction. The early short stories examine militant Irish nationalism while attempting some understanding of the social conditions that propagate such extreme political movements. His poetry and historical writings celebrate Irish military valor while attempting to recruit it for the imperial cause. The Holmes stories investigate the nature of the secret society. Moriarty’s criminal gang, along with the Pennsylvanian Scowlers, invoke Irish and Irish-American Molly Maguireism and ultimately Fenianism. The covert nature of these organizations that exist clandestinely on the margins of respectable society can be tackled only by infiltrating and absorbing their criminality. (*Colonial* 55)

As Wynne argues more fully, Conan Doyle’s early literary examinations of Fenianism, as it manifested in a British imperial context, are penetrating. “That Little Square Box” (1881), for instance, satirizes the British “fear-mongering” surrounding Fenianism (Wynne, “Mollies” par. 10). The cowardly narrator overhears two American passengers (Flannigan and Muller) talking about a mysterious, precious box that he supposes to be part of a terrorist plot.⁸² “The very name of ‘Flannigan’ smacked of Fenianism,” he thinks to himself, “while ‘Muller’ suggested nothing but socialism and murder” (149). Ultimately, after the narrator has tried to stop the men, he discovers that the box contains only two pigeons in an international competition. But Conan Doyle is not just poking gentle fun at some cowardly Brits. As Catherine Wynne points out, “In Flannigan, he [Conan Doyle] portrays an Irish-American who is a cogent reasoner,” arguing with

⁸² Concerning his character, the narrator, Hammond, states, “I have remarked that I am a physical coward. I am a moral one also. It is seldom that the two defects are united to such a degree in one character” (149).

the captain's dismissal of the Fenians ("Mollies" par. 10). Flannigan retorts: "Every secret society has produced desperate men—why shouldn't the Fenians have them too? Many men think it a privilege to die in the service of a cause, which seems right in their eyes, though others may think it wrong" (Conan Doyle, "Box" 161). A clergyman in the conversation responds, "Indiscriminate murder cannot be right in anybody's eyes" (161). Flannigan nevertheless has an equalizing rejoinder: "The bombardment of Paris was nothing else...yet the whole civilised world agreed to look on with folded arms, and change the ugly word 'murder' into the more euphonious one of 'war.' It seemed right enough to German eyes; why shouldn't dynamite seem so the Fenian?" (161–62). The captain finally dismisses it all, "At any rate their empty vapourings have led to nothing yet" (162). The story was published during a Fenian bombing campaign in Britain, and such a satirical jab at the British while depicting an intelligent, reasonable, sympathetic Irishman was a controversial move for someone with such an obviously Irish surname (Wynne, "Mollies" par. 10).

"The Green Flag" (1893) is an even more stridently Irish story, although of course it is not without complication.⁸³ As Catherine Wynne summarizes it, the story "exposes the appalling conditions of an Ireland racked with social and political turbulence" ("Mollies" par. 11). As the narrator describes the conditions from which the Irish emerged under British imperial rule, "Savagery had begotten savagery in that veiled civil war" ("Flag"). But the story depicts much of its social criticism in a comic (though not light) tone, and in a peculiarly Irish way—that is, with dark gallows humor permeating the language. The opening lines, for example, balance dry wit and drastic understatement

When Jack Conolly, of the Irish Shotgun Brigade, the Rory of the Hills Inner Circle, and the extreme left wing of the Land League, was incontinently shot by Sergeant Murdoch

⁸³ Among its critical difficulties are the troubling racial essentialisms in Conan Doyle's descriptions of the Africans and Arabs the British imperial forces are fighting, not to mention the blatant racism of his characters' descriptions.

of the constabulary, in a little moonlight frolic near Kanturk, his twin-brother Dennis joined the British Army. The countryside had become too hot for him; and, as the seventy-five shillings were wanting which might have carried him to America, he took the only way handy of getting himself out of the way. (“Flag”)

Dennis Conolly bathetically joins the army after his Fenian brother is shot “in a little moonlight frolic near Kanturk,” for no other reason than that “the countryside had become too hot...and...the seventy-five shillings...which might have carried him to America” he lacked. He leads a band of inscripted Irishmen into partial mutiny just as his company engages in a bloody battle with Mahdists in the area of present-day Sudan.⁸⁴ They refuse their captain’s orders to fight against the attacking Mahdist forces for the British Empire since “England is no country of ours” (“Flag”). Yet at that moment, the Mahdist fighters come toward them, and the narrator describes how

through the narrow gap surged a stream of naked savages, mad with battle, drunk with slaughter, spotted and splashed with blood—blood dripping from their spears, their arms, their faces. Their yells, their bounds, their crouching, darting figures, the horrid energy of their spear-thrusts, made them look like a blast of fiends from the pit. And were these the Allies of Ireland? Were these the men who were to strike for her against her enemies? Conolly’s soul rose up in loathing at the thought.

In this moment, the narrator’s voice blends with Conolly’s thoughts, and Conan Doyle’s own views are difficult to discern precisely. In any case, spurred by racist loathing, Conolly and the other Irishmen join in the battle, and are mercilessly slaughtered. In a darkly comic twist, the reader discovers that the Irish hesitation and eventual slaughter gave the rest of the British troops time to regroup, and made little difference in their overall strategy.

Conan Doyle’s rhetorical strategy in “The Green Flag” is intricate and indeterminate. In fact, the stylistic complexity of both “That Little Square Box” and “The Green Flag” challenges

⁸⁴ The Mahdist revolt in Sudan was a religious and political conflict prescient of present-day Western conflicts with various Middle Eastern nations. The Mahdists were a group of Sudanese Muslims who followed Muhammad Ahmad, a self-proclaimed Mahdi (messianic redeemer of Islam). Ahmad and his followers, most notably Abdullah ibn Muhammad, wanted to expel the British as well as the Egyptian monarchy from the Sudan region and establish a purely Islamic state. See Winston Churchill’s *The River War* (1902) for a relatively contemporaneous account.

the alleged simplicity to which Conan Doyle's writing is usually relegated. Many readers consider his various adventure stories primarily in the context of straightforward escapism, but these stories reveal a more complicated author demanding more thoughtful analysis. "The Green Flag" reveals some of the terrible effects of British imperial rule on Ireland, but the problem of imperialism is further compounded by the background—a Sudanese political *and* religious revolt against the colonized Egyptians, as well as the British. Particularly within the comic context of the story, the loyal Irish officers arguing with their insubordinate Fenian subordinates to fight the Mahdist revolt against the colonized Egyptians for the absent British Empire is ludicrous and (almost) laughable. The slaughter of the Irish, and its utter futility, is likewise darkly humorous. Conan Doyle's story does not seem to be demonstrating so much that the Irish should not govern themselves, but that within the borders of the British Empire they are much more likely to be simply and unremarkably crushed by the inexorable wheel of imperialism.

Ironically, these stories correspond to a time in Conan Doyle's life when he was an anti-Home Rule Unionist.⁸⁵ Nonetheless, these various contradictions and complicated fictional investigations more strongly reveal one overarching truth: Arthur Conan Doyle was thoroughly and irrepressibly concerned with Irish affairs. As Catherine Wynne explains, "Doyle's letters to the press indicate a strong interest in Irish affairs, ranging from an anti-Home Rule stance to later support for Irish federalism" (*Colonial* 4). Of course, Wynne also points out that such mutation in political views, as in religious ones, was not at all unusual for Irish of the time.

In any case, by 1911, partly through various discussions with the ill-fated Sir Roger Casement, Conan Doyle had changed his earlier Unionist view and supported peacefully-attained

⁸⁵ Conan Doyle's thoughts on this subject, like those of most Irish of his time, are complicated. He publically expressed for quite a while that the Irish, like many other groups, might be better off under benevolent British rule. Still, stories like "The Green Flag" reveal that Conan Doyle's trust in this benevolence was not necessarily unwavering. And he also always situated his Unionist view in terms of the criminal violence attributed to Fenians and nationalists, which were not denounced much by nationalist politicians.

Home Rule. As his views toward nationalism shifted, so did Conan Doyle's representation of the Irish in his fiction. While a few of his earlier stories touch on colonized Ireland and the Irish diaspora, Conan Doyle's later work is markedly absent of it—with the notable exception of *The Valley of Fear*.

As the development of his stories and non-fiction demonstrate, even Conan Doyle's late Home-Rule stance was part of an ongoing attempt at “reconciliation of British imperialism and Irish nationalism” (Wynne, *Colonial* 4). Even though *The Valley of Fear* was written in the midst of the Dublin Lock-out and the tense stand-off between the Ulster and Irish Volunteers, it is primarily set in the late 1880s, with a large portion of the action also taking place in 1875 in the Pennsylvania coal region. At this point in my analysis, a number of discourse threads come together. The resultant noise brings into relief the anarchist principles arching against the confines of the narrative. How does *The Valley of Fear* operate in terms of Fenianism, particularly through its relation of the years 1875, 1888, and 1914? How does Moriarty's presence in the narrative shift this understanding? How does Conan Doyle's adaptation of Pinkerton's *The Molly Maguires and the Detectives* (1877)—in terms of its narrational activity, narrative material, and narrative drive—further disrupt the narrative? How do subsequent adaptations of Conan Doyle's novel affect it? How so do other adaptations of the Molly Maguire story?

Piercing the Veil: Sherlock Holmes and Moriarty's Fenians

Given the sociopolitical context of Conan Doyle's last Holmes novel, in conjunction with its relation to the Canon, a Fenian–labor reading suggests itself strongly, not only for the novel itself but also as a point of departure for its subsequent adaptations which have most conspicuously rendered that thread silent. I would like to remind the reader that in the following

section and beyond I attend to a great number of adaptations, but due to my focus I will not provide in-depth *quo modo* investigations for each one. Rather, I have provided the preceding lengthy look at the context that produced Conan Doyle's own adaptation of the Molly Maguire events as vital to how they are articulated in subsequent adaptations.

In taking this tack of a Fenian–labor reading, I follow a few predecessors, extending the interpretation into the various narrative adaptations of Conan Doyle's novel, as well. First, though, I want to point out Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's own thoughts on his controversial timing for his novel. As Andrew Lycett quotes him, Conan Doyle claims that he “change[d] the names so as not to get on to possible Irish politics” (370). He goes on to say, “I make it vague and international with nothing to offend anyone. It would be a most serious error to be definite in the matter” (370), and warns his publisher that “any advance matter must be very cautiously done and should pass my censorship” (370). Yet for all of this precaution, Conan Doyle was deeply concerned with current events (he was, after all, knighted for his writings on the Boer War). And in fact, his setting of much of his tale in America speaks volumes of his intentions. As Bram Stoker quoted him saying in 1907 (of his time in America in 1894), Conan Doyle

came away from America with a deep admiration for both the country and the people...but the real distinctive America is that portion which is still finding itself...and has not yet set into its final form...the fact is that these various dangers and drawbacks which one sees—the dangers of the great trusts—the dangers of violent labor unions—the dangers of the multi-millionaire—the dangers of individual character and violence becoming too strong for the organized legal machinery of the community—all these things are probably prominent problems to be solved by the human race, and only showing up on American because things move faster there and are on a large scale. (161)

To Conan Doyle, America was an allegorical landscape of the future of the world. Some of the most vital conflicts approaching, he felt would move through America first. He was surely aware of the European foundation of a number of these American tensions, particularly the dispute between labor and the multi-millionaires and trusts.

Given Conan Doyle's uneasy balance of British imperialism and Irish nationalism, one would expect a no-less-conditioned stance on labor. This is, in fact, the case. As *The Valley of Fear* and the foregoing quote suggest, Conan Doyle was troubled by labor violence. But he was troubled by it in the same way he was troubled by Fenian violence: it hurt "the cause." In terms of both labor and Fenianism, "the cause" for Conan Doyle was a modest reformist position, rather than one of the more radical views usually associated with them in this time period. In one of his many letters to the press, which were widely read, Conan Doyle expressed his particular views on Edwardian labor agitation, noting by way of parable that instead of violent uprising, he would urge peaceful reform. It is fittingly Conan-Doyle-esque, and smacks of his relatively equitable, "charitable" (and condescending) views of imperialism. In the letter, addressed in response to H. G. Wells, Conan Doyle agreed "that the working man has in many trades...excuse for his discontent, that prices have advanced in a greater ratio than wages.... It is deplorable that it should be so" ("Labour Unrest" 168). But as he demonstrates, his views on labor are still essentially capitalistic: "I do not see how Parliament can affect the large questions of supply and demand which regulate the price of labour" (169). Nevertheless, he clearly advocates a minimum wage, affordable and livable housing for the working poor, and limits to capitalist expansion. He advocates a relatively liberal view, while still defending the rich as job creators: "A greater austerity and economy among such owners would surely mean bad times in Coventry, Birmingham... I can see no cure for the labour unrest in such measures as that, but rather a danger of throwing fresh classes out of their employment" (170).

If *The Valley of Fear*'s most conspicuous context at the time of its publication was the Fenian labor conflict, the discursive thread that upsets that ubiquitous subtext most is the Moriarty plot undergirding the entirety of the narrative. Why would Moriarty be engaged in this

affair? Holmes himself proposes that he may have been involved “on a promise of part spoils, or he may have been paid so much down to manage it. Either is possible. But whichever it may be, or if it is some third combination, it is down at Birlstone that we must seek the solution” (Doyle, *Valley* 480). Of course, no money is involved; rather, the assailant is Ted Baldwin, a personal enemy of Douglas. His manner of attack is not particularly professional, either: he hides behind a curtain to unload a sawed-off shotgun into Douglas. And he fails, too. As Holmes notes later, when word of an “accident” befalling Douglas reaches him, “It is no case of sawed-off shotguns and clumsy six-shooters. You can tell an old master by the sweep of his brush. I can tell a Moriarty when I see one. This crime is from London, not from America” (574). But if Moriarty were involved from the beginning, why would the first attempt be “sawed-off shotguns and clumsy six-shooters”?

As Holmes himself would suggest, the simplest explanation is the best. Clearly Moriarty was not engaged for the spoils of robbery (this was a personal vendetta), and he was clearly not paid to manage the attack—as Holmes notes, Moriarty is stealthy and has a masterful hand in conducting crime; he would not have failed so terribly. Obviously if Moriarty was involved from the beginning, he must have already been tied to the Scowrers. As a number of critics, including Catherine Wynne, have noted, “Moriarty’s Irish lineage is patronymically attested” (50). Further, at the very conclusion of *The Valley of Fear*, Holmes claims straightforwardly that Ted Baldwin, the fiery Scowrer already in private conflict with Douglas, acted as part of Moriarty’s “machinery.” Holmes further argues that when Moriarty learned “of the failure of this agent, he would step in himself with a master touch” (574).

The reason for Moriarty’s connection to the Mollies is uncertain, of course, and somewhat contested. Michael Waxenberg takes the opportunity of Moriarty’s Fenian connection

to answer why Holmes takes three years (from the events of *The Valley of Fear* in January 1888 to the “The Final Problem” set in mid 1891) to finally defeat Moriarty. “Why,” as Waxenberg says, “did Holmes take these three years to solve the problem of Moriarty? And why did Holmes use such a crude method at the end to dispatch his foe?” (86). His argument is as surprisingly blunt as it is convoluted and controversial: Holmes requires three years “because Moriarty was an important link in the fledgling organized labor movement in Britain at that time, and Holmes did not want to cause unnecessary harm to the labor movement” (86). As far-fetched as it is that Holmes implicated himself in a long-standing labor struggle, and despite some flimsy evidence, some of Waxenberg’s point nonetheless holds up.⁸⁶ While I disagree on his very basic premises concerning Conan Doyle and Holmes, the link Waxenberg identifies between Moriarty and the Scowrers/Molly Maguires is unmistakable.

Wynne proposes a much more plausible reason for Conan Doyle’s linking of the two. The Fenianism of the early stories is treated with sympathy, she notes, but the figure of Moriarty “demonstrates the irreconcilability of divergent ideological affiliations, especially with the politicization of Irish-America” (182). Richard Gerber suggests

that Holmes’ mortal enemy bears a Celtic-Irish name...not by chance. Conan Doyle was an Irishman by descent and religion on both sides of the family, but he identified himself most stoutly in his whole behaviour with the prototype of an English gentleman, and upheld the English side in the struggle to the death between Ireland and England. From this viewpoint the Irishman is the hostile rebel and the element in himself which Conan Doyle sought to suppress. (qtd. in Redmond 98)

Conan Doyle’s fierce opposition to the brutal hypocrisy of the Irish nationalist leaders, in their willful ignorance of or silence to Irish nationalist terrorist activities that injured innocents, is

⁸⁶ Waxenberg cites a few legislative changes (laws legalizing unions and granting broader freedom of speech regarding libel) as the “reason” Holmes took the time he did, but there is almost no way Conan Doyle had any of these laws in mind when he was writing—he has certainly established a number of times that he had no complete plan in mind while writing the stories. Additionally, Conan Doyle’s views toward labor are hardly sympathetic to the strategies that unions used, and Holmes and Watson show no interest in labor issues at all.

reflected in his portrayal of Moriarty in *The Valley of Fear*. Moriarty, as Holmes points out in his discoursing (as Conan Doyle calls it) on the “annals of crime,” is one of a returning, cyclical figure of the type of Jonathan Wild. Wild, he relates, “was the hidden force of the London criminals, to whom he sold his brains and his organization on a fifteen per cent. commission. The old wheel turns and the same spoke comes up” (479).⁸⁷ Holmes informs Inspector MacDonald that Moriarty runs his organization by “paying for brains...the American business principle” (480), another indication of Moriarty’s Irish-American association. Wynne suggests further that “the imbricated nature of nineteenth-century Irish and Irish-American secret societies, Moriarty’s connection with the Pennsylvanian Mollies, and his warning [in “The Final Problem”] to Holmes that the detective has failed to unmask the full extent of the organization locate Moriarty firmly within the Fenian nexus” (*Colonial* 50). Conan Doyle thus implicates Moriarty as the embodied corruption of Fenianism.

The coup de grace of Conan Doyle’s Moriarty–Fenian correlation comes at the very end of *The Valley of Fear* when Holmes and Watson learn that Douglas “has been lost overboard” off the coast of St. Helena, a British colonial island off the western coast of Africa, on his way to Cape Town, South Africa. Holmes recognizes at once that Moriarty is responsible for the deed, which is highly suggestive since the incident itself strongly resembles a famous incident regarding another secret Fenian organization called the Irish National Invincibles, a splinter group of the Irish Republican Brotherhood.

The Invincibles are best known for their engineering of the 1882 Phoenix Park Murders, in which a group of them assassinated Thomas Henry Burke (Permanent Under Secretary of the Irish Office) and Lord Frederick Cavendish (Chief Secretary for Ireland). The Invincibles had

⁸⁷ Holmes and/or Conan Doyle’s understanding of Wild is severely limited and misleading. I discuss him in more detail in the next chapter.

actually been targeting William Edward “Buckshot” Forster, Cavendish’s notorious predecessor, who staunchly (and even violently) opposed Home Rule and the Land League.⁸⁸ In the ensuing trial, a few of the Invincibles’ leaders were manipulated to testify against others. One of those informers, James Carey, had actually pointed out Burke to the actual assailants, but betrayed his conspirators for liberty. A year later, when Carey was sailing off the coast of South Africa near Cape Town, he was killed in retaliation by Patrick O’Donnell, an Irishman who spent several years in the anthracite coal region of Pennsylvania with several of his well-connected Molly Maguire relatives, including Jack Kehoe (Kenny, *Making Sense* 207). His death strongly echoes Douglas’s as related in the last paragraphs of *The Valley of Fear*.

Even Baldwin’s actual attack on Douglas Conan Doyle adapted from Fenian history. Franklin B. Gowen—the railroad and coal industry tycoon who hired McParlan and the Pinkertons and prosecuted the accused, convicted, and executed Molly Maguires—died under mysterious circumstances in December of 1889 (within a year of the setting of *The Valley of Fear*). He was visiting Washington, D.C., and on December 13 apparently purchased a pistol, whereupon he returned to his room at Wormley’s Hotel and shot himself in the head. As Kevin Kenny points out, “Though most newspapers eventually conceded that Gowen had committed suicide, rumors flew that the Molly Maguires had finally taken their revenge” (*Making Sense* 282). Nevertheless, the New York *Star* and *Herald* held fast and suggested murder, the *Star* reporting that “the man who had actually bought the pistol was a Molly Maguire selected for the job because of his uncanny resemblance to Gowen” (282). The parallel to Baldwin’s attack on Douglas is unmistakable, and—given the fact that Conan Doyle relied exclusively on McParlan’s

⁸⁸ Forster derived the nickname “Buckshot” for his suggestion to use violent means to quell nationalist protests. Incidentally, Burke and Cavendish were somewhat accidental victims of the Invincibles’ hatred for Forster since Burke was a misunderstood civil servant, and Cavendish had only just been appointed and was not even known to the Invincibles.

account of his time with the Molly Maguires and based Douglas's eventual death on that of a real-life informer, Carey, who was killed at the hands of a former Molly Maguire from Pennsylvania—it is all but certain that he crafted the murder situation at Birlstone based on the idea of Molly Maguire revenge on the man most singularly responsible for the conviction and execution of nineteen Mollies: Franklin B. Gowen.

Conan Doyle's strong association of Moriarty with Fenianism is critical in understanding how he functions in *The Valley of Fear* along with the apparently separate Scowrer subplot. As I noted earlier, Conan Doyle has been criticized for his "obtrusive" incorporation of Moriarty and his "unnecessarily" lengthy focus on the Scowrer events in Pennsylvania. But in fact, Conan Doyle's whole novel gives full-narrative attention to the international repercussions of the many various secret Fenian organizations. The opening narrational activity frames the story around Holmes's investigation into a possible crime Moriarty's Fenian-linked gang will commit, only to discover that the crime has already taken place. The apparent suicide (under suspicious circumstances) would resonate with contemporary readers sensitive to international Fenian actions, especially during a year that included the Dublin Lock-out, the Irish Citizen Army, the Belfast and Irish Volunteers, and the indefinite postponement of the Home Rule bill. Conan Doyle's choice to (1) reveal that the suicide/murder was itself a deception by the Pinkerton spy who had infiltrated and betrayed the Scowrer/Molly Maguires, (2) provide a lengthy, ostensibly third-person account of his tribulations with them, and (3) further show that the detective nonetheless later fell victim to retaliation (yet again resonant with an infamous Irish nationalist assassination) demonstrates his full-scale devotion to focusing narrative attention on the long history of international violence and intrigue in relation to the Home Rule movement he had begun to support. In light of all these considerations, Conan Doyle's apparent contemporaneous

reason for such attention was to highlight his frustration and anger at the history of violence in the nationalist movement as he had begun to support it *publically*, but to mask it in order to “make it vague and international with nothing to offend anyone. . . . [as] it would be a most serious error to be definite in the matter” (Conan Doyle qtd. in Lycett 370).

“A noxious weed...transplanted from its native soil”: The Shifting Narrational Activity, Narrative Material, and Narrative Drive in Adaptations of Molly Maguireism

Readers of *The Strand* were treated to a chapter or two of *The Valley of Fear* once a month from September 1914 to May 1915, and the latter half of those installments were solely a narrative of Jack McMurdo joining the Scowrers in Pennsylvania, with only the final chapter revealing that McMurdo was a Pinkerton agent. It is only in that final chapter that the reader knows for sure precisely why the Scowrers have been pursuing Douglas, even to Birlstone. The way Conan Doyle shapes the narrative in terms of focus and framing (activity) is extremely important considering the tense context in which he wrote and published his story of Fenianism. While much of the first part (“The Tragedy at Birlstone”) is an intriguing locked-room mystery in its own right, the Moriarty prelude and the Douglas-revelation postlude within it suggest that readers should consider it mainly within the context of a secret, international Irish organization. Only three of the total fourteen chapters do not directly concern Moriarty and his Fenian criminal organization, focusing instead on Holmes’s solution to the murder. Conan Doyle and, more interestingly, Watson take great pains to construct a story that consistently draws itself away from the murder that is the reason for Holmes’s involvement, and instead gives distanced narration of events a number of readers would have recognized, for the history of the Molly Maguires was well-known across the British Empire. For instance, Molly Maguire allusions were so easily referenced that in March 1913 even a New Zealand newspaper (*Ashburton Guardian*)

could run an article on the All-for-Ireland League's (AFIL) reception of the recent Home Rule bill, in which AFIL founder William O'Brien called it, "rotten, beggarly and unworkable, giving not the Grattan Parliament, but a Molly Maguire shebeen house."⁸⁹

With such consistent and obvious attention to the thinly-veiled Molly Maguires, the anarchist question of representation arises. Who controls their story and how is it mediated? And the history of narrativizations has indeed explored that answer. But the answers have not been obvious. Even within Conan Doyle's *Valley of Fear*, the answer of who is telling the Scowrers story is not immediately evident. At the conclusion of the first part, Douglas hands Watson a manuscript that he has been writing while in hiding. Presumably, it is some version of this document (mediated through Watson) that the reader receives in the second part of the novel. But contextual knowledge of the Molly Maguires in Pennsylvania casts serious doubt not only on *who* is controlling the Scowrer narrative, but *why*. In fact, this innocuous moment has produced the most drastic and consequential shifts in narrativizations, and thus in meaning. In a complex system like a narrative, disruptions of the smallest sort can still lead to criticality.

When Douglas is called out by Holmes, he is ready for his revelation. "I have been cooped up two days," he says, "and I've spent the daylight hours...in putting the thing into words" (Doyle, *Valley* 517). Why is he ready to hand over a long narrative of his past when he was hoping to escape detection? When he comes out, he immediately locates Watson and tells him, "I've heard of you.... You're the historian of this bunch" (517), and proceeds to give him his manuscript, instructing him, "Tell it your own way, but there are the facts, and you can't miss the public so long as you have those" (517). In light of the history of the Molly Maguires,

⁸⁹ The "Grattan Parliament" recalls the late-eighteenth-century Irish patriot Henry Grattan who, while initially moderate in his stance on Irish-British relations, strongly opposed the 1800 Act of Union and became an icon of early Irish patriotism, and the namesake of the nineteenth-century Irish Patriot Party (nicknamed "Grattan's Patriots").

however, this is problematic. As has come to light over more than a century of scholarship, the Pennsylvania Molly Maguires were only known through information passed along by the suspect McParlan. Likewise, Edwards/McMurdo/Douglas is the only source of information on the Scowrers, and he clearly understands that Watson has the power to inform the public at large. By representing Douglas through semi-fictional narration, Watson can add credence to Douglas's unverified story. And it *is* Watson who tells the story; as he declares,

I...ask you to come away with me for a time... I wish you to journey back some twenty years in time...that I may lay before you a singular and a terrible narrative—so singular and so terrible that you may find it hard to believe that, even as I tell it, even so did it occur. Do not think I intrude one story before another is finished. As you read on you will find that this is not so. And when I have detailed those distant events...we shall meet once more in those rooms in Baker Street... (520)

Watson declares no less than six times that *he* is bringing the tale to the reader. This point has often been missed over the years when readers think (as does occur in *A Study in Scarlet*) that the narration suddenly switches from Watson's first-person account to a third-person omniscience.

At this point, questions of rhetorical intention fade away to guesswork. It has historically been very difficult to determine where Conan Doyle ends and Watson begins, and it is no less trouble in *The Valley of Fear*. But as Douglas suggests, it is *Watson* who very likely tells it his own way using Douglas's account. If this is the case, Watson peculiarly abandons much of his first-person confessional mode and even removes Douglas's agency. But when the reader is drawn back to 1875, this is not made explicitly clear. The reader supposes some privileged information will be given about Douglas. The reader further supposes Douglas will appear as a person named Douglas. But neither of these are true of the second-part narrative: the narrator tells the reader to be concerned with a young man (only named when he speaks it), and never ventures into his thought process. Watson easily could have related what Douglas likely wrote about his own thoughts, or at least told the reader that the traveler in the very beginning is

Douglas, only under an assumed name. As it is written, Watson only obliquely communicates to the reader that McMurdo is Douglas when he says that “McMurdo, the self-confessed fugitive from justice, took up his abode under the roof of the Shafters, the first step which was to lead to so long and dark a train of events, ending in a far distant land” (Conan Doyle, *Valley* 526). But the reader does not know of his connection for sure.

Instead, the reader is forced to wonder if McMurdo is actually Douglas, or at least wonder how McMurdo might be important to Douglas’s problem with some group of men who “have good cause to hate” him (Doyle, *Valley* 518). Indeed, even if the reader guesses early that McMurdo is Douglas and that the men who want him dead are the Scowrers, it remains unclear until the very last chapter why they want him dead. During the entirety of the Scowrers part, McMurdo appears to be entirely within the gang. He plots with them, suggests murder, and defends them against Old Shafter’s accusations. The effect of this narrative focus is to severely distance the reader from identification with McMurdo and to cause to distrust his actions. If one considers Conan Doyle’s novel as just one more narrativization of the Molly Maguire Story, the choice to distance the reader from the McParlan stand-in is an anarchist critique of a received ideology from Pinkerton’s narrativization.

Reflecting historically, this narrative-activity tack suggests how Conan Doyle’s novel defamiliarizes the only received narrative of the Molly Maguires, Allan Pinkerton’s *The Molly Maguires and the Detectives*, which also acted as the definitive source of the second part of the novel (Baring-Gould 521n56). In his adaptation of the events Pinkerton and McParlan popularized, Conan Doyle keeps a distinct narrative focus from their one-sided, insider account. Throughout Pinkerton’s story, whenever McParlan is dealing with the Mollies, the reader is reminded that he is tricking them. For instance, when others speak disparagingly of the Mollies,

he keeps quiet; the narrator explains, “The detective was paving way for future work, and would say nothing against the Mollies” (Pinkerton 51). Instead of detailing the physical and mental process of Douglas’s infiltration of the Scowrers, however, Conan Doyle focuses the reader’s attention on how a person would actually be pulled into such a gang, allowing the reader to experience the ambiguity of acting in complicity with them (as McParlan did).

**“It is with this man that we are concerned”:
Douglas and Filmic Adaptations of *The Valley of Fear***

Since the Scowrer section of *The Valley of Fear* steadily became the most unpopular part of it, the greatest question in its adaptation to various media has been how to handle its inclusion. Along with the potentially unsettling labor aspects of that part, as well as its allusions to Irish nationalist terrorism (which has plagued the twentieth century), the Scowrer part obviously takes narrative time away from Holmes and Watson. Yet the first adaptation of *The Valley of Fear* happened only one year after its appearance, and it seems it keeps at least some aspects of the Scowrers section, and even seems to include Moriarty with some on-screen time. Unfortunately, the 1916 British film, starring Harry Arthur Saintsbury as Holmes, has not been recovered and is presumed lost.

The first major extant adaptation of *The Valley of Fear* is a 1935 film called *The Triumph of Sherlock Holmes*. The British film, directed by Leslie S. Hiscott and scripted by H. Fowler Mear and Cyril Twyford, is one of the five Sherlock Holmes films starring Arthur Wontner, which appeared between 1931 and 1937. The film depicts the events of the *Valley of Fear* affair through an interesting constellation of shifts in narrative material, activity, and drive. As it is part of the Wontner-as-Holmes films, and since Sherlock Holmes films were a hugely successful industry from at least 1900 on, the film’s primary function was to sell tickets by playing up the

most popular aspects of Sherlock Holmes. This obviously affects the narrative drive of the film, although not too distinctly from the same drive for the 1916 novel, as I discussed earlier. The activity and material changes are more conspicuous.

Instead of immediately attending to the affair at Birlstone, the film adds narrative material from the broader Holmes universe, as the 1916 Saintsbury one likely did, by situating the crime more firmly in terms of the Moriarty framing plot—for Moriarty never appears in the novel. In the opening scenes of *Triumph*, Holmes is retiring to the South Downs in Sussex to live a quiet life of bee-keeping, as he relates in Conan Doyle's "His Last Bow" (1917). In the film, he expresses concern for never catching Moriarty, and his fears are immediately confirmed when Moriarty bursts in and warns Holmes to stay in retirement and away from him under fear of certain death. Their exchange comes nearly word-for-word from Conan Doyle's "The Final Problem" (1893). The film then aligns the events with the novel by depicting an encounter between Ted Balding (as Ted Baldwin is called in the film) and Moriarty. This is an important material addition since it definitively answers a number of implied questions from the novel, and it drastically affects the significance of the novel's historical context.

Balding's film characterization derives from a stereotype from the popular gangster movies of the 1930s, which the Irish-American James Cagney epitomized. He's a tough-talking heavy who demands respect from Moriarty and Colonel Moran, easily angered when they order him around. "I understand you have a proposition to make," Moriarty says to him, after surprising Balding by appearing suddenly in the chair when his back was turned. "Maybe I have! And maybe I've changed my mind! Whydya keep me waitin'?!" He tries to order Moriarty around, and even reaches for a gun, but the film attempts to illustrate Moriarty's masterful criminal mind by having him subdue the gangster through reason, blackmail, and coercion. As it

turns out, Balding is there, as first supposed by Holmes in the novel, to ask for Moriarty's assistance in dispatching with "one of its ex-members who is now living in this country under an assumed name." The film's added narrative material, in the interest of the capitalistic function of the film and the audience's expectations for a film filled with the most exciting Sherlock Holmes conflict, distinctly divorces Moriarty and even the Scowlers' gang from their political, Fenian context.

Yet, in its mercenary attempts to capture its audiences' attention and money, *The Triumph of Sherlock Holmes* manages to capture an aspect of Conan Doyle's *The Valley of Fear* retained only one other time in subsequent adaptations, Bert Coules's BBC 4 radio adaptation. As I described earlier, Watson's relation of Douglas's account of the Scowlers maintains a steady level of distance from the McMurdo character, casting suspicion on Douglas's involvement with them as McMurdo. In other *Valley of Fear* adaptations, Douglas's involvement is disclosed to the audience prior to any account of the events that transpired with them. In *Triumph*, Holmes recognizes the mark on the dead man's arm as the mark of the Scowlers, who in the film are indeed an "American secret society which terrorized the coal district of Vermissa." Holmes presses Douglas's wife for its meaning, which she denies knowing.⁹⁰ Trapped by Holmes's reasoning, however, she confesses she knows the mark, and then *she* is the one who relates Douglas's time with the Scowlers. At this point in the film, the audience is still under the impression that the "murdered" Douglas was actually a member of that organization.

An interesting aside: in *Triumph*, the Scowlers seem to be a secret society from some part of the western United States since Bodymaster McGinty is a saloon owner and many of the characters, including Douglas, wear cowboy hats. Actually, a number of readers and adaptations

⁹⁰ Douglas's wife in *Triumph* is an amalgamation of Douglas's two wives (Ettie Shafter and Mrs. Douglas) in Conan Doyle's novel.

have presumed that Vermissa Valley is part of the western United States, I can only presume because in the opening of the second part, the narrator describes mountains in “the most desolate corner of the United States of America.” And Douglas did spend later years in California with his friend Cecil Barker. Additionally, coal and iron mining regions pepper the West. But by far the majority of iron and coal mining in late nineteenth-century America occurred in the Appalachian Mountains, stretching into Pennsylvania. This fact, along with the evidence that the Scowrers are Irish immigrants and the murder weapon is a shotgun from the Pennsylvania Small Arms Company, points to Vermissa Valley being a fictional area in Pennsylvania.

That Ettie Douglas represents Douglas’s narrative with the Scowrers is all the more significant because she does not disclose who he is to the audience. Again, the suspense her method of narration entails highlights the anarchist critique of representation first hinted at in Conan Doyle’s novel, for both narrativizations cast doubt on the McParlan character’s involvement with and indictment of the Fenian group. As the story unfolds, Douglas (as Jack Murdoch) appears to be one of the worst of them, admitting to killing someone in Chicago. Murdoch’s suspiciousness is compounded by Leslie Perrins’s portrayal since Perrins mainly portrayed villains in his film career. His uncertainty is further multiplied in audience reception through Ettie’s purported relation of the events, which occurs without voiceover and with only one visual interruption. Characters like Balding and Douglas are depicted by the actors who portray them earlier in the film, lending significant credence to Ettie’s story. This implicit accuracy even further suggests Murdoch/Douglas’s dubious association with the Scowrers. But as the interruption suggests—in which Holmes wonders if Murdoch kept his promise to leave Vermissa within a year, to which she then admits they left much sooner—she is relating events from her perspective at the time. The audience discovers only at the end of the events that

Murdoch is really Birdy Edwards, just as the reader does in Conan Doyle's novel. The effect is a prolonged narrative attention to Murdoch/Edwards/Douglas's participation in the affairs of the Scowrers.

The last few minutes of the film, like the first few minutes, serve to sever any association between Moriarty and the Scowrers. And like the first few minutes, the ending shots also ensure that the majority of narrative time remains on Douglas and his life with the Scowrers. Moriarty shows up expecting to retrieve Balding, while Holmes, Lestrade, Watson, and Douglas lie in wait to capture him.⁹¹ In a move assuredly uncharacteristic of Conan Doyle's Moriarty, Moriarty, as portrayed by Lyn Harding, looks around for Balding on his own and is surprised by Holmes; Moriarty immediately starts choking him. Restrained by Lestrade and Watson, he discovers that Douglas is still alive whereupon he maniacally breaks free and runs up the castle stairs, throwing rocks at them until he is shot by Holmes. His entire time at the castle takes up almost exactly three minutes of screen time, and occurs in a flurry of poorly-lit, quickly-paced shots; averaged together, they occur about every four seconds.

Despite its clear departure from the Fenian undertones of Conan Doyle's novel, *The Triumph of Sherlock Holmes* underscores impressively the troubling ethical spot in which Douglas puts himself in his infiltration of the mining district's secret society. These two narrativizations of the actual Molly Maguire events draw conspicuous attention to McParlan's representation of the Molly Maguires, as well as to his actions with them, indicating how increasing numbers of adaptations will prompt increasing anarchist critique of inherent ideologies. While the initial events were represented entirely by stringently ideological groups, after a few adaptations the focus has turned to the obvious silence left by ideology.

⁹¹ Lestrade's addition to the story, replacing the local White Mason and Inspector MacDonald from Scotland Yard, is another functional, structural way in which the film shifted the narrative, relying on audience knowledge and expectation concerning Lestrade, the better known police counterpart to Holmes.

In relation to the events of the novel, and in comparison with later adaptations, *Triumph* remains focused quite heavily on the American subplot. Forty percent of the film is solely visual attention on Douglas in Vermissa Valley. But there have been only three subsequent, major filmic adaptations of *The Valley of Fear* since 1935: “The Case of the Pennsylvania Gun” (1954), *Sherlock Holmes and the Deadly Necklace* (1962) *Sherlock Holmes and the Valley of Fear* (1983). The first and last of these are television productions. In each of these adaptations, the Fenian and labor subplots are severely limited, if not excised altogether. The reasons for this are primarily related to the consequences of the medium, particularly in terms of the function of the adaptations. A brief evaluation of these films will indicate an important facet that makes adaptation anarchist: proliferation of narrativization across media. Similarly, in any dynamic system, a preservation or decrease of information limits complexity, and thus criticality. I also want to include discussion of these films since they illustrate an aspect of complexity I have not given much voice to. I indicated in my introduction that in linear systems, small disruptions have small effects and large disruptions have large effects, while in complex systems the small disruptions can affect large-scale behavior and the larger disruptions can be absorbed. In the complex system of a narrative, intrusions of larger narratives can similarly be absorbed and leave little impact on the overall narrative.

In two of the film adaptations—“The Case of the Pennsylvania Gun” and *Sherlock Holmes and the Deadly Necklace*—the labor subplot is removed entirely, a silence that in the view of a number of adaptations is still significant. “Pennsylvania Gun” is only the third episode of the thirty-nine episodes in the only American Holmes television series, simply titled *Sherlock Holmes* (Barnes 181). The series was the brain-child of Sheldon Reynolds, who also sought to depict a Holmes as appeared in *A Study in Scarlet*—“a young man in his thirties, human, gifted,

and of a philosophic and scholastic bent, but subject to fateful mistakes which stemmed from his overeagerness and lack of experience” (Barnes 181). The series’ episodes were all produced in France for American release, and starred Ronald Coleman as Sherlock Holmes and Howard Marion Crawford as Dr. Watson. Coleman and Reynolds shared similar ideas about their depiction of Holmes who would be “an exceptionally sincere young man trying to get ahead in his profession....[with] a more ascetic quality...deliberate, very definitely unbohemian, and...underplayed for reality” (Reynolds qtd. in Haining 58). This adaptation actually invokes a certain anarchist critique of Holmes as a bourgeois individual, but I am maintaining focus more on adaptations concerning the Molly Maguire events. Consequently, I want to examine the possible reasons for their omission.

A number of structural, functional, rhetorical, and contextual reasons align to justify Reynolds’s exclusion of the Scowrer–labor subplot. For one, the episodes were only 30 minutes, and splitting the time between Holmes and Douglas with the Scowrers leaves little time to develop either plot very well. Additionally, audiences wanted to see Holmes in action, and Coleman’s Holmes is quite engaging and gregarious and holds lightly barbed but good-natured banter with Watson, all of which further explains why a subplot concerning Moriarty, let alone a group of vigilante laborers, would detract from Reynolds and Coleman’s intentions for the show. In all, the episode plants itself firmly and light-heartedly within the world of Holmes’s detection. Since the entire Douglas case rests on a secret past coming back to haunt the countryside, some reason is still required for why Douglas was hunted and why he would want to fake his own death. Reynolds employs a clever plot device in a similar vein as the *Triumph*’s script exploitation of Moriarty and Lestrade’s roles. It plays into the audience’s pleasure in recognizing material from other Holmes stories. Reynolds changes Douglas’s background in America by

borrowing from the *Sign of the Four* plot and mixing it with some of the *Valley of Fear* plot. The episode fills its narrative with focus on extra narrative material comprising Holmes acting “mad as a March hare” and Watson and MacLeod playing up their British wordplay. The discursive interruptions from the *Sign of the Four* blend in with the general whimsy and delight of the show’s Holmes references.

Sherlock Holmes and the Deadly Necklace (1962) is a mess of a production, much less identifiable in terms of intention, context, function, or even structure. The film was a German-French-Italian co-production written by Curt Siodmak and directed by Terence Fisher and Frank Winterstein. The film stars Christopher Lee as Sherlock Holmes in what seems to promise to be a great turn as Holmes. His performance, however, is severely hampered by the fact that he and the rest of the cast were all dubbed over by other actors in post-production. Additionally, the film was supposed to have been a direct adaptation of *The Valley of Fear*, but as Fisher and Lee relate, the German producers shifted the story around and ultimately crafted a very different story. In terms of my previous attention to how Conan Doyle filled his novel with Fenian allusions, *Deadly Necklace* instead expands narrative material concerning Moriarty and completely cuts the Scowrer material. As in “Pennsylvania Gun,” Blackburn’s back story derives from *The Sign of Four*. In this case, Blackburn (a loose interpretation of Douglas) is actually on screen in the beginning, but he is much more like Major Sholto than Douglas. He is fearful and repulsive. The film also curiously depicts his Barker-like friend (named Paul King) and his wife (Ellen Blackburn) as carrying on a love affair, as is incorrectly suspected by Watson in Conan Doyle’s novel. This large-scale narrative interruption dies away as it did in “Pennsylvania Gun” and the film attends much more strongly to the opposition of Moriarty and Sherlock Holmes, focusing much of its narrative attention on Holmes’s elaborate methods to capture Moriarty. All

vestiges of the Douglas character—as country squire faking his death, as Scowrer, as Pinkerton—have disappeared. And again as with “Pennsylvania Gun,” different anarchist critiques arise that fall outside the sphere of this project.

The last major Anglophonic filmic adaptation of *The Valley of Fear* is a 1983 animated version from an Australian production company with Holmes voiced by Peter O’Toole. The company, Burbank Films Australia (BFA), was a relatively short-lived (1982–1991) animation studio that produced almost forty films for television and direct home-video purchase. BFA specialized in adaptations of literary classics, and began with a number of Charles Dickens novels while concurrently working on the four Sherlock Holmes novels. The films were cheaply produced and are characterized by their stationary, sketched backgrounds and recycled original scores. Nevertheless, BFA managed to secure Peter O’Toole as the voice for Sherlock Holmes for all four novel adaptations. *The Valley of Fear* film does include the Douglas–Scowrer plot, but makes an interesting change in narrational activity. Since the film is “shot” in the third person, Watson is not the narrator. As such, Douglas’s confession would be quite uncinematic (particularly for its target demographic: children) were it written and given to Watson. Instead, when Douglas emerges out of hiding, he sits down and tells the entire group his story.

Douglas’s reminiscence is severely shortened in comparison with Conan Doyle’s novel; it takes up only nine minutes of the total fifty. Like *The Triumph of Sherlock Holmes*, the BFA cartoon depicts the Scowrer events somewhere in the western United States. The men walk around in cowboy hats, and the background illustration of the town looks very much like a production set for a Western in the Hollywood studio days. While Douglas does not provide voiceover during the relation of the events, and while the audience is never informed that he is a detective until the end of the Scowrer section, the audience could hardly be fooled that he is

really one of them. The Scowrers are laughably caricatured—they break store windows randomly, laugh manically and gleefully about extortion and murder, and deride even the words “law and order.” Douglas, on the other hand, maintains complete composure; in fact, his voice is nearly monotonous at all times. The viewer never has an opportunity to see him do anything for the Scowrers, and is thus prevented from doubting him. In all, the amount of time focused on Douglas with the Scowrers is so short as to never detract from the original feeling of honesty and goodwill he engenders to the audience based on Holmes, Watson, and MacDonald’s reactions.

Adaptations of Douglas and *The Valley of Fear* in Non-filmic Media

If filmic adaptations of *The Valley of Fear* have steadily shortened or modified the Scowrer plot to such drastic degrees, can I really argue that adaptation is anarchist? In what way are these adaptations straining against the ideologies that help form them? I indicated that some other forms of anarchist critique are more visible in the three previous filmic adaptations, but some critique persists concerning the Molly Maguires. Worth repeating and emphasizing here is my suggestion that adaptation is by definition understood in the context of the narratives it follows and transforms. While individual instances of adaptations might lean toward a variety of political and ideological stances, my argument that adaptation is in itself anarchist is based on the way the discursive threads move between adaptations, disrupting each other and prompting critical interrogation. In this case, critique arises from the increasingly steady *absence* of the Scowrers-as-Molly-Maguires (in Pennsylvania) in favor of the Scowrers-as-evil-bandits (in the American West) or of their complete erasure altogether. This absence, in conjunction with the conspicuous preservation and expansion of the particularly Holmesian aspects of the narrative events, suggests to the recurring audience a suturing of discursive rifts and a bridging discursive gaps, which demonstrates the ideology such bridging and suturing would reinforce.

Consistent adaptations in one form of media will be less anarchist in formal comparison than adaptations that proliferate across a variety of them. This is for the logical reason that if adaptation is anarchist in the way it disrupts ideological transmission, that disruption is heightened when narratives are moving across a wider variety of media. Adaptation is anarchist, and more adaptation is more anarchist. As such, I want to turn now to two *Valley of Fear* adaptations in non-filmic media.

The number of non-filmic media in which Sherlock Holmes has been presented almost equals the number of non-filmic media in which narratives can be presented: theatre, musical, ballet, radio, comics, poetry, sculpture, painting, drawing, photography, song, music video, and so on. I am more particularly concerned here with two of the more widely known narratives and how they interpret the Douglas and Scowrer section of Conan Doyle's novel. The first I will consider is the most recent: a 2011 comic-book adaptation by I. N. J. Culbard and Ian Edginton, released through the British publisher SelfMadeHero. SelfMadeHero was founded in 2007 by Emma Hayley and publishes in a number of genres, but particularly in adaptations. Culbard (illustrator) and Edginton (text adapter) completed their adaptations of the four Holmes novels with *The Valley of Fear's* publication in 2011.

Unlike previous generations of comic adaptations of literature, SelfMadeHero's line of adaptations, including the Holmes books in their series of Crime Classics, have enjoyed the recent "cultural legitimacy" of the comic book form. These publications are not specifically meant for children, evidenced by works in their Eye Classics series, their hyperactive *Tristram Shandy* or their graphic and politically attuned *Crime and Punishment*. The works themselves are likewise serious endeavors with years of work behind them. For instance, the *Heart of Darkness* adaptation, written by David Zane Mairowitz and illustrated by Catherine Anyango, uses

language from Conrad's *Congo Diary* as well as his novella, and pairs brief lines of his language with immensely dramatic pencil drawings that begin in intricately realistic detail and gradually wear away into abstraction. Culbard and Edginton's adaptation clearly benefits from similar respect, although not with nearly as much consideration given to interpretation. For a Holmes readership, Culbard and Edginton seem to seek resemblance and faithfulness more than interesting, thought-provoking narrative shifting. Their readership will likely want to relive the thrill of a Holmes case with accuracy of wording and minimal artistic intrusion on the pacing of the story. In the case of the Eye Classics' *Crime and Punishment* (set in Putin-era St. Petersburg) or *Heart of Darkness*, the literary-minded comics audience does not expect or want complete faithful adaptation but *interesting* adaptation that somehow transforms notions of the primary narrative.

Nevertheless, certain choices force interpretation, even when those choices appear to be "uninteresting." In a complex system, such changes can lead to criticality. In *Heart of Darkness*, realistic and abstract imagery indicated a level of interpretive engagement with the text. In the Holmes adaptations, the illustrations are neither too realistic nor too abstract, either of which might be distracting or insulting to those who prefer Sidney Paget's original *Strand* illustrations or their own mental image conjured during reading. Rather, they conform to cartoon representation (to use Scott McCloud's terminology from his "Big Triangle"), which allows the reader to recognize a certain level of verisimilitude and also fill in details mentally and personally. As McCloud explains, "cartoon imagery moves away from resemblance [as in a photorealistic picture] (stripping away details, conceptualizing forms, exaggerating details, etc...) but still manages to convey that basic meaning as effectively as a photo might." Cartooning images abstracts them to a degree that universalizes them.

Culbard and Edginton make their adaptation a dramatic depiction of the events, in the sense that the characters communicate all of the events through action and dialogue, rather than any narration by an outside party. Consequently, as in the BFA cartoon, Watson is not the narrator, and Douglas does not hand over a manuscript to him. Instead, once Holmes has revealed that he is still alive, and he has emerged from hiding, Douglas settles with the whole party near a fire and tells his story. Since he provides a first-person account, Edginton incorporates much of the language from the narration. Instead of Watson's request to the reader "to journey back some twenty years in time...that I may lay before you a singular and a terrible narrative—so singular and so terrible that you may find it hard to believe that, even as I tell it, even so did it occur," Douglas says this to Holmes, Watson, MacDonald, and the others, word for word. Eliminating all of the suspense from the tale, he then explains right out, "My name was not always John Douglas. My real name was...is Birdy Edwards and for many years I was a Pinkerton agent" (Edginton 91).

Throughout the ensuing account, this apparently unobtrusive mingling of Watson's narration with Douglas's language leads to significant interpretive claims. For one, throughout the Scowrers section of Conan Doyle's novel, the reader never knows to what degree McMurdo is involving himself in the Scowrers. Besides not knowing that he is a spy, the reader has no direct knowledge of whether his feelings for Ettie are completely genuine. In the *SelfMadeHero* publication, Douglas closes these gaps: "Such was the character of my masquerade, but with Ettie my feelings were my own. She'd won my heart the instant I set eyes on her grace and beauty" (95). Any uncertainty in the listeners and readers' minds is appeased, at least at Douglas's word.

Culbard's layout in the Scowrers section intriguingly complicates the gap-closing that Douglas's statements cause. Whereas Conan Doyle's depiction of what happened in Vermissa Valley is highly ambiguous—is this Watson's interpretation and embellishment of Douglas's account, or a word-for-word translation of it?—the double-page multiframe keeps the reader's attention inescapably on the fact that *Douglas* is relating the narrative. In Conan Doyle's novel, in the BFA cartoon, and in *The Triumph of Sherlock Holmes*, the audience's situation to the narrator is obscured by the substitution of a direct depiction of the events that implies complete truth. Culbard's double-page layout, however, always contains one image of John Douglas telling the story in the present. Further, across the multiframe of the whole novel, Culbard maintains a color and border theme for frames that depict events in the past. Thus, throughout the 1875 Scowrer section, all of the frames are sepia-washed and have slightly wavy borders, opposing the straight-line bordered, full-color frames of the Holmes events. Emphasis on Douglas's relation of events is compounded by the word balloons and text boxes which always indicate that he is *speaking* this tale.

The effect of this scheme raises suspicion of Douglas's account of what happened. Thus, in a different manner due to the demands of the comics form, this narrativization pushes anarchist critical attention to Douglas's role. In *Triumph*, this criticism was prompted by an emotional experience—*feeling* suspicious of McMurdo/Douglas's involvement with the Scowrers by witnessing his interaction with them without any knowledge of his spying. Edginton also evokes suspicion into his adaptation of Conan Doyle's language. When Douglas is describing his love for Ettie and his conflict with Ted Baldwin over her, Inspector MacDonald interrupts, "Baldwin...the victim?" This causes Douglas to say defensively, "The men and families he murdered and had murdered were victims. Ted Baldwin got no more than was his

due!” (Edginton 95). Because MacDonald interjects both visually and textually—his image is imposed on the flashback—and since Douglas’s account remains unbroken in the multiframe, the authors encourage doubt. His account is entirely uncorroborated. His entire audience, both within the narrative and without, has every right and obligation to question why Baldwin might be after Douglas. Indeed, they should question whether Baldwin was even after Douglas. They might also question whether Douglas actually had good cause to kill him other than self-defense, if it was even that. In the novel, as well as the Edginton–Culbard adaptation, it is only *supposed* by MacDonald that the stranger even brought a gun with him. In fact, little evidence exists other than the Scowrer mark that the dead body is even Baldwin’s, for he is unidentifiable to the police.

Edginton and Culbard’s book highlights the unreliability of Douglas’s account, and even redirects attention back on the Pennsylvania origins of the Scowrers (Vermissa Valley is explicitly located in the state in Douglas’s account), but by far the most intertextually engaging adaptation of *The Valley of Fear* is the 1997 BBC 4 production helmed by Bert Coules. Coules approached the BBC radio drama department in 1987 to adapt *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, and following its success, he produced versions of *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Sign of the Four* (Coules). In 1990, Coules and the BBC launched into adapting the entire Canon, beginning with “A Scandal in Bohemia.” They adapted all of the canonical stories and concluded with *The Valley of Fear*.⁹²

Considering the rabidity of some Sherlock Holmes fans for a certain kind of adaptation fidelity, but perhaps owing to and emboldened by the sheer volume of adaptations of the Canon, Coules’s *Valley of Fear* is a bold and thoroughly intriguing adaptation of a familiar tale by virtue

⁹² Coules also later produced a number of Sherlock Holmes adventures under the collection entitled *The Further Adventure of Sherlock Holmes*. All of the cases are original compositions by Coules, derived from references in the canonical stories.

of its reliance on using the full narrative from which it draws, while radically shifting the narrational activity by which that material is arranged. Instead of completely separating the Birlstone and Scowrers events by focusing on one and then the other, Coules intersperses them. Thus, while he still mostly follows Conan Doyle's arrangement of the individual scenes within those separate narrative arcs, they play out interspersed with one another, moving consistently back and forth between the two sets.

More interestingly, Coules's depiction of the events in Pennsylvania is unlike any other adaptation. While other adaptations have almost begrudgingly depicted the Scowrer events, slowly limiting its narrative control and attention, Coules's radio play begins with them and gives them extra narrative material in a way usually reserved for Holmes's section of the Story. Additionally, within the first half, the narrative focuses much more time on the Pennsylvania events (which often take upwards of three or four minutes) than on Holmes's detection (which frequently lasts about a minute). The Scowrer scenes are elaborately depicted with a full cast of characters speaking in thick Irish brogue, much of the narration from Conan Doyle's novel making its way into a voiceover. Certainly, sections of narration are cut, but the passages that remain tend to be nearly complete. The focus on this part of the Story obviously owes something to its relative silence elsewhere in Holmes adaptations. Proliferation of adaptation is the central way in which anarchist critique of ideology arises.

In terms of the added narrative material, Coules's adaptation gives over considerable time to audience attention on only apparently tonal additions. For instance, in the first part ("The Scowrers"), after only about ten minutes, in the fourth Vermissa Valley scene, the audience hears McMurdo singing "Danny Boy" to Ettie. The song could be included just to engage listeners with McMurdo and Ettie's love affair, and it does do this. But some fourteen minutes later,

McMurdo is singing to the Scowrer men, and he does so yet again in the second part (“The Tragedy of Birlstone”). Again, these songs could be just to illustrate Conan Doyle’s own point in the novel that with McMurdo, “his joke was always the readiest, his conversation the brightest, and his song the best. He was a born boon companion, with a magnetism which drew good humour from all around him” (*Valley* 526). Again, it does do this, but why so many minutes of narrative time devoted to song? Why so many songs? The content of these musical interludes suggests some answers.

The first title is “Danny Boy,” one of the most famous Irish tunes, but the other two are less known and thus compelling (both can be found in Appendix B). The first song that McMurdo sings, after “Danny Boy,” is a selection of a song by Thomas Moore called “The Minstrel Boy.” The song is a popular Irish-American song, written originally concerning the Irish Rebellion of 1798, which inspired the modern Home Rule movement and Fenianism across the globe. The song eulogizes a fallen minstrel boy gone to war, who had encouraged Ireland by declaring patriotically, “‘Tho’ all the world betray thee, / One sword, at least, thy rights shall guard, / One faithful harp shall praise thee!” Upon dying, he breaks apart his harp, “‘No chains shall sully thee, / Thou soul of bravery! / Thy songs were made for the pure and free / They shall never sound in slavery!” Not only does this adaptation acknowledge the Irish heritage of its characters, it steps itself within the context of Conan Doyle’s life. This song very directly reflects the spirit behind the Irish nationalist movement, the very movement that gave so much inspiration to the Molly Maguires. Coules’s inclusion of it thus imparts a significant amount of sympathy for the condition of the miners (and thus their actions) in Vermissa Valley, an anarchist resistance to ideology prompted by the allowances of the medium.

This sympathy is multiplied by the next song, “Lament of the Irish Emigrant.” The song, another nineteenth-century composition, was written by Helen Selina (Lady Dufferin), and describes the troubles an Irishman faces in Ireland, losing his wife and child in childbirth, compelling him to emigrate to America. Once again, the song serves to draw significant narrative attention to the problems Irish emigrants faced, and the promise they held in America. “I’m very lonely now, Mary,” the immigrant sings, “For the poor make no new friends.” Indeed, as he continues to sing, although he will stay in America, he will often think back on Ireland, “And my heart will travel back again / To the place where Mary lies.”

Despite the clear attempt to adapt the audience to the sociohistorical context of Conan Doyle’s novel, the radio adaptation also intensifies the dubiousness of McMurdo’s role with the Scowrers. While Conan Doyle’s Scowrer narration, like the *SelfMadeHero* adaptation, comes from Douglas, the events of Vermissa Valley in the BBC adaptation come from an initially unidentifiable narrator who speaks with some narrative distance. This shift in narrative has interesting consequences since the connection between the Irish-American miners and Holmes in this adaptation is unclear for most of the radio-play. Not only does the audience have no real knowledge of who Douglas is or even what happened to him until close to halfway into the entire adaptation, McMurdo appears to be an intensely charismatic Irishman fallen in so deep with a murderous gang that he kills an entire family by blowing up their house at the very end of the first part, laughing manically afterward. Absolutely no explicit connection between the Scowrers and the Birlstone murder is known until about an hour in. In fact, the first connection between the two events occurs in the prefatory, promotional excerpts that open the second installment by way of inducing suspense. The facts of the case are reviewed by White Mason, wondering in conclusion of the murderer, “what manner of man can do that?” Holmes replies ominously, in a

low tone, “What manner of man indeed?” Immediately following this is the explosion sound effect of McMurdo’s apparent murder of the Wilcox family, accompanied by his sinister laugh. Of course, the suspense is sorted out. By the end of the second part, the crime has been solved, Douglas has been outed, and the listener discovers that Watson has indeed written up all of the preceding material, including the events with the Scowrers. In his concluding minutes, Coules makes a number of definitive, interesting closures left ambiguous in Conan Doyle’s novel, another illustration of the power of silence in a narrative. After many adaptations, the final moments of the Story are elaborated on. First, since Douglas has given Watson his manuscript, and the audience later hears him typing it up with Holmes looking on, Watson’s response to Holmes’s question (“Not using Douglas’s own words?”) is, “More or less.” The degree of intrusion by Watson is completely left up to the reader in Conan Doyle’s account. Not so here. Further, as Watson types up the ending, commenting on how satisfactory it all is that the murder was self-defense and Douglas got off with a minor warning, Holmes reads that Douglas has been lost overboard on his trip to South Africa. In his subsequent discussion with Watson, Holmes answers a number of lingering questions about Moriarty’s involvement when Watson declares that he just doesn’t “see how he could be connected to all this.” In Holmes’s answer and further discussion with Watson, he closes another interpretative gap left open by Conan Doyle’s novel:

“The Scowrers needed someone to track down Douglas for them.”

“This Moriarty can be hired?”

“Yes, he’s a consultant! His services can be bought just like any other consultant’s!”

“But even if you’re right, the Scowrers had their own assassin. Moriarty wasn’t employed to kill Douglas.”

“Maybe not. But his power rests on his reputation. He can’t afford to be linked to a failure...”

“Dear God. And so he murdered him.”

“With my help.”

“What?!”

“I killed Jack Douglas as surely as if I pushed him myself.”

“No! That is utter nonsense!”

“His plan was a good one. Mason and Mac would have accepted things at face value, Douglas’s death would have been reported, and that would have been an end to it, if I hadn’t insisted on solving the case. Another triumph for Sherlock Holmes!”

In Conan Doyle’s novel, the link between Moriarty and the Scowlers is utterly unknown, and as I argued earlier, there are a number of indications that they must have been connected even before the Douglas affair. In any case, Holmes is right, of course, about his involvement. In previous adaptations, Douglas’s death is covered over, replaced by Holmes’s triumph over Moriarty—sometimes even physically. This adaptation not only returns to Conan Doyle’s Fenian allusion in Douglas’s “accidental” death off the coast of South Africa, it presses to answer the question raised by so many previous adaptations’ erasure of it: why did Holmes apparently knowingly send Douglas off to his death? Given his precautions in “The Final Problem,” Holmes’s decision in Conan Doyle’s *The Valley of Fear* to allow Douglas’s survival to be revealed seems to indicate he is intentionally sending Douglas off to his death.

Coules’s adaptation of *The Valley of Fear* engages consistently and deeply with a number of discursive gaps and conflicts that the many readings and adaptations of Conan Doyle’s novel, and exemplifies not only the anarchist potential of adaptation, but its very anarchist operation in the way it highlights serious problems in the reception of the narrative events and seeks to respond to those problems. Ultimately, its very existence owes itself to the anarchist nature of adaptation. While the Molly Maguires lived decidedly outside the official narrative of the United States, and while their story was told by an unethical alliance of private industry and the State, consistent adaptations of that narrative gradually placed more emphasis on the very silence of their self-representation until their depiction moved perceptibly to the forefront.

CHAPTER 5
“UND SIE WISSEN IMMER NOCH NICHT, WER ICH BIN”:
CAPITALISM AND *EIGENTLICHE* REVOLT
IN ADAPTATIONS OF *DIE DREIGROSCHENOPER*

In criminology as in economics there is scarcely a more powerful word than ‘capital.’

Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged*

I ended the previous chapter in a (relatively) hopeful tone: a relentlessly suppressed and self-ostracized group, despite its complete eradication and its own worse excesses, eventually realized a degree of reasonable portrayal within the society it so violently fought. In this concluding chapter, I want to return to some of my initial assumptions in order to find a way to realize that hope more broadly. At the same time, I must also admit the sad history of these past chapters. What possibilities exist for creating the radically just society in the “New World” that was promised implicitly in such documents as *Common Sense*? Given the examples of Billy Budd and the Molly Maguires, what are the possibilities for real resistance to coercive ideology? What is the form of authentic struggle against the State? The overarching argument of this chapter will suggest one way.

In the introduction, I asserted that crime defines the limits of State-sanctioned identity, and I return to this idea once more to examine the prospect of a group forming *within* the purview of the State, and yet still against it. Any group in resistance to the State but still relatively trapped by it will find itself in a liminal state of criminality. But in a capitalist republic (such as the United States), such a group remains a part of the labor force and market, and thus still vulnerable to ideological influence. As resistant as the group may be, everything in a capitalist state begins to reflect the logic of capitalism. And while crime indicates the State’s

self-proposed limits for its image, it thus also reveals those darker necessities for sustaining that image. Crime is the negative image of the State, a dark supplement to the economy that is deemed unseemly by the State. By using supplement, I am drawing on Derrida's term by way of Carl Freedman who argues in "The Supplement of Coppola" that primitive accumulation "might be understood as capitalism's *supplement...*" (11). Derrida defines a supplement as something apparently secondary that comes in aid of something "natural" and "original," but upon reflection reveals itself to be far more intricate and integral—even primary. Just so is primitive accumulation to capitalism, Freedman argues, insofar as Marx introduces the concept of "so-called primitive accumulation" only in Part 8 of *Capital* as an explanation of capitalism's origins. But primitive accumulation is an ongoing, accompanying "process of staggering disruption, fraud, theft and violence" to the normal operations of capitalism (Freedman 9–10). Freedman further proposes that this specific supplementarity is the "repressed yet continual 'shadow' ...of the whole capitalist project" (12), a dark origin it tries to repress—but "there will always be signs (if we bother to read them) by which primitive accumulation makes its reality known" (12).

These signs are made more apparent through adaptation. In crime narratives specifically, the ideological influence of capitalist republics attempts to differentiate between criminality and capitalism. But adaptations of those narratives resist and defamiliarize the distinction, uncovering a never-ending equation of crime and capital. The Irish immigrants known as the Molly Maguires developed an extra-legal, group response to the *de facto* conditions of oppression they encountered in the Pennsylvania coal region; but unlike a number of other criminal groups, they remained steadfastly separated from more official systems of trade and government. In *The Valley of Fear*, during an investigation into activities of the Molly Maguire

literary substitutes (the Scowrers), Sherlock Holmes tells Inspector MacDonald that “the most practical thing that you ever did in your life would be to shut yourself up for three months and read twelve hours a day at the annals of crime. Everything comes in circles” (479). He is speaking of Moriarty’s similarity to Jonathan Wild, “the hidden force of the London criminals” (479), but he might also be describing reading Marx.

His major point is that both Wild and Moriarty worked within criminal groups, holding one foot firmly in the criminal underworld while still holding the other firmly in respectable society—using each side for gain in the other. Like the Molly Maguires, Wild and the groups in which he worked sought a change in their conditions. Unlike the Molly Maguires, Wild and his associates and rivals (who were often one and the same, as with Jack Sheppard) explicitly connected the criminal and the respectable, and demonstrated the near impossibility of eliminating capitalism, or its preconditions and products, through the efforts of a rebellious group *within its own system*. Instead, they revealed how such groups splinter into exploitative hierarchies, mirroring the capitalist system they shadow. They reveal, in fact, how the criminal and the “authorized” in capitalist society *shape and are shaped* by each other in dialectic, a dialectic constituted primarily through performance. The “authentic” and “inauthentic” ways of capitalism are hopelessly confused to the point of equivalence.

Particularly within their discursive echoes in the *Beggar’s Opera* adaptation *Die Dreigroschenoper*, *lumpenproletariat* like Wild and Sheppard and their followers expose how fringe groups are exploited by those above them socioeconomically until they learn to *perform* that exploitation, at which time they replicate the bourgeois system. At the same time, entertainment performances of the narratives of ambitious criminals, who reflect the rise of the bourgeoisie, ironically solidify the bourgeoisie and ruling classes’ ideology of itself by

suggesting that the *lumpenproletariat* reveal an unhygienic form of the “natural” order of things, while helping to insulate that audience from its own image by implying that only the underworld acts so despicably in its warping of capitalist republican ideals. However, the unceasing performances (renarrativizations) of these performances (crime narrative entertainment) of performances (the *lumpenproletariat* mimicking the bourgeoisie)—and the ideologies they engender and then defamiliarize—ultimately conflict with one another, confusing audience with performer, performer with audience. Brecht’s particular dramatic approach intensifies this process. In fact, Brecht’s dramatic theories are very much compatible with my own views on what adaptation does. Whereas Brecht envisions his dramatic theories as dramatic *tools* for changing society, I have been arguing that the continuing process of adaptation (or renarrativization) spontaneously and continually engenders that change—providing there remain audiences of ever-increasing knowledge of prior narrativizations, which is a crucial qualification. In any case, the central issue is authenticity, wholly appropriate for any discussion of Moriarty, Wild and Sheppard, and *Die Dreigroschenoper*—but particularly for any discussion of adaptation.

Of course, the term “authenticity” is fraught with troubling connotations. Labeling someone or something “authentic” or “inauthentic” is a move that implicates a power relation: the labeler implicitly claims a superior epistemological status to the labelee. In the following chapter, I will use *eigentlich* and its derivatives (*uneigentlich*, *eigentliche*, *uneigentliche*, *eigentlichkeit*, etc.)⁹³ to refer to whether someone or something corresponds to a self-professed image. Thus, if I say Wild is an *uneigentliche* profit-maker, it means he does not earn his profit by the means he professes to. If I say an adaptation is *uneigentlich*, it means it does not

⁹³ The differences in spelling correspond to parts of speech and negations. The “-e” ending denotes an adjective, the “un-” prefix denotes a negation, and the “-keit” ending denotes an abstract noun.

correspond to the adaptation it professes to. I am also contrasting this definition of *eigentlich* with “authentic,” which I will use to mean correspondence to theoretic ideals, such as authentic Marxist revolt or authentic to Brecht’s dramatic theories.

Returning to Holmes and his pontification about studying true crime, his suggestion to MacDonald is particularly sound since the “old wheel turning” might resonate in a number of ways. In effect, Holmes urges MacDonald to read the past that he might recognize the *uneigentlich* in the present and future. As a hidden force of criminality under the cloak of respectability, Wild reveals the *uneigentlichkeit* at the heart of the new bourgeois world, for his duplicity was conditioned by London society. Readers of contemporary criminal fiction do not generally recognize the lasting influence Wild has had on the development of the genre, which is all the more unfortunate since his very life and its ensuing popularity in narrativization reflects a number of aspects of the development of modern capitalism: the burgeoning bourgeois-capitalist foundation of organized crime as we now conceive it, capitalism’s own internal contradictions and conflicts, the increasing importance of mass communication and mass appeal to the growing urban population. His legacy and influence, along with that of his “nemesis” and erstwhile accomplice Jack Sheppard, are crucial to understanding the relation between crime and modern capitalist ideologies, in addition to the role crime narrative adaptation plays in negotiating how the two are culturally received. In any case, if Wild was the major source for Moriarty and Dickens’s Fagin, his similar influence on the characterization of Peachum, along with Sheppard’s influence on that of Macheath, in *The Beggar’s Opera* and *Die Dreigroschenoper* give them strong claim to being two of the most important villains in modern history. Before I turn to discussion of the criminal narrative adaptation use of Wild and Sheppard’s lives, I will review them.

Wild, Sheppard, Gay; Hauptmann, Brecht, Weill

Wild and Sheppard

Wild's life has been the subject of numerous narratives, factual or otherwise, since even before his death; as such, the myth of Wild is frequently inextricable from his history. This is just as well since it is the mythology surrounding Wild that has been so influential. Nevertheless, a number of facts are discernible. He was born in 1682/3 in Wolverhampton in the West Midlands of England and grew up in a poor family, after which he apprenticed a buckle-maker, married and had a son, and moved between London and Wolverhampton until 1708 when he stayed in London permanently—without his family (Pelham 51).⁹⁴ By 1710, though, he was in a debtor's prison in London, and his life and memory well could have ended there were it not for an act of Parliament in 1712 that relieved insolvent debtors of their obligations (Walsh 18). Hereafter, and likely due to his time in prison, Wild took up thievery, but also began receiving small fees for returning lost goods to their owners (18). He began to "apprentice" the Under City Marshall, Charles Hitchen, who, "combined with liberal helpings of bribery and brutality...had become a substantial receiver of stolen goods and taker of thieves" (18). At the time, "thief-taking" was hardly a noble occupation, but had simply developed from a 1693 statute that promised £40 in reward to those instrumental in bringing evidence against or capturing a thief (Howson 37). It was actually quite a brutal job that included "bribery, blackmail, informing, framing, receiving and theft compounded together" (42).

As in many narratives of organized crime, Wild wanted to move beyond his "boss's" limited operation, and he did so in a thoroughly modern way: advertisement (Walsh 19).

⁹⁴ The 1891 account of Wild's life by Camden Pelham (nom-de-plume of Hablot Knight Browne) is relatively accurate, if colorfully biased, and could very well have been a source for Conan Doyle's knowledge of Wild, although Holmes's account of Wild's date of death is wildly erroneous.

Harnessing the power of mass communication, from 1714 on, Wild took out ads searching for “lost” goods that he might return them to their owners. Wild’s methods differed from his predecessors through a managerial, public-relations maneuver: rather than obtain stolen goods and keep them for sale (a system the authorities were trying to suppress), Wild simply acted as a non-possessing conduit from thief to victim, substantially increasing his own profit by ensuring the liberty of himself and his confederate thieves (Pelham 52). At the time, stolen goods often ended up at pawnbrokers, and the original owners could buy them back; Wild simply eliminated any legal possession or exchange, and instead took victims to a “friend’s” place who had “found” it, all of which Wild would do for a small fee.⁹⁵ Through his ingratiating demeanor, he made a name for himself among the upper classes, and he took pains to brand himself in his increasing advertisements as “Thief-Taker General,” while he simultaneously organized a number of thieves around London with the promise of security *and* profit.

Wild became so well known and so successful, he opened his own shop (a shop of “lost property”) and began keeping elaborate records while attending to detail-oriented orchestrating of every aspect of the operation required for his financial success. As a fence for stolen goods, Wild was flourishing, but as his business relied on thieves, he needed a system to control them. He found that he could do this and further increase his profit by standardizing and classifying the various thieves in his *de facto* employment (Walsh 20). He organized them by district, carefully separating any possible rebellious confederates, and gave them tips on acting and impersonation for better thieving. He kept tabs on what property arrived in relation to that reported missing by his “customers,” and thereby surveilled the honesty and loyalty of his thieves, turning in

⁹⁵ Later, in 1719, when Parliament passed “The Jonathan Wild Act,” which stated that any person who took reward for the return of stolen goods and did not also bring the thief to justice could be tried for felony. After that, Wild simply performed his job gratis—with the implication that he should probably be tipped at some going rate (Walsh 21–22).

members of his own gang—for a fee—were they disloyal or unproductive. This had the added bonus of maintaining his credibility as a thief-taker in the public eye, while also acting as an incentive for loyalty and productivity from the rest of his thieves.

Wild's operation was a triumph of capitalism in a very peculiar way. His entire system was predicated on a circulation of commodities, property exchange which he prompted, organized, and taxed. All the while he generated and maintained markets for his business. Yet the production of commodities is conspicuously absent from his operation. Strangely, he more accurately reflects features of late capitalism in which production has become secondary to the accumulation of profit. Wild simply taxed the circulation of commodities. In one sense, Wild's system of proto-finance-capitalism is the specific supplement of the production of commodities—at first apparently secondary and in aid of production, but upon closer inspection a necessary first step in primitive accumulation. In a proto-capitalist, barter-like economy, a basic way to accumulate capital beyond outright stealing is through taxing and “usury.” In the shadows of the first phases of capitalism lies its own ghost.

Wild's schemes were peculiarly suited for a growing urban population during the rise of conspicuous consumption *because of* the rise of conspicuous consumption. He needed readily moveable goods for exchange and the potential for a growing market. In all, the precondition of his success is the *uneigentlichkeit* of his actual profit-making activity compared to his cover of respectability. His success, and *uneigentlichkeit*, was such that Wild even developed a transportation racket, in which he pretended to transport criminals to penal colonies (for a reward), when he actually sent them to other areas of Great Britain to extend his criminal

empire.⁹⁶ In a sense, with an expansion of his *uneigentlichkeit* came an expansion in his power and wealth.

During this time, Wild's popularity grew steadily, but it was only a matter of time before Wild's market realized how he was exploiting them. And they did. But it was not until after his rejected, hubristic, ironically feudal attempts to be granted Freedom of the City of London—a civil privilege and honor which would have permitted him voting rights in Parliament—that Wild would engineer his own downfall. Wild felt that if he could ensure the capture of a notorious criminal, the aldermen would be compelled to make him a Freeman (Walsh 22). Jack Sheppard was the perfect candidate for Wild.

Like Wild, Sheppard was born into a poor family, was apprenticed, and eventually left it to turn to thieving. Unlike Wild, however, Sheppard was twenty years younger, relatively unambitious, and free-wheeling. He was a gregarious spirit, a straightforward pick-pocket, house-breaker, and sometime highwayman who fell into thieving, according to many accounts, after meeting a prostitute named Elizabeth Lyon (commonly known as Edgworth Bess). In any case, he spent the rest of his life with her. Presumably, he moved on from drinking and visiting brothels to petty theft to burglary, and he joined Wild's gang. In the two years he was active as a thief, Sheppard was captured and imprisoned five times, but he escaped four times, and broke *in* to prison once.⁹⁷ It was for his irrepressible desire for freedom—evidenced by his escapes and his refusal to work with Wild—that Sheppard became the talk of London and came to Wild's unfortunate attention.

He had been arrested and imprisoned once with his brother (Tom) and Bess. They were all released, but Tom informed on him upon his own second arrest, and a warrant was issued.

⁹⁶ Actually, by 1720, Wild had also begun to trade in the international black market, trading goods between England and the European continent (Walsh 22).

⁹⁷ This latter feat was done to rescue Bess.

One of Wild's men betrayed him to a constable, and he was arrested and imprisoned at St. Gile's Roundhouse. Within hours he had escaped by climbing down tied and knotted sheets (Linebaugh 23). Less than a month later, he was arrested again and imprisoned in New Prison, along with Bess. They escaped, once again by a rope of bedclothes. In his time thieving, Sheppard had struck out on his own along with another ex-associate of Wild's ("Blueskin" Blake), and Wild demanded that Sheppard bring his goods to him; Sheppard refused, but was betrayed by Bess when Wild purportedly plied her with alcohol for information on his location (Linebaugh 28). He was imprisoned again—this time in the infamous Newgate prison—but still managed to escape, this time with the aid of Bess and another prostitute, who distracted the guards while he removed a bar in his window (30). He put on women's clothing, and fled the prison.

By the time of his third escape, Sheppard was immensely popular, particularly with the working class. As Peter Linebaugh argues, "The refusal of subordination was a characteristic of the London labour force.... And it led to the delight that greeted Sheppard's escapes" (24). He was also a source of lurid fascination to some of the upper classes. At any rate, Wild pursued him every moment he was free and he was soon back in prison. Nevertheless, he was just as popular imprisoned as free, for everyone wanted an audience with him: "The great, the fast, the strong, the talented and the beautiful sought his company in Newgate..." (33). And he did hold a kind of court, expostulating witticisms on "political economy, theology and the justice system," which kept him in steady supply of money and confidence (34).

As some kind of luck would have it, the infamous Blueskin was apprehended by Wild's men while Sheppard was imprisoned. Blueskin said to Wild on his way to trial, "You may put in a word for me, as well as for another person," whereupon Wild said, "You are certainly a dead man, and will be tuck'd up very speedily" (qtd. in Linebaugh 35). Blueskin pulled a penknife and

slashed Wild's throat, nearly killing him. A commotion arose during which Sheppard got out of his handcuffs, and made an elaborate escape from Newgate (35). As he walked the streets of London, he listened to stories and ballads of his escape, and presumably overcome with egoism, he purchased diamonds, watches, a black suit, a sword, and other luxuries, and hired a coach to ride through town with prostitutes visiting gin-shops and ale-houses with hundreds listening to his stories (37). The public were captivated by him for his *eigentlichkeit* to his own desires and activities: he lived simply to indulge his senses and whims, but did so in a relatively straightforward way. He boasted of escaping before doing so, notifying his jailers of his plans. Even the egoism of his last escape illustrates this *eigentlichkeit*. Given the chance to live on elsewhere, Sheppard chose instead to make himself into a lavish spectacle in the middle of town, completely aware of the consequences—but true to his own self-centered desire. He was captured for the last time a little over two weeks after his last escape, and some two weeks after that he was hanged at Tyburn before one of the largest crowds London would see—until Wild was hanged six months later.

After Sheppard's death, Wild was dogged by frustrations with the justice system, and his erratic behavior cost him support and loyalty among both his thieves and wealthier patrons (Walsh 23). Wild was eventually charged with shoplifting and for violating sections of the "Jonathan Wild Act," but the charges were weak. Instead, Wild's own foolishness in court earned him a conviction and death sentence (23). He rode to Tyburn in a drugged coma in May of 1725 after attempting suicide by laudanum that morning. Sheppard was widely mourned and respected, but at Wild's execution, "not one sympathetic voice was raised in his behalf" (23).

Wild and Sheppard's stories have lived on so spectacularly because they evoke the polar-opposite possible resolutions for the exploited in capitalist society: *uneigentlich* duplicity and

eigentlich defiance. The notion of communities banding together against exploitation or oppression, even via criminal gangs, dissolves. Gang members turn against gang members, and only the most ruthless and efficient triumph—for a time, after which their exploitative practices catch up with them. The magnificence of Wild and Sheppard's stories lies in their elegant condensation of both the possibilities and the *conditions* of modern life across the classes. Linebaugh says of Sheppard that as “extraordinary, even marvelous, as his later actions appeared, they would not have stirred such excitement, such passion, such fundamental discussion, had he not shared in the central experiences of his class and generation” (9). Wild might have enjoyed similar popularity; he even did for a time. Both Wild and Sheppard were born into meager existence and found themselves funneled along the usual routes of labor: workhouse, apprenticeship, marriage and child and debt (in Wild's case). Yet both men rejected such existence in dramatic ways, turning instead to thieving. Wild was dismissed from his apprenticeship, abandoned his wife and child, and once out of debtor's prison, he never stopped robbing. Sheppard began his criminal spree just ten months before the end of his seven-year apprenticeship. Neither man seemed content to try to get by through prescribed routes.

If they shared a similar desire to change their conditions, Wild and Sheppard had opposing notions about what might constitute a better existence. For Wild, it was class ascendancy at the sake of those he relied on. As Vincenzo Ruggiero notes, “As an entrepreneur and employer, he shunned the risks connected with his venture, transferring all potentially negative outcomes onto his employees” (41). Likewise, as an erstwhile worker, he manipulated and exploited his peers in order to move above them in class. Such capitalist mobility can only happen *uneigentliche*, under the guise of bourgeois respectability, for the machinery of that very system must be kept in a pleasant image. He thus organized his theft racket around an image of a

noble civil servant, a position he hoped to attain by simply proclaiming it. But real ascendancy only seemed possible through systematic betrayal of those he worked with and fraud of those he wished to be like. His final (and fatal) ambition was to be given Freedom of the City, a position of respect, protection, and legislative voice, bought with Sheppard's blood.

For Sheppard, a better life was one of hedonistic liberty and conviviality. He seemed to want nothing more than to go his own way, to drink and be merry with prostitutes and companions and glory in their wonder of him. In Sheppard's final procession through London town in a black suit with diamonds, watches, and a sword garnishing him, he seems to reflect a part of Wild's own bourgeois desires but transforms them subtly through context: this is a working-class hero in his final hours, transfigured into a doomed dark knight of the under-classes. Sheppard knew he would be captured—his behavior even courted it—and so he cloaked himself in the adulation of his peers. The gamble certainly paid off, for Sheppard was widely mourned and became a hero to generations of poor children all over the world for more than a century after his death.⁹⁸ Peter Linebaugh says bluntly, “In England his name cut deep into the landscape of popular consciousness” (8), but he was also popular throughout the English-speaking world. Even in late nineteenth-century America, the James brothers wrote letters to the *Kansas City Star* signed “Jack Sheppard” (7–8).

At the risk of excusing crime wholesale, and Sheppard and Wild more specifically, the two men can best be understood in the context the new political economy into which they had been born. The very economy that ruled their early years, and would define their later ones, shaped many of the choices they made. As Vincenzo Ruggiero notes, “Trade and its principles

⁹⁸ Sheppard's (dangerous) influence was such that William Harrison Ainsworth's 1839 *Jack Sheppard* and its subsequent slew of stage adaptations compelled the Lord Chamberlain to ban licensing of any plays with “Jack Sheppard” in the title (Hollingsworth 147). This was also largely due to the fact that Lord William Russell's murderer, his valet (Courvoisier), reportedly read Ainsworth's *Sheppard* in the days preceding Russell's murder, and newspapers suggested it was the novel's glorification of crime that inspired Courvoisier (145).

penetrated the logic of criminal legislation, shaping crime itself, rather than responding to it” (40). Linebaugh similarly argues that “the forms of exploitation pertaining to capitalist relations caused or modified the forms of criminal activity, and...the converse was true, namely, that the forms of crime caused major changes in capitalism” (xxi). Both estimations point again to the crux of it: crime parallels capitalism. The two are only separated by what the culture at large deems authentic to legitimate capitalism, which is to say the two are only separated by what the culture deems *eigentlich* to its image of itself.

So far I have been mostly speaking of crime in terms of trade, as opposed to violent crimes. On the surface, then, this parallel appears limited. Does all crime really reflect capitalism, including violent crimes as well as property crimes? It does, in fact. But I am not suggesting that *all* crimes are *always* caused directly by capitalism. Particularly while arguing through an anarchist perspective, individual cases, obviously involving free will, should be taken into consideration before leaping to generalizations everywhere. But the conditions and consequences of capitalism heavily influence the categories of crime and establish the *context* in which individual instances of crime occur with their multifaceted causes and effects. Thus, while crime and its fictional accounts describe “legitimate” society in photo negative, the ideological strains of that society combat such identification in the societies’ narratives, attempting to disassociate the two by identifying one as authentic, the other inauthentic. I will trace this struggle in the remainder of this chapter.

Gay

That Wild and Sheppard thoroughly and almost perfectly reflect the political economy of their time is nowhere better attested to than in John Gay's *Beggar's Opera*.⁹⁹ The play (or "ballad opera," the genre of which I shall discuss in a moment) parallels the lives of Wild and Sheppard neatly. After an introduction by a beggar and a player, Mr. Peachum and his wife, managing their ledgers, learn that their daughter (Polly) has married a charming, notorious scoundrel (Captain Macheath). Peachum heads an organization precisely like Wild's, and Macheath is a somewhat independent highwayman enamored with and by many women, much like Sheppard. Peachum and his wife reason that Macheath will ruin them, and decide instead to turn him in to the police for a reward. Polly warns Macheath of the danger, and he leaves promising his fidelity, but goes straight to Mrs. Coaxer's whorehouse, where two prostitutes (Jenny Diver and Suky Tawdry) betray him to Peachum and some constables who take him to the jailer (Lockit), with whom Peachum is in league. Macheath pays Lockit for easier chains, and is later met by Lockit's daughter, Lucy, to whom he is engaged. Polly arrives and the three fight while Macheath lies to both, looking for any advantage to escape. Peachum comes and takes his daughter away, at which point Lucy helps Macheath escape. Lockit learns of his daughter's engagement, and hopes to win Macheath's inheritance, and discusses the matter with Peachum. Polly entreats Lucy to save Macheath, but Lucy tries to poison Polly. Peachum and Lockit learn of Macheath's hiding place (once again, Mrs. Coaxer's) and capture him, after which their daughters plead for his life. Nevertheless, he stands at the gallows ready to die (since two women want to marry him, and four more have arrived claiming him as husband and father to their

⁹⁹ The authorship of *The Beggar's Opera* is far less ambiguous than that of *Die Dreigroschenoper*, but I should note that I am leaving out all discussion of Johann Christoph Pepusch, who arranged the popular melodies to which Gay's lyrics were set. By all accounts, *The Beggar's Opera* was Gay's project, and he enlisted Pepusch's help. Such distinctions are not so neat with *Die Dreigroschenoper*, as I will relate.

children). At that moment, the player stops the scene and declares that the play needs a happy ending, like any opera in vogue. Macheath is suddenly reprieved then, and forced to choose a wife (whom he does: Polly).

The general historical significance of this proto-operetta cannot be overstated. At once notable of Gay's *Opera* is the prescient knowledge of its peculiar status even before it premiered. Gay's patron, the Duke of Queensberry, as well as Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, and William Congreve all had serious concerns about how Gay's work would turn out. Upon reading it, they all agreed with the Duke: "This is a very odd thing, Gay. I am satisfied that it is either a very good thing, or a very bad thing" (qtd. in Burgess vii). As it turned out, it was a very, very good thing; in fact, one of the most important dramatic productions in the modern English-speaking world. This status is partly indicated by the show's run, which was sixty-two nights (then a first-run record) at a time when "single performances were not uncommon, and a first run of four to five nights established a play as a definite hit" (Burgess ix). Burgess reports that "the success of *The Beggar's Opera* was such that Gay's contemporaries were convinced that the play would run forever. In a very real sense, it has done precisely that" (x).

Popularity and financial success are not the only reason the play is well-regarded. In fact, its popularity and success rather reflect the stunning originality and radical nature of the work. As some twentieth-century critics noted of *Dreigroschenoper*, the astounding success of a work that so thoroughly lambasts the very audience watching it (Walpole was in attendance at the premiere) pleads for explanation. Not nearly as many critics or champions took up the cause of *The Beggar's Opera* as they did *Die Dreigroschenoper*, but the question arising is very much the same: "how could a work of subversive tendency and high artistic merit attract such widespread public acclaim?" (Hinton, "Misunderstanding" 181). Gay reportedly wrote his work apparently

at the suggestion of Swift, who asked both Pope and Gay, “what think you of a Newgate pastoral, among the whores and thieves there?” (qtd. in Gagey 12).¹⁰⁰ The suggested innovation regards pastoral verse, but Gay obviously decided theater was a better venue, and then he apparently decided to critique Italian opera. Pope, Gay, and Swift were intensely bothered by the popularity of Italian *opera seria* on the English stage, and its querulous, pretentious productions were a favorite target of their ridicule (18–19).

Gay’s play turned Italian opera on its head entirely, populating it with the thieves and prostitutes of London, rather than the melodramatic, aristocratic figures of the *dramma per musica*. These characters *spoke* in English and sang popular ballad tunes, rather than singing recitative (a new operatic addition) in Italian. The ballads of the time were common street songs in which anything extraordinary found its way into a “specified old air” (Gagey 27). Unlike the Italian operatic form, the *Beggar’s Opera* songs were often integrated with the story. Throughout his new “ballad opera,” Gay pokes fun at the traditions of Italian opera, ridiculing the dueling *prima donne*, the clichéd, overused imagery, and the ridiculously contrived happy endings.¹⁰¹

Of course, *Beggar’s Opera* is more than a just a parody of melodrama, although it does that phenomenally well, as Ruggiero argues (38). He continues, “It is also a document that, while describing conventional crime, unveils the practice, the rationale and the structure of a criminal enterprise developing common interests with agencies of social order” (38–39). I suggest, though, as I mentioned earlier, that it is a document that describes how a criminal enterprise arises *because* of social order, and how agencies of social order require criminal enterprise. Gay’s work not only lampooned Italian *opera seria*, provoking his audiences “to consider the basic incongruity of foreign-language opera on the English stage” (Burgess xii), and celebrated

¹⁰⁰ The three writers lived together at this time, hence their consistent association.

¹⁰¹ Dueling *prima donne* was a very real thing. Only the year before *Beggar’s Opera*, two of Handel’s sopranos (Faustina and Cuzzoni) attacked each other on stage (Hirsch 35).

street art by using “songs that were native to the English spirit and temperament” (xii), he also used the recent conflict between Wild and Sheppard and dramatized it in such a way to make larger comments about their particular occupations, as well as the political situation at the time. For audiences at the time, parallels of the activities of the *de facto* first Prime Minister (Robert Walpole) to the action on-stage were unmistakable. *The Beggar’s Opera* was a thorough defamiliarization of its period, a satirical adaptation of its very style and content.

At the time of Gay’s writing, Walpole had been in a place of significant power for only a few years, but he was already a favorite target of satire, and following Gay’s immensely popular play, his favor as a target would only grow. Famous among all the citizens of London was “Walpole’s extravagance, his alleged debauchery, his love of food and wine, his coarseness” (Gagey 45), but Gay also drew on his own experiences trying to curry favor in the court. He had been repeatedly rebuffed in his attempts to gain a position in the court, and was bitter at the hypocrisy and double-dealing he felt controlled it. “In the world of Newgate,” Burgess points out, “Peachum is the master manipulator, a thoroughgoing cynic, and, above all, a man with his eyes firmly fixed on the main chance for turning a profit. Thus, Walpole, in Gay’s opinion, was the Peachum of the world of Whitehall” (xvii). Peachum’s money-grubbing material selfishness “reflected the widely-held contemporary belief that Walpole used his office to amass a vast personal fortune” (xvii). Gay also ridiculed Walpole’s “alleged sangfroid in using people to further his own ends” through his depiction of Wild-through-Peachum (xvii). And Walpole was not even above comparisons to Macheath’s reckless philandering, extravagance, and debauchery. In a sense, in the way Wild and Sheppard suggested the polar-opposite choices for resistance to those caught up in a capitalist system, Walpole suggested the total embodiment of that system at its absolute worst: embedded within government.

Gay's broader point then is not about Walpole, Peachum, or Wild, but the very system that makes them act the despicable ways they do. So while Peachum and Lockit's collusion, for instance, "reflects the collaboration between Jonathan Wild and the corrupt official agencies that was necessary to the career of thief-takers...corruption is [also just] the permanent feature, the inescapable backdrop for all careers" (Ruggiero 43). Corruption, however, is a form of *uneigentlichkeit*. And by satirizing London society through a lampoon of the entertainment it craved (*opera seria*), Gay further highlighted the systemic *uneigentlichkeit* of London's capitalist culture. He ridicules the *uneigentlich* criminals who exploit their peers to profit, and satirizes the ruling classes by revealing their manifestation of that exploitation, as well, all while illustrating how their most beloved entertainment (*opera seria*) is the most *uneigentlich*. In Gay's vision of London, crime is no allegory for bourgeois society, it *is* bourgeois society; the two indistinctly bleed into one another, all the way to the highest positions in the land. The contemporary cultural obsession with depictions of classical royalty in unrealistic representation and situation underscores the full-scale hypocrisy of that society.

It seems Gay understood the full radical nature of his work (that is, in both form and content), for he engages it directly in the very opening of the show. First, he provides an introduction in which a beggar and a player indicate all the ways they have tried to make their production like the most fashionable operas, "I have introduc'd the similes that are in all your celebrated operas: the Swallow, the Moth, the Bee, the Ship, the Flower, etc. Besides, I have a prison scene, which the ladies always reckon charmingly pathetic" (3). At the same time, they indicate how they are intentionally deviating from making an opera: "I hope I may be forgiven that I have not made my opera throughout unnatural, like those in vogue; for I have no recitative: excepting this, I have consented to have neither prologue nor epilogue, it must be allow'd an

opera in all its forms” (3–4). Given this summary, they are still abandoning one of the main hallmarks of *opera seria* (recitative) and are still providing a prologue (as they will eventually provide an epilogue), even as they claim they do not have one. Next, Peachum steps out singing new lyrics to a popular tune of the time (“An old woman cloathed in gray”), and the lyrics establish the tone and intention of the whole work:

Through all the employments of life
 Each neighbor abuses his brother;
 Whore and rogue they call husband and wife:
 All professions be-rogue one another.
 The priest calls the lawyer a cheat,
 The lawyer be-knaves the divine;
 And the statesman, because he’s so great,²
 Thinks his trade as honest as mine. (5)

² **great** a term often applied to Walpole with sarcastic overtones.

Peachum’s parting words after the song and before Filch enters further sums it up: “‘tis but fitting that we should protect and encourage cheats, since we live by ‘em” (5).

Hauptmann, Brecht, Weill

As I have mentioned, Gay’s opera was of such a success that it was revived many times for centuries after its performance. One of the most prominent of these revivals was in 1920, before which it had not been staged in a major production for almost fifty years. The old wheel turns, as Holmes said; the 1920 revival, arranged by Frederic Austin and produced by Sir Nigel Playfair at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, was an astounding success, running 1,463 performances over three years (Hinton, “Sources” 15). Any dramatist could have recognized the potential of such success, and many did. Brecht was one, but he was far from alone in recognizing the potential of adapting *Beggar’s Opera*.

As with Wild and Sheppard, more Brecht myth survives than fact. A late-1930s piece by Walter Benjamin indicates some of the myth surrounding “Brecht’s” work. Writing of *Dreigroschenoper* in terms of Gay’s original work, Benjamin erroneously states that “no theatre had dared to take on his piece. Eventually private funds were made available; they sufficed to fit out a barn in such a way that the piece could be presented in it. . . . Just 50 years later, however, the work was already forgotten on the Continent” (144). Some of what Benjamin says rings true; Gay did not translate well, and his most popular work never did as well in foreign countries as it did in its own. But Benjamin’s suggestion is that Gay’s piece was so subversive as to have been barely performed and then subsequently forgotten, recognized and rescued from obscurity by Brecht’s solitary genius. In reality, it was revived a number of times, and the rest of Europe and even America would have been cognizant of this; it was, for instance, George Washington’s favorite play. As for Brecht’s solitary genius, let my discussion speak for itself.

For instance, far before Brecht even knew about the opera, the German music publisher Schott approached the composer Paul Hindemith in 1925 to produce an adaptation based on Gay’s work, and suggested he incorporate his own style of music that reflected “refined popular music or a caricature thereof, at the same time a satire of the sort of modern opera composed by d’Albert” (qtd. in Hinton “Sources” 15–16). And further, when he did adapt *The Beggar’s Opera*, he was far from alone in actually adapting the work. This point has been lost over time, as a mystique of Brecht’s lone vision for an adaptation of Gay’s play has emerged, and now *Die Dreigroschenoper* is frequently remembered as primarily his work. Brecht’s exploitation of his own group reflects the apparent impossibility of social resistance to capitalist ideologies, an outwardly hopelessness already witnessed in the life of Wild.

Even the original idea of adapting it was not Brecht's, nor was the majority of the language of the original production. In any case, as Stephen Hinton notes at the outset of his discussion of the sources and genesis of *Die Dreigroschenoper*, "Of one thing we can be certain: when...[it] opened in Berlin at the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm on 31 August 1928, the audience was left in no doubt as to the work's multiple authorship" ("Matters" 9). That certainty has been eroded with time, unintentionally and otherwise. In 1927 and into 1928, Brecht's sometime lover and secretary, Elisabeth Hauptmann, was working on a translation of *The Beggar's Opera* after some English friends of hers sent her a copy of it (along with its sequel *Polly*), presumably because they had heard of or seen the Austin adaptation (Fuegi 193).¹⁰² At the time, Hauptmann had already prepared a number of works for Brecht, but which he had passed off as entirely his own. In April, a wealthy young man named Ernst Josef Aufricht had leased the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm and needed a play for it since his option for a play by Georg Kaiser had fallen through (194).¹⁰³ He asked the café-hopping Brecht if he had a play, and after Aufricht rejected Brecht's major work at the time (*Joe Fleischhacker*), Brecht floated the idea of *Dreigroschenoper*, which was then entitled *Gesindel* (or *Riff-Raff*). Up to that point, according to Fuegi, Brecht had shown almost no interest (193). Aufricht liked the idea and Brecht insisted on Weill's involvement. Although Aufricht was apprehensive of the notoriously avant-garde composer, production moved forward.¹⁰⁴

When the work premiered on the 31st of August 1928, no one thought it would do well. This is unsurprising since Brecht did not attend any of the rehearsals until the 20th (Fuegi 198).

¹⁰² Throughout his life, Brecht kept up a number of affairs, often with women he collaborated with, or with the wives and girlfriends of men he collaborated with. John Fuegi's *Brecht & Co.: Sex, Politics, and the Making of Modern Drama* is an excellent account of how Brecht's notorious affairs affected his work, and how he used them to his advantage.

¹⁰³ Weill collaborated with Kaiser the year before on *Der Protagonisti*, like *Dreigroschenoper* set in a prior century in England. Kaiser, in fact, introduced Weill and Lotte Lenya.

¹⁰⁴ Secretly, Aufricht secured the employment of the Berlin operetta director Theo Mackeben to arrange Pepusch's score if necessary (Fuegi 195). Mackeben would go on to direct the music for the *Dreigroschenoper* premiere.

The rehearsals were dogged with all manner of problems, including *prima donna* tantrums from its cast.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, halfway through the first performance, the work was a hit. The number of new productions of *Die Dreigroschenoper* that season, counted by Weill's publisher (Universal Edition) exceeded fifty (Hinton "Première" 50). In fact, all of Europe caught *Dreigroschen*-fever, and by Universal's very conservative estimates (and several notable omissions) by 1933 at least 130 productions had been mounted across the world (50). But which actual narrative caught fire is uncertain, for no two productions were alike—and they often differed in significant ways.

The summarized general plot of *Dreigroschenoper* is mostly similar to *Beggar's Opera*, and this fact is an indication of the importance of narrative focus and narrational activity—as opposed to narrative material—since the two works are still noticeably varied. The plot begins with a "Moritat" (murder ballad) of Mackie Messer (literally, Mackie Knife), and then presents a singing Jonathan Jeremiah Peachum, the owner of a shop that outfits and instructs beggars on begging, assigns them to districts of London, and extorts them for protection. He and his wife discover that their daughter, Polly, might marry Mack the Knife. Meanwhile, Mackie and Polly marry in a stable, around goods stolen by his incompetent, uncouth gang. The police chief (Jackie "Tiger" Brown), an army friend of Mac's, is in attendance. Peachum learns of their wedding, and decides to hand Mackie over to the sheriff, but Polly warns him and he escapes, leaving her in charge of the gang. Nevertheless, he goes straight to a whorehouse, where Mrs. Peachum suspected he would go. While enjoying old memories with Jenny and the other

¹⁰⁵ One such tantrum came from the actor who played Macheath, Harald Paulsen. Whatever the precise story—and almost *all* stories about *Die Dreigroschenoper* are conflicting—the work's most famous song, the opening "Moritat" (now known as "Mack the Knife") was written in the 11th hour, just before the premiere. Presumably, Paulsen demanded a song introducing him, working in (if possible) a mention of the light-blue bow tie he wanted to wear. Despite Brecht's famous theft from others, it is very possible that Brecht wrote both the tune and lyrics for the piece, although David Drew argues otherwise persuasively through a motivic analysis of Weill's whole score (151).

prostitutes, Mackie is betrayed. Polly comes to the prison and fights with Lucy Brown (Tiger Brown's daughter) over Mackie. Mrs. Peachum comes and takes Polly away, after which Lucy helps Mack escape. He goes back to the whorehouse. Peachum arrives at the jail, and finding Mackie gone, implicitly threatens to unleash the beggars around the upcoming coronation. After a speech to his beggars, and after Jenny inadvertently reveals Mackie's location, Peachum is placed under arrest by Brown. Peachum blackmails Brown into releasing him and arresting Mackie. He is arrested, and awaits hanging, before which he begs forgiveness of those around. At the last minute, a mounted messenger of the King arrives and pardons Mackie, giving him a peerage, a castle, and £10,000 a year for the remainder of his life.

Despite some obvious similarities, a cursory comparison of the summaries of *Beggar's Opera* and *Dreigroschenoper* reveals a number of key differences. By looking comparatively at the summaries, I am taking a macrodiscursive approach to the texts. How do the two works engage narrative material, arrangement, and drive? Both plays divide up organically into about eleven scenes of action. The first two reflect each other. *The Beggar's Opera* opens with a jarring introduction by The Beggar and The Player before showing Mr. Peachum at work, and *Dreigroschenoper* opens with placards giving the action, while a ballad singer sings a song about one of the characters; after this, the audience sees J. J. Peachum at *his* work, which differs from Mr. Peachum, as I have mentioned.¹⁰⁶

Hereafter, the differences lie more in narrative material focus since the overall arrangement of major plot points is roughly the same. The Peachums worry about their daughter marrying Mack and plan on turning him in to the police for their own benefit; she warns Mack who goes to his brothel, whereupon the prostitutes betray him to the Peachums and the police. The jailer's daughter, in love with him, fights with Polly, but then helps him escape after the

¹⁰⁶ Incidentally, both Peachums sing the very same melody to open both works; it is the only one they share.

Peachums take Polly away. He goes back to the brothel, is captured again, and finally brought to die, whereupon he is saved by the *deus ex machina* of a royal, mounted messenger.

But *Dreigroschenoper* focuses on interestingly different facets of these events. For one, it depicts the moment after Mackie and Polly's marriage, whereas the *Beggar's* Macheath and Polly have already married prior to the action of the play. This is significant insofar as Hauptmann/Brecht depict Mackie as a bourgeois gentleman with a taste for nice things, thoroughly disgusted with his gang's poor taste. Furthermore, the sheriff, Tiger Brown, comes to his wedding feast. In *The Beggar's Opera*, Macheath has little intercourse with the official jailing authority; he simply pays them a fee for lighter chains, as all other prisoners do. As Vincenzo Ruggiero notes of policing at the time, it "was chaotic and ineffectual...virtually every permanent official involved in the administration of London had to buy their job, [and] prisoners were...required to pay for the cost of their detention, as they were billed for the use of their cell" (39–40). Macheath's imprisonment is one more unfair way in which Peachum, Lockit, and the ruling classes of London keep Macheath habitually exploited. But Mac's jailing is the betrayal of a friend, and something he believes he has insulated himself from since he essentially "plays" the same game with the authorities that Peachum does. Whereas *Beggar's* "Macheath is a resonant of Jack Sheppard, the independent, individualistic, rebellious criminal who refuses to conform to the discipline of hierarchical organizations" (43), Mackie is much more like Mr. Peachum, a bourgeois gentleman who abuses and exploits his gang for his own gain.

J. J. Peachum is a curious development from Mr. Peachum. Instead of running a gang who steals for him and whom he blackmails and exploits, which Mackie now does, J. J. Peachum has organized a much more devious racket that preys on Christian sympathy to earn money. J. J. Peachum's particular exploitative twist is that he charges beggars for their begging, splitting

them up by districts and dividing them up into categories of beggars. Hauptmann and Brecht's opera is overrun much more thoroughly with echoes of capitalism than Gay's. Gay could still highlight an anarchist, if crude, spirit at work in eighteenth-century London crime, but Hauptmann and Brecht's relatively nondescript time and place has capitalism in every corner. The individualistic, rebellious criminal has become a bourgeois Mr. Peachum (Mack the Knife), and Mr. Peachum has become the even more devious Jonathan Jeremiah Peachum, so *uneigentlich* that he profits from behind the respectability of religion and charity, pretending to be the poorest man in London when he in fact controls a large *lumpenproletariat* army.

Now, I want to turn to some more specific aspects of renarrativization. In doing so, I also need to point out a recurring motif in this entire project regarding authorship and the stable text. As Macherey noted, "the work is never... a coherent and unified whole" (41), but completes itself in each *konkretization*. Narratives are irreducible discursive productions of an authorial-audience complex, and *Dreigroschenoper* is one of the most lively and unmistakable examples of it. For one, although I have already indicated the primary authorship by Hauptmann, regarding her as the sole author does discredit to the myriad agents involved in the production, including the composer (Weill), the set designer (Caspar Neher), the director (Erich Engel), the conductor (Theo Mackeben), the orchestra (the Lewis Ruth Band), the performers (Erich Ponto as Jonathan Peachum, Rosa Valetti as Frau Peachum, Roma Bahn as Polly, Harald Paulsen as Mackie, Lotte Lenya as Jenny, and so on), and obviously Brecht's contributions. As Stephen Hinton points out,

Although the production was put together in a hurry, its discrete elements...*emerged from a collective effort*. Just as Weill and Brecht wrote...in close consultation, making alterations as rehearsals progressed, so director Erich Engel drew his production ideas from Caspar Neher's drawings, and vice versa. ("Première" 52, emphasis mine)

Many of Weill and Brecht's apparently "authorial" choices were in fact made in rehearsal, by direct input or by circumstance. Rosa Valetti, for instance, refused to sing the "Ballade von der

sexuellen Hörigkeit" ("Ballad of Sexual Dependency") due to its subject matter. It was left out of the original production. Paulsen, of course, demanded his own song (the "Moritat"), which Brecht and Weill wrote at least the night before. Carola Neher, who played Polly throughout rehearsals, was called away three days before production to see her dying husband, and was replaced by Roma Bahn. Helene Weigel (Brecht's wife) was to play Mrs. Coaxer, but came down with appendicitis, and the part was removed not only from the premiere, but from all subsequent productions I know of. A number of songs and scenes were removed from the work entirely, not only from the production. Kate Kühl (Lucy) could not sing the satirical "Aria" that Weill composed, and it was dropped. The premiere's playbill indicates other last-minute changes, for it states that the work contains "Eingelegte Balladen von François Villon und Rudyard Kipling" ("Interpolated Ballads by François Villon and Rudyard Kipling"), which do not appear, but were written.

The above alterations, the list of which is not at all comprehensive, only cover changes before the performance. As Hinton notes, "The business of making the piece stage-worthy was as much a matter of trial and error as of expediency" ("Matters" 27). The production "libretto" was first published in October of 1928, and reprinted twice by the end of 1929, and another edition appeared in 1931. Brecht did not stop tinkering with his work in one way or another for years on end, going on to change the plot significantly for his film treatment for Pabst's film, and then developing that plot even further in writing his 1934 *Dreigroschenroman* (*Threepenny Novel*).

Speaking of the broad ways in which the Wild, Sheppard, Gay, Hauptmann/Brecht narratives differ, then, the historically attentive critic should be more attuned to macroscopic discursive shifts in making any claims about rhetoric since the language necessarily passed through a multitude of interpretive lenses, from the various biographers (critical or not) of Wild

and Sheppard through Gay's text, through Hauptmann's original translation of Gay and her and Brecht's subsequent adaptation through rehearsal and production, through the various alterations Brecht made to his and Hauptmann's writing over the years, and through the many English-language interpretations that appeared from 1933 onward, often published several years after the production and thus subject to unknown alterations from unknown sources. Microscopic discursive shifts are obviously still quite important, but I am speaking of arguments made concerning the overall rhetorical shift from Wild and Sheppard through *The Beggar's Opera* and *Dreigroschenoper* and then its many translations and productions.

Analysis of such a "noisy" text is liberating. Due to the over-determination of information, resulting in numerous intersecting discursive subsystems, audiences need to choose particular interpretive approaches to determine meaning for some *konkretization*. The attentive critic—radically freed of much ability to identify individual rhetorical intention exactly—is forced to explore more thoroughly the agency, context, and function of the narrative's ongoing production and realization in relation to *received* rhetorical intention as it plays out according to those various factors. Obviously, even this task is daunting given the sheer possibility of critical avenues. In this choice lies one of the most important moves in an anarchist method. In terms of *Dreigroschenoper*, what about the structure, context, or function of the work's realization over the past 84 years presents itself as particularly vital in its constant renarrativization?¹⁰⁷ How can the anarchist critic articulate the emerging resistance to ideology? The answer is as short as it is (perhaps) surprising: Anglo-American influence.

¹⁰⁷ I want to be clear that in subsequent productions, the narrativization first set forth by Brecht et al. has been altered significantly enough to often warrant being called a "renarrativization."

American Influence and Performances

In my own analysis, the Anglo-American context of *Die Dreigroschenoper* arises as predominantly relevant. But this is not simply an Anglo-American-centrism on my part. A brief glance at Hauptmann, Brecht, and Weill's works around the time of their meeting until the end of their lives indicate this direction for analysis.

Brecht was obsessed with Anglo-American themes before he met Hauptmann and Weill, but the two of them further encouraged his obsession. As Willett notes, although Brecht did not visit England or the United States prior to his mid-thirties, he had grown up "in that particular climate of Germany in the 1920s where everything Anglo-Saxon was fashionable" (24). He read Upton Sinclair, G. K. Chesterton, Rudyard Kipling, and Shakespeare (especially). He met Elisabeth Hauptmann in 1924, and she became "a key member of what was known as the 'Brecht collective' ... during the eight remaining years of the Weimar Republic. Both the English and the American orientations of his work benefited" (25). Inspired by Kipling, *Mann ist Mann* took on a fresh setting in the British army in India (25). Some of Hauptmann's translations of Kipling from this time ended up in *Dreigroschenoper*, although they were dropped before the first performance.

By the time he met Weill, Brecht's plays were almost entirely American in orientation, and much of his poetry reflected that as well. Around the same time he was working on *Fleischhacker*, the play *Aufricht* rejected, Brecht worked with Weill for the first time on the American-set *Mahagonny-Songspiel* (later to become *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*), Mahagonny being an imaginary city in Florida near Miami. In general, a flurry of American projects were devised and worked on, some shelved and reworked, some produced and some unproduced. The *coup de grâce* was *Die Heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe* (*St. Joan of the*

Stockyards), a major amalgamation of his Anglo-American influences up to that point. The plot derived from *Happy End* (a play about Chicago gangs), and included a New York millionaire, the industrial background from Sinclair's *The Jungle*, and a title derived from Shaw's *St. Joan*—all developed in a Shakespearean form, from which he developed the epic theatre he became famous for (Willett 26). Willett notes, “It was the ‘American’ plays...that most notably developed the Shakespearean or ‘epic’ strain in his work, though they also connected less directly with *The Threepenny Opera*” (25–26). Frequently when audiences study *Dreigroschenoper*, they have a notion that it exemplifies Brecht's epic theatre, his *Verfremdungseffekt* (estrangement), and his use of *Gestus* (a belabored “gesture” of a “gist”). Brecht himself has contributed to this misunderstanding.

Brecht, Weill, and Hauptmann continued to work strongly within an Anglo-American context for years to come. From 1935 until his death in 1950, Weill worked in America, collaborating with Americans (like Maxwell Anderson) in English. Brecht continued to study English and American literature, reading increasingly in the native language of that literature.¹⁰⁸ For Brecht, “the whole of...[that] literature from *Hamlet* to Hammett was one unbroken, if too often bloodstained web” (Willett 42). In turn, his writing was not only made more accessible to Anglo-American audiences, but his own critical eye was turned steadfastly and unwaveringly on the transatlantic Anglophone culture, judging it all “from a consistent, non-discriminatory... largely practical, independent point of view” (43). Although he went back to Germany, even in his last years he was still making use of English and American models (41). Like Conan Doyle, “America stood for him—for better or worse—as the land of the future,” a land of possibilities (42).

¹⁰⁸ By the early 1940s, Brecht was even mixing his German and English, forgetting words equally in both: “Brecht was able to think in a kind of half-English, which in turn was not without its effect on his German” (Willett 36).

So in what ways has *Dreigroschenoper* intervened in Gay's *Beggar's Opera*, and how did the development of his dramatic theories through his Anglo-American period influence any intervention? And if the Brechtian critical move continues and accumulates through collaboration and successive performance, how did subsequent performances of *Dreigroschenoper* operate in relation to their audiences, *The Beggar's Opera*, and prior performances of *Dreigroschenoper*? How have particularly American performances of *Dreigroschenoper* engaged (intentionally or otherwise) their audiences and their prior cultural production?

Twentieth Century

The issue, again, is authenticity and *eigentlichkeit*. Brecht's entire purpose in his developing epic theatre tradition, which he derives from the Anglo-American tradition, is to produce theatre that stages the epic struggles of the day in defamiliarizing ways and defamiliarized settings. The Anglo-American (mostly American) settings of his works indicate attempts to follow authentically this same approach. Hauptmann/Brecht's America in the *Mahagonny* opera is a caricatured indulgence of a European's idea of America in order to play up the unreality of the entire opera and *point out that unreality*. Brecht writes in "Anmerkungen zur Oper *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*" ("Notes to the Opera *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*"), "Whatever [in opera] is intended to produce hypnosis, is likely to induce sordid intoxication, or creates fog, has got to be given up" (38). Hauptmann, Brecht, and Weill really do have a similar project to Gay: reveal the inauthenticity of society through its unrecognized reflections, its *lumpenproletariat* and its entertainment. In adapting Brecht's work, American producers were often trying to offer Marxist critiques of capitalist society to the major capitalist society. Yet ideological influence on their productions has been strong, and reveals the

necessity of persistent adaptation to engender its inherent anarchism. Since most of these productions occurred in the same medium, ideological influence remained relatively strong.

Ideology simplifies and schematizes modes of thinking to favor legitimation of the State. The distancing that Hauptmann and Brecht create by setting *Mahagonny*, *Happy End*, and other works in America can work much better for a European audience who can share in the acknowledged mythological notions of America, much as Shakespeare employed Rome and historic Britain. The danger of setting such works in the United States comes from the potential for the director, set designer, producer, dramaturg, and so on to create a realistic, engaging atmosphere for the play. For Brecht, the set should emphatically *not* be realistic. At the same time, Romantic and exotic locales can have the exact opposite effect from such an epic, defamiliarizing move. If the audience believes the exotic, Romanticized setting, then you have an ironic and dangerous situation in which the audience may be spellbound and captivated in an ideological way. For Brecht, any dramatic production hoping to change exploitative conditions must be avowedly political, “for art to be ‘unpolitical’ means only to ally itself with the ‘ruling’ group” (“Short Organum” 196). There was always an implicit danger in American translations and productions, then, but a similar possibility.

The 1931 film version of *Die Dreigroschenoper* is its first and (arguably) last American performance—an important point to which I will return at the end of this chapter. At any rate, Kim Kowalke notes, “*Die Dreigroschenoper* first crossed the Atlantic during May 1931 in G. W. Pabst’s film version.... [But the] film found few enthusiasts among an audience hungry for escapist musical fare in the new medium. Needless to say, its box office showing did nothing to encourage a stage production” (79–80). In any case, when the first American stage production appeared in 1933, it closed after ten days, plagued by savage reviews complaining of its sluggish

humorlessness. In the mid-1940s, an instructor at the University of Minnesota, Eric Bentley, wrote a new lyrical translation and used the 1937 Desmond Vesey translation of Brecht's writing to stage a short-run, November 1946 production with the Illini Theatre Guild in Champaign; its success was limited, particularly since the production was so small, with the music performed only on an electric organ (97). When Duke Ellington's *Beggar's Holiday* opened on Broadway in December 1946, the idea of a better major New York production faded (99).

In both the 1933 and 1946 production, by all reports, translations were kept as close to Hauptmann and Brecht's German as possible. In bringing the work to the United States, the idea was to try to recapture what Hauptmann, Brecht, Weill, etc. had done in Berlin in an attempt to be authentic, without realizing that doing so would go exactly against the point of their production. As I indicated earlier, I am distinguishing between "authentic"—correspondence with a self-professed identity—and *eigentlich*—correspondence with another's ideal. If a *Threepenny* narrativization does not realize Brecht's dramatic theories, it is *uneigentlich* to them. If it does not realize its own apparent purposes, it is inauthentic to them. The idea of "faithfully adapting" an authentic production of *The Threepenny Opera* understandably comes (mostly) from the functional aspect of the textual event: the producers want to make money. If a work is a huge success in one place (as *The Beggar's Opera* was in England), the implicit idea is that an "adapted" work that channels the first's "essence" can be a success elsewhere, either in another place or another medium or another genre. A similar rhetorical facet to the textual act encourages this fidelity view. If one respects the original rhetorical intention, homage to that intention is its retention. In the case of *The Beggar's Opera*, Hauptmann, Brecht, and Weill wanted popular success and respected Gay's intentions, but still shifted freely their renarrativization for *their* purposes in *their* culture, remaining authentic to Gay's rhetorical purpose.

Because of *The Threepenny Opera*'s success, a capitalist motive for authenticity developed, haunting productions even after they ended. No extant translation (by Gifford Cochran and Jerrold Krinsky) of the 1933 production has been located, but Weill suggested to Brecht in 1942 that "one of the principal reasons for the failure... was that they had made a literal translation..." (qtd. in Kowalke 81). From then on, authenticity was *the* white whale to hunt—inscrutable, damning, magnetic. Some productions' attempts at authenticity apparently doomed them to failure, while other productions provided loose adaptations and were hailed as authentic. And the reverse happened: literal translation or adaptation was successful and daring productions closed early.

For instance, the 1946 production translation does exist, and is available publically. While it fared better than the 1933 Broadway production, both were relatively small and had little national impact. Nevertheless, the translation's publication is indicative of a recurring theme in American productions of *Threepenny Opera*. The book, published first in 1949, has been reprinted many times in paperback, and has increased its attempts at authenticity in successive editions. At least by 1960, the book had acquired three vital assets for securing apparent authenticity to Brecht and Weill's original production. First, the cover is stark black with a widely reproduced, black-and-white photo of Lotte Lenya, right arm thrown up, singing the last of the "Pirate Jenny" song. Second, the book boasts a foreword by Lotte Lenya. Third, appended to the back of the book is a translation of Brecht's "Notes to *Threepenny Opera*" by the book's translator, Desmond Vesey. The conjunction of these assets communicate to the average consumer that this edition is somehow authoritative and authentic: Brecht's learned notes on the production are included; Weill's widow, Lenya, was in the first production, the film,

and the first major American production. If it includes Brecht scholarship and Lenya endorses it with her likeness and words, the book *must* be authentic!

But of course it need not be. In fact, the cover photo is from Blitzstein's 1954 production, which did not use Vesey's translation. It is a widely reproduced photograph, and Lenya did not have rights to it anyway. Furthermore, the foreword was not written for the book, but was rather an article ("That Was a Time!") originally published in 1956 in *Theatre Arts*. It no longer carries that title, though, further distancing it from that publication. And Brecht's "Notes" have been widely reprinted. Not only is the Vesey–Bentley translation not particularly authentic the way the Grove Press book suggests, Lenya mentions in a 1954 letter that

Mr. Bentley had hopes that Kurt would give his blessing to the Bentley–Vesey version. Needless to say, that Kurt refused. Their version seemed to Kurt stilted, flavorless, the lyrics unsingable, the score quite distorted. Last winter, several unauthorized performances of this work were given in Chicago, to very bad press. Nevertheless, Mr. Bentley is bitter about the Blitzstein version; attacking it cautiously in print, and viciously in private. (qtd. in Kowalke 111–12)

Who can *really* own and authorize a production anyway? Brecht? Weill? Lenya? Hauptmann? Neher (Caspar or Carola)? Universal Edition (Weill's publisher)? Erich Engel (the original director)? The public? That particular production's actors, set designer, director, arranger, conductor, audience? Which audience? Should various producers of the German version have a say over the work produced in another language and land? Should their children? All of this is not to say one way or another that the Vesey–Bentley version is definitively inauthentic, but to draw attention to the relativity of the question in the first place and the relativity of its answer. The Vesey–Bentley book is widely, legally available, and carries the cultural capital listed above. However inauthentic it is, its *eigentlichkeit* will be decided in the mind of each individual buyer—and unless that person gets into a discussion about it, the decision will remain there.

American productions were attempted for over twenty years after the Berlin premiere, including by Weill and Brecht separately. In fact, at several points, both Brecht and Weill tried to develop all-black cast productions, but to little avail. Paul Robeson was even attached to the project a number of times and in talks with Brecht and Weill separately. Nevertheless, the idea fizzled for various reasons each time.¹⁰⁹ Their attempt to produce such a defamiliarizing production indicates, however, how the previous American productions had been *uneigentlich* in their very attempt at authenticity. Their self-avowed attempts at fidelity to the Berlin premiere reveal their failure of authenticity to the dramatic theories.

As it turned out, a major production did not appear until after Weill's death, and it came from an unexpected source. Marc Blitzstein, whom Weill had met in 1935 and who had written some unflattering reviews of Weill's music previously, had slowly been won over by Weill's expertise and vision, and by January 1950 he had written a translation of the "Pirate Jenny" song. After singing it over the phone to Weill and Lotte Lenya, Weill encouraged Blitzstein to write a full translation of the musical (Kowalke 101).¹¹⁰ A few months later, Weill passed away, but his passing apparently spurred Blitzstein on. With a little over a year, Blitzstein had completed his version, had been "authorized" by Brecht, and was working toward its premiere in New York (Gordon 357). By all accounts at the time, Blitzstein was working toward a "definitive," "authorized"—that is to say, authentic—translation and adaptation. Whatever that might mean.

In January of 1952, *Variety* announced that several Broadway producers were interested in staging Blitzstein's new version of *The Threepenny Opera* for the fall season, and that the New York City Opera Company would likely produce it at the City Center (Kowalke 103). One month later, however, the City Center announced that the production had been postponed, and it

¹⁰⁹ See Kowalke's "'The Threepenny Opera' in America" for more thorough discussion.

¹¹⁰ Such stories, passed along as I am doing here, further inculcate the sense that Weill and Lenya's word on translation *matter* significantly for new translations and new productions.

did not mention Blitzstein's work again. In the intervening month, a number of critics had expressed dismay at the idea of the New York City Opera Company—"a more or less publicly supported institution" (List qtd. in Kowalke 103)—presenting a work (to paraphrase) of such obvious and demoralizing Communist sympathies. Kurt List, the most vocal of the critics, concluded in his piece in *The New Leader*, "A Musical Brief for Gangsterism," that he had

no intention of advocating that this piece be banned from the City Center stage. But I think if those of us who are opposed to its basic premises are willing to have it displayed publicly, with public funds...then the gentlemen responsible for the production should announce it as what it essentially is—a piece of anti-capitalist propaganda which exalts anarchical gangsterism and prostitution over democratic law and order. (qtd. in Kowalke 104)

What role this outcry played in the delay of the Blitzstein version is uncertain. In any case, *Variety*'s announcement and the City Center's subsequent announcement coincided with the very height of McCarthyism.

Blitzstein's translation and adaptation of *The Threepenny Opera* became one of the most astounding success stories in theater history, inspiring a movement called "Off-Broadway" that continues today. The show opened in 1954 at the Theatre de Lys, a big gamble on the part of its entire crew and cast. As Eric Gordon reports, "everyone was convinced that the FBI would close down the show and everyone would be blacklisted" (377). The producers (Capalbo and Chase) had sunk an immense amount of money into their production at time when "Off-Broadway shows could sometimes be done for one thousand dollars. Capalbo and Chase spent close to ten thousand dollars" (Gordon 374). Nevertheless,

Based largely on spectacular notices in the two most prominent newspapers in town, *The Threepenny Opera* was a hit from the first minute. The morning the reviews appeared, a line formed at the box office and reappeared every day, an absolutely unprecedented response to an Off-Broadway production. In six weeks, Capalbo and Chase paid off their expenses—equally unheard of for Off-Broadway. (Gordon 379)

After a brief hiatus—during which time the Theater de Lys’s owner attempted to host his own works before being bought by Louis Schweitzer for his wife for their anniversary—the show ultimately ran for six years for a total of 2,611 performances, an astounding feat at the time. In that time, “it became a veritable factory of Off-Broadway talent” (Gordon 395). As Kowalke points out, “*Threepenny-fever* in New York nearly equaled the *Dreigroschenoper*-craze that had swept Berlin in 1928–29.... The impact of ‘Mack the Knife’ was such that WCBS-Radio in New York suspended airings of the song during a spate of teenage gang knifings that had been linked to its popularity” (113). The old wheel turns.

Brecht and Weill, with Hauptmann conveniently and unfortunately forgotten, were new stars in America, giving “something forbidden and magnetically attractive” in a time of “crushing social conservatism of the interminable Eisenhower years” (Gordon 398). American theatre was likewise transformed, the number of productions growing on college campuses, regional theatre, and Off-Broadway “where theatre artists of every kind tried flapping their anti-Establishment wings. The face of theatre, the way people looked at theatre, the expectations audiences brought to the theatre, all changed” (Gordon 398).

But getting caught up in this *Threepenny-fever* creates its own retroactive focus. With the eclipsing success of the 1954 “authorized” production, Blitzstein’s 1952 Brandeis University concert version of his translation, adaptation, and arrangement (as well as his previous attempt to premiere the work with the New York City Opera Company) have been relegated to an historical curiosity. But I want to draw attention to the 1952 concert performance for its unique spot in American adaptations of *Die Dreigroschenoper* and because attention to these kind of minor productions generates new criticisms of renarrativizations, proliferating the inherent anarchism of adaptation. Revisiting already widely popular *konkretizations*—with no modifications—will

tend toward simplifying and schematizing thought processes, engendering ideology rather than anarchism.

The Brandeis performance occurred in the aftermath of the ambiguous *Variety* reports concerning City Center's performance schedule in the fall of 1952. The deal clearly fell through, and instead Blitzstein's new version of *The Threepenny Opera* premiered at the inaugural Festival of the Creative Arts hosted at the nearly four-year-old, nonsectarian, Jewish-sponsored university. The university was preparing for its first commencement and had just created a new school for the creative arts, and appointed the 34-year-old conductor Leonard Bernstein to the faculty (1952). The festival lasted the four days leading up to commencement and featured the world premiere of Bernstein's *Trouble in Tahiti*, as well as a jazz symposium and performance by Miles Davis, and a number of performances and presentations by other world-renowned artists.

For the performance, which Bernstein conducted, Blitzstein developed and read a concert narration. This fact has led many to suppose the concert a simple dress-rehearsal staging for a major production, but Blitzstein's narration has an important precedent. Stephen Hinton has located a concert narration of uncertain date quite similar to Blitzstein's, written by Bertolt Brecht. Hinton sees indications that it may have been written over a number of years, from the premiere to at least after 1945 ("Editorial" 6–7). The reason for his narration is unknown, but its existence points to an important precedent for the work that Blitzstein was very likely aware of. The narration further shows that at some point Brecht considered setting *Dreigroschenoper* in 1730s London, rather than the Victorian era.

Blitzstein's own narration reveals a similar oddity. While the 1954 production, and every subsequent major production in America, has set the work in nineteenth-century London, as

Brecht did, the concert narration is set in 1870s New York. This is a very important discursive shift for it indicates that Blitzstein wanted to update the work in an instructive way for his audiences. Blitzstein's narration is meticulous in its setting, too, and throughout the songs and narration, the material is made relevant to a Tammany-Hall-Tweed New York. Moreover, Blitzstein clearly wanted his audience to keep in mind an historic but relevant setting at once distanced from themselves for a *Verfrumdungseffekt*, but not so distanced that they may take it for indulging in fantasy. In the opening prologue following the overture, Blitzstein tells the audience,

Five Points was the name of an intersection in lower New York City. It was the confluence of five of the most notorious streets in town, the hangout of thieves, racketeers, sailors, bums, panhandlers, and pitchmen, a cop or two, and the ladies of pleasure. There were two hundred and seventy dancehalls, houses of prostitution, and bootleg-saloons posing as vegetable stores in the immediate vicinity, not counting Old Brewery, a five-storey tenement that boasted a murder a night for fifteen years. Dickens wrote about the neighborhood, "Debauchery has made the very houses old." Here, one spring evening in eighteen-hundred and seventy, you could hear a street singer recounting the exploits of one Macheath, head of the Five-Points Gang, and our hero. Macheath was known to all who feared him as "Mac the Knife." Here then is the police record of Mac the Knife. ("Narration")

In a way that Brecht did not do with *Dreigroschenoper*, but which echoes Gay's work, Blitzstein aligns his characters with real figures germane to the audience's history. By narrating the events, Blitzstein remains authentic to Brecht's notion of *Gestus*, which always indicates to the audience that a gesture is being made, a mood being set, without entrancing the audience within that gesture or mood. Yet his narration also takes a pointedly political stance in an effort to challenge the audience's ideology. Blitzstein goes to great pains to ensure his message as he mentions particular locales (the "Liebeslied" that mentions a "Mond über Soho" is translated to "Moon over Dock Street," and the whores frequent the historically accurate Greene Street), as well as

particular stores (Mackie's gang steal from Ehrick's Temple of Fashion, Stewart's Department Store, Arnold Constable & co., and so on).

Perhaps the most incisive political commentary Blitzstein makes is in his translation of the "Kanonen-Song." While some later criticized Blitzstein's adaptation as softening Brecht's initial vision, as the above setting indicates, and as his "Army Song" indicates, Blitzstein had a thoroughly critical vision for his adaptation. Brecht's German lyrics for the song are pretty clear in their condemnation of the army, but in many performances of the song the lyrics are dampened in favor of a rousing song demonstrating the camaraderie between Mackie and Tiger Brown. Menahem Golan's 1989 film *Mack the Knife*, for instance, has a rousing barroom dance number with Raul Julia (Macheath) and Bill Nighy (Brown) singing,

We'll meet a darker race,
We'll fight them face to face,
'Cause if it's clear we're better,
We kill them, it doesn't matter,
We'll chop them up and make from them our beefsteak tartare.

This version, translated by Golan, certainly contains much of Brecht's point, but it is subverted by the realistic barroom in which the men dance extensively, while a gleeful Polly smiles and claps along. At the line "We'll meet a darker race," Nighy's Brown grabs a black man at the table and sends him off in a boorish joke (he runs up a wall and does a flip, in an obvious special effect). Such a visual transforms an otherwise political line into a moment of off-color humor from which the audience only learns that Brown and Mackie, old army pals, are ill-mannered. Furthermore, Polly's clear delight in the joking song, and the realistic barroom with special effects and choreographed dancing, contribute to the kind of dramatic theatre that is lulling and apolitical.

Blitzstein's now much-maligned translation and adaptation renders the above lyrics this way:

If we get feeling down,
 We liberate a town,
 And if the liberation,
 Should meet insubordination,
 We'll chop 'em to bits, because we like our hamburger RAW! (Blitzstein)

These lines do not correspond very well to a literal translation of Brecht's German,¹¹¹ but they speak more directly to an American audience, most evidently in the changing of the awkward "beefsteak tartar" to "hamburger raw." Also, instead of the ironically blasé attitude of randomly killing other races—undoubtedly a leftover Kipling overtone—Blitzstein implicates the American ideology of military liberation, tied to the capitalist restlessness for new commodities and markets only a world superpower can feel. In 1952, the United States had given the Philippines back to its people only six years prior (cruelly and ironically on July 4), and the memory of their "liberation," "insubordination," and slaughter was fresh.¹¹² Blitzstein's lyrics are no abstract political statement, but a direct reference and challenge to the audience. With such biting lyrics and such a rousing tune set within the context of 1870s America—just prior to the beginning of America's worst imperialist activity—Blitzstein's concert narration and setting produce a Brechtian *Verfrumdungseffekt*. The *V-effekt*, as Peter Brooker notes, would communicate a "dialectical, non-illusionist...manner, declaring its own artifice as it hoped to also reveal the workings of ideology" (215). Whereas the "bourgeois theatre emphasized the timelessness of its objects" (Brecht, "Alienation" 96), the *V-effekt* of Brecht's drama provides "a special technique...to underline the historical aspect of a specific social condition" (98). My

¹¹¹ Brecht's German is "Wenn es mal regnete, / und es begegnete / ihnen 'ne neue Rasse, / 'ne braune oder blasé, / dann machen sie vielleicht daraus ihr Beefsteak Tartar," which roughly (and unlyrically) translates to "When it was raining, and we met some new race, brown or black of face, we chopped them into bits of beefsteak tartar."

¹¹² See my brief discussion of the American conflict with the Philippines in Chapter 4, pp. 211–12.

particular defense of Blitzstein's *eigentlichkeit* and authenticity stems from subsequent generations of critics and artists who have supposed his adaptation to be soft, light, and uncritical, whereas his concert narration particularly illustrates the Brechtian direction he was taking the work in.¹¹³

But again, adaptations, renarrativizations, and specific *konkretizations* of works do not need to follow the political project of the narrative they follow—they do not need to be authentic to be *eigentlich*. And in this case, as I indicated, I am reviewing a minor renarrativization of *Die Dreigroschenoper* to develop its inherent anarchist critique. The more renarrativizations, the greater chance they will deviate from prior narratives, and thus the greater chance for lasting resistance to dangerous ideological simplification. And in the case of *Dreigroschenoper*, the Brechtian approach to drama reflects strongly my own view of how renarrativization operates, and those productions that try to cling to the authenticity of its premiere performance ironically counter its very dramatic project, rendering themselves *uneigentlich*. This is quite useful to my method. In striving for and claiming authenticity, these renarrativizations draw strong, anarchist attention to what that might mean for how the production believes audiences *should* receive the work in its *konkretization*. Drawing attention to that belief indicates how ideology is operating.

Golan's film, for instance, cobbles together a number of sources to create a kind of definitive, authentic version. In doing so, Golan vividly indicates the narrative locations and lacuna in which authenticity is sought. First, the casting of Raul Julia recalls his celebrity-launching 1976 role in the celebrated Manheim/Willett translation, produced by Joseph Papp for the New York Shakespeare Festival. The role of Mackie, more so than any other, must then be

¹¹³ For instance, Kim Kowalke describes the 1976 NYSF production as “more faithful to the tone and diction of Brecht's play (the 1931 literary version) than Blitzstein had been, and unencumbered by the theatrical conventions and language-restrictions of the fifties...” (115). Even Joseph Papp promoted the production as “the REAL *Threepenny Opera*” (qtd. in Kowalke 115).

somehow definitively authentic, and Julia's performance has been the recent standard. Indeed, the very changing of the title from *Threepenny Opera* to *Mack the Knife* indicates this importance, relying as it does on the commercial success of performances of Blitzstein's "Mack the Knife" translation. Further, the casting of newcomer Rachel Robertson for Polly works in a similar, yet opposite way. The significance of Polly is highlighted by trying to find a beautiful new talent for the role. Additionally, Golan's film borrows certain of Blitzstein's translation and includes it with his and his musical director's, Dov Seltzer. Clearly, an attempt is made to bridge a classic translation while making it new and more engaging. Following that, Tivadar Bertalan's production design engages the audience in a more realistic London setting than most productions use. In a similar vein, during the opening "Moritat," Golan focuses the camera on Macheath's murder of several people, forcing the viewer to know that Macheath kills people and letting them revel in watching it graphically. This works to try to spellbind the audience, according to the Stanislavskian attitude. Instead of the ambiguity of the "Moritat"—which leaves the audience wondering if the song merely creates an image of Mackie or if the image is real but they will never know it (as the lyric reminds the listener again and again)—the viewer is encouraged to enjoy how stealthily the character kills while enjoying the ever-popular tune. This choice, while apparently "authentic" and "definitive" through its graphic, dramatic portrayal, conflicts strongly with Brecht's vision of the play, and brings into strong relief the very question of the authentic performance of Mackie, and if a "definitive" performance of Mackie would primarily constitute a "definitive" version of *Threepenny Opera*.

Twenty-first Century

Given the competing translations of the twentieth century, spanning five major translations and adaptations, and not counting many others, the driving discursive force in

twenty-first-century productions of *Die Dreigroschenoper* remains authenticity, while authenticity itself remains implicitly contested. In America, the first decade has already seen two new, distinct productions of *The Threepenny Opera*, while older translations have continued to be produced. Michael Feingold's 1989 translation, whose production starred Sting on Broadway in the role of Macheath, was staged off Broadway in 2012, following only a few months after a Brooklyn Academy of Music performance of a world-touring Berliner Ensemble production that used Brecht and Hauptmann's original script, directed by the American Robert Wilson. In 2006, a new translation by Wallace Shawn premiered on Broadway, starring Alan Cumming and Cyndi Lauper as Macheath and Jenny. Each of these productions varied greatly from the other, and each implicitly claimed a certain level of authenticity.

Of course, Wilson's 2011 production seems to lay the greatest claim to authenticity to Brecht's defamiliarizing goals, given its reliance on the Hauptmann–Brecht script and its use of the Berliner Ensemble that Brecht founded. Indeed, the production's use of subtitles enhances even further Brecht's vision for epic theatre. Yet the production was not uncontroversial, for although it was widely praised for its "highly stylized interpretation" (Csencsitz), of which its co-director Ann-Christin Rommen claimed "many critics asserted that this is *Threepenny* as Brecht would have it" (qtd. in Csencsitz), still others claimed it was created from "conventional expectations of its end result—or, even more unhelpfully, from conventional recollections of the later works it influenced—to produce an inert, dim replica of something that looks like something that resembles something that somebody else did long ago" (Feingold). Feingold claims that Wilson turned Brecht's "middle-class wake-up call into dead entertainment for rich people." Of course, this apparently obvious failure to follow Brechtian theories works as the very anarchist critique adaptation evokes. If the critic knows previous adaptations, as Feingold does,

the salient ways the production differs from other narrativization draws forth points of ideological influence.

But I should note that Feingold also wrote his own competing translation of *Threepenny Opera*, which was produced in February of 2012. Feingold's translation was written in the 1980s, and followed the successful Broadway translation by Manheim and Willett, which remains the version used for the Penguin publication of the book and lyrics. How does another translator defend against apparently definitive productions like Wilson's or Manheim and Willett's? As Kim Kowalke quotes him having said about previous translations, "We have no right to suppose that Blitzstein was out to clean up Brecht, anymore than we have to insist that Manheim and Willett, having the exact words, have had the final one" (117). One presumes that with his own translation, Feingold was trying to "infuse new life into an old, familiar work...by going backward, searching inside the work for the initial impulses that created it," as he suggested Wilson should have done.

As Feingold's last comment suggests, if an authentic renarrativization is determined by what "initial impulses" the new creator has decided the source narrative had, no one adaptation could hope to lay final claim to complete authenticity. For one thing, "initial impulses" are open to wide interpretation. For instance, Wallace Shawn's 2006 Broadway production reveled in shocking the audience with its outrageousness at an apparent attempt to recapture the presumable shock Weimar audiences had in seeing the experimental *Die Dreigroschenoper*. Michael Musto suggests the production attempts to reflect reality, "but in a deeply artificial way that adds excess poundage to the proceedings." His major criticism is that the production "tries on anything for size: bisexuality, coke, subtitles, modern dress, sing-alongs, house lights going on in the middle of a song, a gay marriage joke, New Yawk accents, belching, and everything but getting stuck in

a 14-year-old.” Cumming’s Macheath is viscious and laughable. He is repulsive, but the audience is supposed to laugh at the “irony” when he ridicules his men’s poor manners. Thus, instead of a critique of capitalism, the production’s attempts at subversion and shock come across instead as thoughtless, sensual experience of the offensive. The audience is enraptured by the thrill of seeing live, pansexual grinding on stage, punctuated by a number of taboo subjects articulated through profane language.

But even if one could question the first creators on their initial impulses, they may suggest that an authentic, *eigentlich* narrativization of what they had hoped to create would instead follow their later reinterpretations of their own initial impulses. Brecht, as I have already noted, transformed *Die Dreigroschenoper* numerous times after its initial production, continually shifting what he himself considered an *eigentlich* production. Weill, on the other hand, never wanted to change his orchestration, and became incensed whenever a production went ahead without his particular directions for orchestration.

So what are the possibilities for real, lasting resistance to ideological coercion? In the second and third chapters, I indicated how the State reproduces itself ideologically through individuals and crushes resistance. In the fourth chapter, I demonstrated how bold decisions by social groups to remove themselves entirely from the State left them silenced in their historical representation. In this chapter, I have explored how the *lumpenproletariat* (the criminal class) remain in the liminal dominion of the State, and apparently live contrary to its ideology, but actually reproduce that ideology anyway.

But I have also shown how adaptation addresses these hopeless situations. In the *Billy Budd* adaptations, persistent renarrativizations drew more and more attention to the severely political and ideological forces that prompted Melville’s novel and articulated increasingly

stronger critiques of the selfish, coercive actions of the State against its own citizens. In the adaptations of the Molly Maguire events through the Sherlock Holmes narrativizations, the very silence of self-representation can elicit representations of sympathy and understanding counter to capitalist and government narrative co-option. But will adaptations really always move toward anarchist critique? Even now when I can identify a work that explicitly criticizes ideology, its adaptation and performance can still result in capitalist, ideological simplifications.

A crucial facet of anarchist criticism is direct action. There is nothing deterministic about anarchism—power will replicate itself and legitimate itself unless actively combated. This is not necessarily a call for violence, although it has been quickly interpreted as such far too frequently. Rather, it is a call to daily struggle against power in its many manifestations, particularly in its most pervasive manifestation: culture. Anarchist criticism is a call to cultural combat.

Through this particular method, I suggest the anarchist critic actively educate the public at large about adaptations and find ways to multiply adaptations as a means of multiplying ideological critique. Returning to the text at hand, one of the most interesting twenty-first-century American renarrativizations of *Die Dreigroschenoper*, then, is what amounts to its ever-most-recent narrativization: G. W. Pabst's film version in DVD or on a digital file. Unlike the American stage performances of *Threepenny Opera*, Pabst's film can be re-*koncretized* with each viewing, and thus remain more present than many other visual narrativizations. Unlike its original screening in Germany and France, Pabst's film now constitutes an American narrativization of *The Threepenny Opera* due to its conspicuous DVD release through the American Criterion Collection, based in New York City. Criterion's DVD packaging substantially affects how an audience will interact with Pabst's film since it provides a number of features that color the audience's reception, including two version of the film (German and

French), a number of critical featurettes on the film's production and influence, critical commentary by film scholars, subtitles (including one set that are unavoidable), and tools for navigating the DVD at will. As a twenty-first-century, American product, Pabst's Criterion-released film emerges as a uniquely, simultaneously authentic and inauthentic narrativization of Brecht's production that nonetheless provides an increasingly *eigentlich* Marxist-and-Brechtian critique of capitalist society, which no other narrativization could adequately match.

How can it be both inauthentic and authentic? Again, I mean authenticity in terms of how the film approaches Hauptmann, Brecht, and Weill's apparent rhetorical purposes in creating *Die Dreigroschenoper*. Before discussing how the film matches those purposes, I want to first say that the film already has a number of claims to *attempts* at authenticity. After seeing a production of *Dreigroschenoper*, Pabst told a producer at the recently-formed Nero-Film AG, Seymour Nebenzahl, that the work would make an excellent film version. Nebenzahl, the Nero founder's son, agreed, and obtained the rights from Brecht and Weill, whose conditions were that they collaborate on the screenplay and music. Nebenzahl was especially pleased with this condition because he had wanted to bring the hit production to his audience, as Jan-Christopher Horak points out in Criterion's DVD featurette "Brecht vs. Pabst." They didn't want to rework it in any way.

As I already mentioned, Brecht's plans for his *Dreigroschenoper* were changing. Eric Bentley, who worked with Brecht and translated *The Threepenny Opera* in the 1940s, recalls in "Brecht vs. Pabst" that at the time Brecht "was getting to be more and more a Communist, so to speak. He was a big student of Marxism, and he wanted to change *Beggar's Opera* even more than he already had in the direction of making it a flat-out critique of capitalism. That was why there was going to be war." As Horak reports in the same featurette, Brecht "completely revised

the play in his film treatment, removing numerous characters, turning the character of Mackie Messer (Mack the Knife) from a criminal and a degenerate into more of a middle-class character because he wanted to make this equation between gangsters or criminals and capitalists; that was his goal.” Thus, while Pabst and Nero-Film AG attempted to remain as authentic to Brecht’s stage play as possible, Brecht himself envisioned a different authenticity, one closer to an *eigentlich* Marxist vision. Pabst and Nebenzahl were furious at Brecht’s contract breach, and as G. W. Pabst’s son (Michael) relates, “Brecht was unwilling to make any concessions and broke off discussions” (“Brecht vs. Pabst”). They fired Brecht, who subsequently sued Nero Films and lost.¹¹⁴ Pabst and Nebenzahl hired Béla Balázs to rework it and incorporate more of the original stage play, though still using elements from Brecht’s film treatment (Horak in “Brecht vs. Pabst”).

Nero-Film AG’s attempt at authenticity and Brecht’s own notion of *eigentlichkeit* to his own vision collided in Pabst’s film version, which became a collaboration on the order of the stage *Dreigroschenoper*. G. W. Pabst’s son, Michael, recalls that his father said that a number of decisions were made spontaneously during filming. For instance, they kept a copy of the Hauptmann–Brecht script and added lines from it sporadically and improvisationally, the cast drawing inspiration from Lotte Lenya and Carola Neher’s presence (“Brecht vs. Pabst”). The film flirts on the border of authenticity and inauthenticity. As Kim Kowalke suggests, “Half the music isn’t there, plot is changed, the emphasis is quite different from what it was. And you won’t get a sense of why this became the most popular play in the German language” (Brecht vs. Pabst”). Yet in following Brecht’s film treatment and mingling it with much of the original

¹¹⁴ Brecht wrote up his thoughts on the lawsuit in “The Threepenny Lawsuit,” and claimed that he had all along intended to lose the suit as a way of pointing out the bourgeois aspects of the film industry. Weill, incidentally, also sued Nero Films over the way they changed the music and won his lawsuit.

script, the film managed to bridge authenticity to the premiere production and Brecht's later move toward an *eigentlichkeit* of Marxist critique.

Brecht's earlier work, of which his *Dreigroschenoper* is one (howsoever transitional it is), is part of an overall "revolting against everything," as Jan-Christopher Horak calls it ("Brecht vs. Pabst"). Thus, the stage play, as Horak goes on to claim, is

too cynical and scattered...to really function as a Marxist work. And...in some ways, Pabst...ultimately presented a more unified Marxist vision in his film than in the original play. There is that equation between capital and...criminality and the exploitation of the proletariat—or even the exploitation of the lower middle classes—by big capital is criminal. And that clearly comes out in the film the way it certainly does not in the original stage play.

And actually, the film presents a critique more anarchist than Marxist. As Eric Bentley recalls, many Marxist critics argued that Brecht confused the proletariat and the *lumpenproletariat*. He had. But Pabst still uses the *lumpenproletariat* to critique capitalist society by revealing the ubiquity of capitalist *uneigentlichkeit*, suggesting that the only way to challenge the ubiquity of the system is from its most rejected classes. Further, as Bentley argues, Pabst uses "film's power to handle a crowd, which you couldn't easily do on stage, and...[takes] the beggar's seriously as a possible revolt, still...bringing a social message.... The new element introduced of the beggars in the film, not present in the stage version, is quite effective" ("Brecht vs. Pabst").

The most evident, macrodiscursive way the film differs from the play and enhances its leftist critique is in the concluding scenes of the film. Pabst, through Brecht's film treatment, actually depicts Peachum ordering his beggars to march on the coronation—a threat which is only uttered and not realized in the stage version. However, during Macheath's time in jail, Polly has legitimated his gang, turning it into a profitable bank. Peachum discovers this too late, having already motivated his beggars to rise up against the crown and loosed them on the streets.

His powerful rhetoric, as *uneigentlich* as it is, remains authentically leftist—so much so it becomes anarchist. He tells them, “For I’ve shown that the rich of this world have no qualms about causing misery but can’t bear the sight of it! They have hard hearts, but weak nerves. Well, we won’t spare their nerves today! By the thousands we’ll tear at their nerves, for our rags do not conceal our wounds!” Of course, once he realizes his own family is in power, he tries to stop them, but in vain. They march on relentlessly, unstoppable, encouraged by the very *eigentlichkeit* of their protest. They march over everything, silently, and come face to face with the newly crowned queen. Brown is disgraced and runs off into hiding.

Polly, meanwhile, has raised enough money to pay for Macheath’s £10,000 bail. Jenny, of course, has already helped him escape, so when Brown discovers Macheath out and complains of the ruinous coronation, they make him a bank director and give him the £10,000 as investment capital. Pabst’s thoroughly anarchist vision includes a depiction of the way even a legitimate revolt is subverted by the apparently rotating, but continually present bourgeois powers. The chief of police may be ousted, but he simply becomes a bank director.

Yet however Marxist it may have become, Brecht still maintained that the film ruined the epic-theatre quality of his idea of *Die Dreigroschenoper*, and he was not incorrect. Pabst’s film does rely on narrative film motifs, and in its contemporary context would have been a much more spellbinding film, using a relatively realistic set and incorporating Weill’s music into the background, rather than foregrounding its unnatural incorporation into the production. Under Pabst’s direction, the filmic medium remained largely inauthentic to Brecht’s notion of epic theatre and *V-effekt*.

Yet as a twenty-first-century DVD release, the film takes on a spatiotemporal defamiliarization from its 1931 release that reintroduces Brechtian dramatic practices and

establishes a suggestive critical approach for the present-day anarchist. For one thing, the acting style of early 1930s German cinema, drawing as it does on the gestural silent era, is at great odds with an audience used to judging acting based on achievements in Method acting during the sound era.¹¹⁵ Thus, while the set is realistic, the acting is more akin to Greek theatre—stylized, unrealistic, with little dialogue in near-montages of staged moments, the camera often pivoting around motionless actors, emphasizing their artifice. At one point in the *Cuttlefish Hotel*, the audience sees Mackie and Polly behind glass, staring at one another, barely moving. He is talking to her, but the audience cannot know what he says, forcing a critical interpretation of the moment as the shot remains fixed on them staring at each other in a posed, artificial moment.

Further, while the stage *Dreigroschenoper* employed placards and signs with lyrics and summaries to break the spell of performance, encouraging the audience to critique the drama in front of them instead of being drugged by it, the film took very few opportunities to establish such *V-effekting*. The American DVD release of the film, however, uses subtitles, which constantly reminds the viewer of the experience of watching a film. Further, the film's release through the Criterion Collection, a company known for its release of intellectual and foreign films (and intellectual foreign films) with numerous features included for the purposes of critical examination similarly ensures that the audience will intentionally approach the film to understand in what way it means to critique society. When attempts at understanding the critique fail, the viewer can turn to features such as scholarly audio commentary or a documentary on the adaptation from stage to screen. For a further defamiliarization of the work, the viewer can also view Pabst's shot-for-shot French version of the film, shot at the same time as the German version, but with slightly different casts and a host of smaller discursive shifts in performance,

¹¹⁵ Stanislavski's Method acting is the polar opposite of Brecht's theory for epic acting, which relies on the *Gestus*.

lighting, and staging that produce a startlingly different work, reflecting the predictions of complexity theory.

As I have been demonstrating, specific *koncretizations* of a narrative—particularly in the performance arts, but even in film as it transforms across different media—may often be considered different enough narrativizations to lay claim to being an adaptation, providing the audience recognizes it as such. In order to propagate adaptations, anarchist critics must inform audiences that they are looking at adaptations. The specific conditions and preconditions of stage performance, the historical reception of a film, the increasing shifts in media that occur with film and performance, and myriad other factors can often so drastically alter the specific reception of a narrative as to create new and unexpected effects. After this, comparison can begin, perhaps with guided education even through DVD commentary, eventually eliciting recognition of ideological influence. If audiences can be convinced of the drastic changes that occur in certain *koncretizations* of performance-art and film narratives, a new field of possibilities in adaptation and adaptation studies will present itself, and the arsenal of ideology-critique will be greatly enhanced by offering up as social criticism some of the most popular and widely accessible narratives in the present day.

I want to conclude by pointing out an oddity. While capitalism remains the biggest threat to positive interpretations of foundational American principles, it also provides the impetus for a proliferation of adaptations, and thus of anarchist criticisms of State ideology. Although narratives of all kind can provide a critique of ideology, the ones that will have the greatest possibility for effective cultural change will be those narratives not in high or low art, but in the “middle” art, as Carl Freedman calls it: that “particularly large and interesting realm of modern culture that has seldom been discussed or even recognized as such” (*Incomplete Projects* 39).

And as Freedman then points out, film might be the privileged form of “middle” art, although television is very rapidly catching up to it, if it has not already surpassed it with such narratives as *The Sopranos*, *The Wire*, *Louie*, and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Capitalism will necessarily cater products of these “middle” narratives, multiplying their number of possible re-*koncretizations*. Given the right conditions and right informative perspective, the noise can be attuned to criticism. Of course, in any complex system, the disturbance you least expect might be the driving force to criticality.

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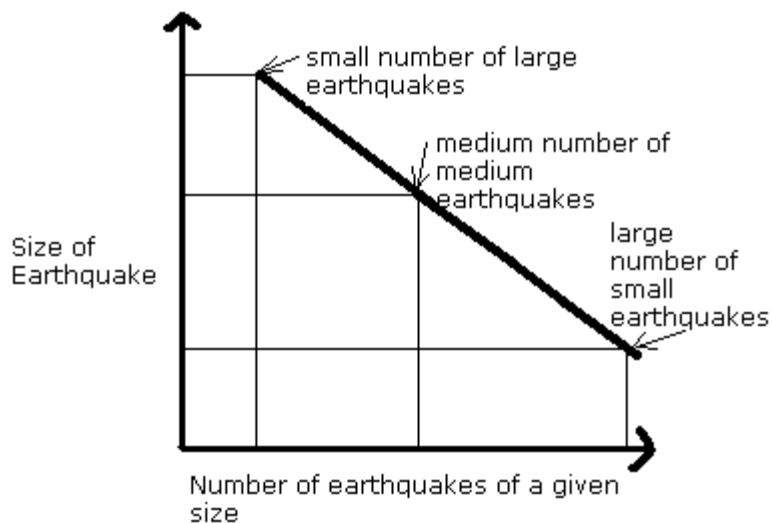
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APPENDIX A
POWER-LAW DISTRIBUTION AND $1/F$ -PINK-FLICKER NOISE

Imagine that your city has lost its electricity, but the telephone network is intact. You are asked to create a telephone tree such that everyone can be kept up to date on the situation as efficiently as possible. What would the telephone tree look like? First you would need to decide how many people each person would contact. If each person only contacts two other people the number of layers needed before everyone is contacted becomes too large to be efficient. If each person is asked to contact 25 other people there will be much less layers, but everyone will complain about how long it is taking to contact their people. The ideal is probably about 10 other people to phone. The number of layers is manageable and the requirements of each individual are not too onerous. So, the first person phones 10 people and each of them phone 10 people and so on until everyone in the city has been contacted. It would not make sense to have people in the second layer contact 2 people each, 17 in the third layer, 46 in the fourth layer and so on. This would cause bottlenecks that would slow the message reaching people. The most efficient system would be for each layer to have the most efficient number of people to contact. That means the proportions between layers is constant. In this case each layer has 10 times the number of people as the layer before. You can see that this structure is therefore self-similar. This relationship is called a power law relationship and as we have seen in the fractal examples of trees, lungs and coast lines, is often found in nature because it is effective.

In any area where earthquakes are felt, there will be a very large number of small earthquakes, most of which actually go unnoticed. Next, there is a smaller number of medium sized earthquakes and very few very large earthquakes. This relationship between the different



sizes of earthquakes is not just a rough tendency, but also conforms to a power law distribution.

If we make a graph of the pattern of earthquake sizes with the number of earthquakes of a given size on the horizontal axis and the size of earthquakes on the vertical axis, we find the graph forms a nearly straight line. A point on the line near the top left hand part of the line describes a small number of large earthquakes, while at the bottom right end of the line describes a large number of very small earthquakes. Of course, all the intermediate values of earthquake sizes also fit on the graph to make the straight line.

The graphs are usually drawn as a log-log graph, where the logarithm of the numbers are used rather than the numbers themselves, because of the huge range of numbers used. It just makes the graphs much easier to see, without actually changing the mathematical patterns themselves....

The interesting thing is that this mathematical relationship is found in many other seemingly unrelated parts of our world. For example, internet use has been found to fit power law distributions. There is a small number of websites that attract an extremely large number of

hits (e.g. Microsoft, Google, eBay). Next there is a medium number of websites with a medium level of hits and finally, literally many millions of sites, like my own, that only attract a few hits....

If we put a sand pile on a tray and drop more sand slowly to the top, bit by bit and measure the amount of sand that slides off the edges each time there is a 'sand slide', we find the same power law graph is created (Bak, 1996). There is a small number of slides where large quantities of sand are tipped over the edge of the tray, a medium sized number of slides with medium amounts of sand being tipped over and a large number of slides with a small amount of sand falls. As with the graph of the earthquakes, if we measured any other point between the top and the bottom of the line, the amounts would fit on their place on the straight line. Interestingly, the sand on the sand pile tends to rearrange it self [sic] so that every time there is a sand slide, the angle of the slope readjusts itself back to the same slope.... There are also power law distributions which occur over time, such as in a dripping tap or even our heartbeat. Careful measurement shows our heartbeats are not regular as we might assume, but the slight variations from a strictly regular beat follow power law distributions, but those formed over time are called 1/f noise.

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APPENDIX B

Lament of the Irish Emigrant

I'm sittin' on the stile, Mary,
Where we sat side by side
On a bright May mornin' long ago,
When first you were my bride;
The corn was springin' fresh and green,
And the lark sang loud and high--
And the red was on your lip, Mary,
And the love-light in your eye.

The place is little changed, Mary,
The day is bright as then,
The lark's loud song is in my ear,
And the corn is green again;
But I miss the soft clasp of your hand,
And your breath warm on my cheek,
And I still keep list'ning for the words
You never more will speak.

'Tis but a step down yonder lane,
And the little church stands near,
The church where we were wed, Mary,
I see the spire from here.
But the graveyard lies between, Mary,
And my step might break your rest--
For I've laid you, darling! down to sleep,
With your baby on your breast.

I'm very lonely now, Mary,
For the poor make no new friends,
But, O, they love the better still,
The few our Father sends!
And you were all I had, Mary,
My blessin' and my pride:
There 's nothin' left to care for now,
Since my poor Mary died.

Yours was the good, brave heart, Mary,
That still kept hoping on,
When the trust in God had left my soul,
And my arm's young strength was gone:

There was comfort ever on your lip,
 And the kind look on your brow--
 I bless you, Mary, for that same,
 Though you cannot hear me now.

I thank you for the patient smile
 When your heart was fit to break,
 When the hunger pain was gnawin' there,
 And you hid it, for my sake!
 I bless you for the pleasant word,
 When your heart was sad and sore--
 O, I'm thankful you are gone, Mary,
 Where grief can't reach you more!

I'm biddin' you a long farewell,
 My Mary--kind and true!
 But I'll not forget you, darling!
 In the land I'm goin' to;
 They say there 's bread and work for all,
 And the sun shines always there--
 But I'll not forget old Ireland,
 Were it fifty times as fair!

And often in those grand old woods
 I'll sit, and shut my eyes,
 And my heart will travel back again
 To the place where Mary lies;
 And I'll think I see the little stile
 Where we sat side by side:
 And the springin' corn, and the bright May morn,
 When first you were my bride.

---Helen Selina, Lady Dufferin

The Minstrel Boy

The minstrel boy to the war is gone,
 In the ranks of death ye will find him;
 His father's sword he hath girded on,
 And his wild harp slung behind him;
 "Land of Song!" said the warrior bard,
 "Tho' all the world betray thee,
 One sword, at least, thy rights shall guard,

One faithful harp shall praise thee!"

The Minstrel fell! But the foeman's chain
Could not bring his proud soul under;
The harp he lov'd ne'er spoke again,
For he tore its chords asunder;
And said "No chains shall sully thee,
Thou soul of love and bravery!
Thy songs were made for the pure and free
They shall never sound in slavery!"

---Thomas Moore

VITA

Kristopher Mecholsky was born in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and grew up in State College, Pennsylvania, and Gainesville, Florida. He considers the last his hometown. After earning an International Baccalaureate degree, he studied physics and English at the Catholic University of America and graduated with a dual Bachelor of Arts degree in 2004. He graduated from Marymount University in 2008 with a Master of Arts in Literature and Language. In 2012, he earned a Doctor of Philosophy degree at Louisiana State University in English literature.