

LEVIATHAN

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Nervous Wrecks and Ginger-nuts: *Bartleby at a Standstill*¹

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Where, however, from disease, or the food being inappropriate, the stomach is injured by what is eaten, consciousness then becomes painful for the express purpose of warning us that mischief has been done, and we must take means for its removal. In some kinds of dyspepsia, indeed, the sensibility becomes exalted to an extraordinary degree.

— William Beaumont²

Recall the moment in *Moby-Dick* when Stubb proclaims, after Queequeg has been pulled from the shark-infested waters,

Ginger? ginger? and will you have the goodness to tell me, Mr. Dough-Boy, where lies the virtue of ginger? . . . Is ginger the sort of fuel you use . . . to kindle a fire in this shivering cannibal? . . . The steward, Mr. Starbuck, had the face to offer that calomel and jalap to Queequeg, there, this instant off the whale. Is the steward an apothecary, sir? . . . We'll teach you to drug a harpooneer; none of your apothecary's medicine here.³

Now recall the moment in "Bartleby, the Scrivener" when the lawyer meditates on Bartleby's peculiar eating habits:

He lives, then, on ginger-nuts, thought I; never eats a dinner, properly speaking. . . . My mind ran on in reveries concerning the probable effects upon the human constitution of living entirely on ginger-nuts. . . . Now, what was ginger?⁴

Despite the nearly seven hundred essays on Melville's famous story, this striking parallel has remained untreated. Such an omission would seem more

¹ The author wishes to thank David Blake, Sheila King, David Leverenz, Maureen McEvoy, John Murchek, Robert Ray, Stephanie Smith, and Emily Thornton Savarese for their help with this essay.

² As qtd. in Andrew Combe, *The Physiology of Digestion*, 7th ed. (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1847), p. 26. Hereafter cited as Combe.

³ Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, ed. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and The Newberry Library, 1988), 322. Hereafter cited as NN MD.

⁴ Herman Melville, "Bartleby, the Scrivener," *The Piazza Tales and Other Prose Pieces*, ed. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and The Newberry Library, 1987), 23. Hereafter cited as NN *Piazza Tales*.

understandable if Melville hadn't engaged the topic of patent medicine in other works from the 1850s. In *The Confidence Man*, for example, Melville devotes several chapters to the dealings of an herb doctor who prescribes "Omni-Balsamic Reinvigorator" and "Samaritan Pain Dissuader" to passengers on a steamboat ironically named *Fidèle*.⁵ There, Stubb's skepticism in the face of such medicine finds expression in the voice of a Missouri bachelor who derides one of the herb doctor's patients: "Yarbs, yarbs; natur, natur; you foolish old file you! He diddled you with that hocus-pocus, did he? Yarbs and natur will cure your incurable cough, you think" (NN CM 106). Directly connecting the phenomenon of herbal medicine to the novel's central conceit of the confidence game, Melville even has the Missourian remark, "I have confidence in distrust; more particularly as applied to you and your herbs" (108). Finally, in "Cock-A-Doodle-Do!" a story with references to steamboat and railroad disasters, a less skeptical but much more desperate narrator speaks of money as "a drug in the market," lamenting, "But blame me if I can get any of the drug, though there never was a sick man more in need of that particular sort of medicine" (NN *Piazza Tales* 270). Checking his pockets, the narrator then declares, "Ha! here's a powder I was going to send the sick baby in yonder hovel, where the Irish ditcher lives."

Clearly, Melville is playing games with patent medicines in his fiction from the 1850s. This essay seeks to answer the lawyer's question in "Bartleby, the Scrivener" — "Now, what was ginger?" — as a way of trying to elucidate the scrivener's mysterious rebellion, and it assumes from the outset that the lawyer cannot possibly answer his own question. Instead, it leans on the witty "distrust" of these other works in order to flesh out the story's implicit critique, to see where indeed *lies* the virtue of ginger.

I focus on three interconnected issues: 1) the underexamined relation between "Bartleby, the Scrivener" and "Cock-A-Doodle-Do!" the only other piece that Melville published in 1853; 2) the similarly underexamined motif, in both stories, of nervous indigestion (or dyspepsia), a symptom not only of accident trauma but of a long list of sociomedical afflictions attributed to the stress of industrialization; and 3) the scrivener's renunciation of ginger-nuts — indeed of all food — and its connection to the rise of patent medicine and the Jacksonian claim of medical democratization. Suffice it to say for now that as early as 1866, John Eric Erichsen officially cites nervous indigestion, a loss of appetite, and a concomitant melancholy (along with a refusal to work) as symptoms of a strange condition afflicting railroad accident survivors.⁶ And

⁵ Herman Melville, *The Confidence Man*, ed. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and The Newberry Library, 1984), 74, 84. Hereafter cited as NN CM.

⁶ For a discussion of the work of John Eric Erichsen and that of other early theorists of accident neuroses, see Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 134-149. Hereafter cited as Schivelbusch.

suffice it to say as well that throughout the nineteenth century ginger is widely advertised as a cheap, self-administered cure for indigestion and the lassitude that usually accompanied it. Ginger is the "great invigorator," as one ad put it, the "stimulant without reaction."⁷

My argument in a (ginger) nutshell is this: if the narrator of "Cock-A-Doodle-Do!" portrays the burgeoning industrial order as a threat to the health of the republic, first in the figure of accident shock and then in the figure of his own affliction with dyspepsia, then Bartleby is the hyperbolic playing out of these figures, this egalitarian sickliness. And if the narrator of "Cock-A-Doodle-Do!" clings to the possible efficacy of patent medicines, then Bartleby renounces them as yet another example of spurious progress: marvels encased in a similar discourse of heralded democratization but just as disappointing and injurious, finally, as the new locomotives and steamboats.

In presenting Bartleby as the ultimate disillusioned egalitarian, I enlist the services of Walter Benjamin, whose notion of "dialectics at a standstill" — a term for both the illusory movement of capitalist history and its squandered utopian possibilities and the distinctly non-narrative practice of imagistic montage that formally allegorizes this calamity — nicely illuminates the story's central tensions.⁸ Indeed, given all of the references to the scrivener's stubborn "long-continued motionlessness" (NN *Piazza Tales* 29), "dead wall reverie" (29), and adamant disinclination to explain himself, Bartleby seems uncannily to perform Benjamin's idea of a traumatic standstill, and he seems to do so at the very center of what Marx called "value in motion": namely, Wall Street.⁹ Reading "Bartleby, the Scrivener" in conjunction with "Cock-A-Doodle-Do!" I argue that Bartleby is the recipient of a particularly nasty case of egalitarian shock or, as Melville puts it in the latter story, a "knocking on the head" (268).

It is Benjamin, after all, who in "Theses on the Philosophy of History" invites us to imagine capitalist history as a perpetual locomotive disaster and, analogously, montage as the compulsive, often inscrutable, reproduction of the egalitarian calamity in the head of a traumatized "passenger."¹⁰ (Bartleby is one

⁷ Warsaw Collection of Early Advertising, Archives of the National Museum of American History. The collection contains numerous advertisements of this sort for ginger.

⁸ Brook Thomas, in his book *Cross Examination of Law and Literature*, also connects Melville and Benjamin, but only generally in the "Closing Statement." Thomas's book, however, specifically links Melville to the phenomenon of locomotive disasters through the figure of Melville's father-in-law, Lemuel Shaw, who helped to define the legal concept of negligence. Nan Goodman even goes so far as to refer to Shaw, who was Chief Justice of the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts, as the "principal architect of American railroad law" (3). See Brook Thomas, *Cross Examination of Law and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) and Nan Goodman, *Shifting the Blame* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

⁹ Karl Marx, as qtd. in David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 107. See Ralph James Savarese, "Piecing Together What History Has Broken to Bits: Air Florida Flight 90 and the PATCO Disaster," *American Disasters*, ed. Steven Biel (New York: New York University Press, 2001) for a discussion of Walter Benjamin's notion of history as a kind of traumatic standstill.

¹⁰ In "Piecing Together" (see above) I offer a speculative reading of montage, or "dialectics at a standstill," as the catastrophic reproduction of a figurative transportation disaster.

such historical "passenger.") For Benjamin, the hold of ambiguous images in montage is meant to replicate for the reader, accustomed to the movement of unambiguous narrative, history's own arresting, though unacknowledged, possession by egalitarian failure. This version of materialist critique, like *Bartleby* himself, would "say nothing, only show."¹¹ It would "renounce nothing" ("N Theoretics" 8), all the while pointing to some sort of figurative renunciation.

And yet, obviously the form of the story is not imagistic montage. Obviously, there's no "blasting" operation (to use Benjamin's word for the freeing of mutinous images from any homogenizing narrative) on the part of Melville or the lawyer.¹² Instead, what we have is the narrative translation, the narrative *recuperation*, of *Bartleby's* highly perplexing behavior. "History *breaks down* into images not into stories [my italics]," Benjamin writes in "N [Theoretics of Knowledge, Theory of Progress]" (25), evoking the enigmatic standstill of trauma and repudiating, at least indirectly, the corresponding form of recovery. Again and again, Benjamin worries that conventional demystifying critique, with its aim of mastery, inadvertently signals a departure from traumatic injury — in Freudian terms, it doesn't strictly remember it, instead using narrative as a mode of defensive neutralization or tool of repression.

Whereas *Bartleby* refuses to translate his injury into terms that would be more legible, the narrator is all too willing to do so. In fact, the narrator, one might say, *has* to do so. *Bartleby's* "distressing" "motionlessness" leaves him "in such a state of nervous resentment" (NN *Piazza Tales* 36) that he seeks to have to recover from that state. Like some sort of over-anxious therapist, he has to get things moving again and, hence, his reconstructed "Story of Wall Street." This tension between image and narrative (or stasis and movement) manifests itself in the lawyer's account of *Bartleby's* ginger consumption, and it explains in part, I think, his utter failure to penetrate the mystery of the scrivener. "My mind . . . ran on in reveries," the lawyer announces, unwittingly contrasting himself with *Bartleby* who remains resolutely at a dead-wall standstill in his. The story thus offers a subtle reprimand to anyone who might hope to master through movement the meaning of the scrivener's odd refusals.

In a sense, the small minority of critics who have championed the story's enigmatic nature — nearly without fail these critics oppose "theory" and its progressive political aims — is correct in wanting *Bartleby* to triumph over

¹¹ Walter Benjamin, "N [Theoretics of Knowledge; Theory of Progress]," *The Philosophical Forum* 15.1-2 (Fall-Winter 1983-1984), 5. Hereafter cited as "N Theoretics." This characterization of Benjamin's critical intent, like the one that follows it, is of course, hyperbolic, but it does reflect Benjamin's insistence on the evocative possibilities of critique.

¹² The conceit of a critical "blasting" operation appears throughout Benjamin's work, becoming increasingly darker and even apocalyptic. See, for example, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1986), 263. Hereafter cited as "Theses."

efforts to "affix him in a formulated phrase."¹³ But rather than arguing for the spectacular meaninglessness of "*Bartleby*," we can argue for a less indeterminate rebellion. We can follow Benjamin's own solution to the problem of mystification or demystification. As "Theses on the Philosophy of History" makes clear, Benjamin envisions, finally, a dialectic between image and narrative, trauma and recovery, ambiguity and understanding.¹⁴ For his is a project of *critical* remembrance: too much ambiguity and the image floats free of its object of critique; too much understanding and the author and reader have already moved on. Accordingly, I seek, with the material on ginger and dyspepsia, and even the appeal to Benjamin, to provide some contours for *Bartleby's* ambiguity, compensating for the lawyer's blind spots and yet recognizing full well that my own sentences and paragraphs race inexorably toward presumptuous mastery.

Villains, Asses, and Vital Things

At the very beginning of "Cock-A-Doodle-Do!" the narrator complains,

In all parts of the world many high-spirited revolts from rascally despotisms had of late been knocked on the head; many dreadful casualties, by locomotive had likewise knocked hundreds of high-spirited travelers on the head (I lost a dear friend in one of them); my own private affairs were also full of despotisms, casualties, and knockings on the head, when early one morning in Spring, being too full of hypoes to sleep, I sallied out to walk on my hill-side pasture (NN *Piazza Tales* 268).

¹³ Thomas Inge, ed., "Introduction," *Bartleby, the Inscrutable: A Collection of Commentary on Herman Melville's Tale 'Bartleby, the Scrivener'* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1979), 11. These critics seem gleeful about the scrivener's triumph, at times betraying an aversion to criticism itself. For example, in *The Silence of Bartleby*, Dan McCall writes, "Critics claim to have found the 'key' to unlock the story. But their metaphor is fundamentally flawed. There is no key" (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989, 28). Later, he says, "Somewhere there has to be a meaning to *Bartleby*. But there isn't" (77). By systematically surveying and then dismissing an entire history of methodological approaches to "*Bartleby*" (Marxism, psychoanalysis, source study, etc.) and by choosing to reprint the story at the end of his own book and claiming unequivocally in the preface that the "story is what we should always be reaching for and coming back to" (x), McCall makes clear his aversion to the claims of "theory" and criticism in general. Similarly, William Aarnes remarks, "For I have learned not to expect this story to have meaning" ("Qualms: 'Bartleby' and the Death of Scholarly Interpretation," *Furman Studies* 32 [1986]: 10). And Inge maintains, "It is one of those few stories in English, or any other language, which will continue to defy any definitive or generally satisfactory explication, and this may finally be its theme, of course — that the inscrutable does not yield one iota to the rational categories of existence" (*Bartleby, the Inscrutable* 9). Finally, Alan Silver argues, "More than with most literature, a notion of what 'Bartleby, the Scrivener' 'means' risks diminishing it" ([1981]: 409). By invoking the notion of trauma as precisely something that should not yield, at least entirely, to "rational categories," I attempt to chart a course between the depoliticization of the scrivener's ambiguity and the mastery of it at the hands of theoretical (therapeutic) interpretation. While marveling at Melville's artistry, it presumes the need for some sort of critical intervention, linking *Bartleby* himself with the hyperbolic Benjamin who imagined that disturbing "found" images alone might politically educate the reader. "Do you not see the reason for yourself?" (NN *Piazza Tales* 32), the scrivener stubbornly replies when asked why he has stopped copying.

¹⁴ As Benjamin writes in "Theses on the Philosophy of History," "Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to a man singled out by history at a moment of danger [my italics]" (255). Here, the retention of "image" in the context of conventional demystifying critique doesn't constitute a repudiation of the critic's customary role; rather it helps to shape the process of analytical clarification or, to use another of Benjamin's figures, "development." Quoting Andre' Monglud, Benjamin maintains that the "past has left behind in literary texts images of itself that are comparable to the images which light imprints on a photosensitive plate. Only the future possesses developers active enough to bring these plates out perfectly" ("N Theoretics" 32).

Here, Melville analogically constellates, through the repetition of key phrases — “high-spirited revolts,” “rascally despotisms,” “knockings on the head” — a series of ostensibly unrelated people and phenomena, leading a reader to ask: how is the failure of radical egalitarianism in Europe like an American transportation disaster? Further, how is either of these things at all similar to the “private affairs” of an individual in the country? And, finally, what is the nature of the “knocking on the head” imparted by each and how might it be understood as a reflection of its constellated counterparts?

The adjective “high-spirited” alludes in condensed form to the sense of utopian possibility that enveloped the 1830s, 40s, and 50s with the advent of industrial technology. The very idea of an “industrial revolution” (a phrase originating around 1810) expresses, according to Leo Marx, “the close kinship between the two forces, political and technological, which were to threaten the old order everywhere during the next 150 years.”¹⁵ Marx usefully terms the rhetoric articulating this political faith in technology “the technological sublime” (195), and examples of it abound. In 1847, at a ceremony marking the opening of a stretch of railroad in Lebanon, New Hampshire, Daniel Webster, for instance, celebrated the locomotive as “calculated. . . to equalize the condition of men” (210).

The most impressive of the new machines (and certainly the most drenched in “the technological sublime”) were the locomotive and steamboat, whose “mastery of movement by reason,” as Armand Mattelart puts it, quickly became a symbol for another, more significant kind of mastery: historical mastery.¹⁶ The locomotive was “the embodiment of the age, an instrument of power, speed, noise, fire, iron, smoke — at once a testament to the will of man rising over natural obstacles, and, yet, confined by its iron rails to a predetermined path, it suggests,” Marx writes, “a new sort of fate. . . . Mankind is now able, for the first time, to realize the dream of abundance” (Mattelart 191).

Thus, it should not be too difficult to see how an egalitarian defeat might find itself figured as a locomotive or steamboat disaster. More difficult would be to see how an actual transportation disaster might find itself figured as an egalitarian defeat — until, that is, one considers the details of a good number of mid-nineteenth century accidents. Accident reports from the period are filled with charges of gross indifference to passenger safety on the part of careless operators, who at best were poorly supervised, at worst actively encouraged to go as fast and carry as many passengers as possible, and, probably more to the point (as Karl Marx himself argues in *Capital*), often utterly exhausted from

¹⁵ Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 187. Hereafter cited as *Machine*.

¹⁶ Armand Mattelart, *The Invention of Communication* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), xiv. Hereafter cited as Mattelart.

being “exposed to the elements, and [forced to function] without rest.”¹⁷ These details came as a tremendous shock to transportation enthusiasts who had not at all foreseen the possibility of technological failure (and the grisly injuries that accompanied it), let alone the “mean spirit of gain” and / or negligence that would end up costing so many their lives.¹⁸ Melville’s narrator has lost a “dear friend” in exactly such a “careless” accident.

And so, at one point, the narrator of “Cock-A-Doodle-Do!” bemoans “the thousand villains and asses who have the management of railroads and steamboats, and innumerable other vital things in the world” (NN *Piazza Tales* 269-70). He even suggests, in what is truly an indictment of industrial democracy, that if he were “Dictator in North America,” he would “hang, draw, and quarter; fry, roast, and boil . . . the rascally numskulls of stokers” (270, my italics). The narrator seems to fall prey to the mystification that insists, in Karl Marx’s words, that “the negligence of the railway workers is the cause of the misfortune” (*Capital* 363) and not simply an effect of capitalist labor practices. And yet, the narrator almost parodies this view, so excessive is the rhetoric he uses to indict the “thick-headed engineer” (NN *Piazza Tales* 269) responsible for the death of his friend. Calling the locomotive a “death monopolizer” (270), he in fact identifies a smaller group of “villains and asses” who might be more appropriately tortured.

In a second fantasy of revenge, he presents the wealthy passengers of a “shelled” locomotive as having “disembarked into the grim hulk of Charon, who ferried them over, all baggageless, to some clinkered irony-foundry country or other” (NN *Piazza Tales* 269), where presumably they would be forced to toil eternally for less than subsistence wages. Only in the shock of collision and death do these passengers see what they otherwise refuse to see: the productive underside of their consumptive heaven. The narrator clearly distinguishes himself from those who believe, as Benjamin said of the Saint Simonians, that “all social antagonisms dissolve in the fairy tale that progress is the prospect of the very near future”¹⁹ or from those who insist that “to better communications is. . . to allow all members of the human family to enjoy the possibility of traveling across and exploiting the globe . . . [and] to extend the franchise to the largest number as much and as fully as possible by elections” (Mattelart 106). If the forces of industrial capitalism have stemmed the tide of democracy in Europe, in America they threaten, with the institution of

¹⁷ Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume I (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 364. Hereafter cited as *Capital*.

¹⁸ S.A. Howland, *Steamboat Disasters and Railroad Accidents in the United States* (Worcester: Door and Howland, 1840), 197. Hereafter cited as Howland.

¹⁹ As qtd. in Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing* (Boston: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1993), 91. Hereafter cited as Buck-Morss.

wage labor and the habit of uneven development, the very principles of the Constitution.

This sense of imperilment shapes the narrator's "private affairs." For one thing, he is in desperate financial straits, pursued by a creditor who, he says, "seems to run on a railroad track too" (NN *Piazza Tales* 270) and who "frightens the life out of [him]." Such comments undergird the figure of a personal egalitarian disaster, in which the dream of historical progress runs the narrator over exactly as its parody passes him by. The narrator directly speaks of the poor and propertyless, whom the railroad "tantaliz[es] . . . with the sight of all the beauty, rank, fashion, health, trunks, silver and gold, dry-goods and groceries . . . flying by . . . as if that part of the world were only made to fly over, and not to settle upon" (281-82). He implies that he, too, was once a "high-spirited traveler." He, too, has suffered a devastating blow at the hands — or, rather, wheels — of the market and a major structural transformation. "I can't pay this horrid man," he complains, "and yet they say money was never so plentiful — a drug in the market . . . It's a lie; money ain't plenty — feel my pocket" (270).

Despite the claims of ubiquitous economic opportunity, money, according to the narrator, is a drug that the straitened cannot get: the only drug that will relieve them (him) of their debilitating "illness." Immediately after establishing these metaphoric equivalencies and pointing to his empty pocket as evidence of his own poor "health," the narrator addresses the problem of actual health and its entirely literal relation to poverty. He also, significantly, alludes to the primary means by which the poor — and, by implication, he — attempt to treat their many illnesses: namely, patent medicines.

Ha! here's a powder I was going to send to the sick baby in yonder hovel, where the Irish ditcher lives. The baby has the scarlet fever. They say the measles are rife in the country too, and the varioloid, and the chicken-pox, and it's bad for teething children. And after all, I suppose many of the poor little ones, after going through all this trouble, snap off short; and so they had the measles, mumps, croup, scarlet-fever, chicken-pox, cholera-morbus, summer-complaint, and all else, in vain! Ah! there's that twinge of the rheumatics in my right shoulder. I got it one night on the North River, when, in a crowded boat, I gave up my berth to a sick lady, and stayed on deck till morning in drizzling weather. There's the thanks one gets for charity! Twinge! Shoot away, ye rheumatics! Ye couldn't lay on worse if I were some villain who had murdered the lady instead of befriending her. Dyspepsia, too — I am troubled with that" (NN *Piazza Tales* 270-271).

The passage is classic Melville: social injustice meets cosmic injustice in a cry of despair that no pill or powder, with its hyperbolic claim of being a "cure all," could possibly assuage. Without actually saying so, the narrator acknowledges the inadequacy of these patent medicines; by his own metaphoric logic, only the medicine of money will bring health to the poor who must otherwise doctor themselves.

Friedrich Engels makes this point in his 1844 *The Condition of the Working Class in England* while much more aggressively exposing the sham of patent medicines. The passage is worth quoting at length, as it helps to set up what I will eventually argue are *Bartleby's* own "troubles" with dyspepsia and quiet repudiation of these medicines:

Another reason for the poor state of health of the working classes is to be found in the impossibility of securing skilled medical attention in the event of illness. . . . English doctors charge high fees which the workers are unable to pay. The workers either do without medical advice, or they are forced to patronize charlatans and make use of quack remedies which, in the long run, do more harm than good . . . Morrison's Pills, Parr's Life Pills, Dr. Mainwaring's Pills and thousands of other pills . . . They are taken to relieve an astonishing variety of different complaints — constipation as well as diarrhea, fever as well as lassitude. Just as peasants in Germany go to be bled or cupped at certain seasons of the year, so the English workers now gulp down their patent medicines, injuring themselves while filling the pockets of their proprietors.²⁰

Rather than "equaliz[ing] the condition of men," rather than doing away with war and disease (typical claims of the "technological sublime"), the new vehicles only bring greater division and ill health — ill health that then points to the condition of democracy itself. To drive home his point, the narrator describes the train as "com[ing] straight-bent through these vernal woods, like the Asiatic cholera" (NN *Piazza Tales* 270).

Whenever the Spirit of Competition Runs High

Both "Cock-A-Doodle-Do!" and "Bartleby, the Scrivener" contain innumerable references to ill health. I am interested in one particular affliction that both mention — dyspepsia — and its relationship to the "age of steam." Dyspepsia, it turns out, is intimately connected, as a socio-medical problem, with the entire history of industrial development in the nineteenth century: from the work conducted in the 1830s and 40s by Peter Gaskell and Andrew

²⁰ Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Classes in England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968), 117.

Combe on the plight of mill workers and "brain-worn" merchants and entrepreneurs, to the work conducted in the 1860s and 70s by John Eric Erichsen's and others on accident neuroses, to the work conducted in the 1880s and 90s by George M. Beard on neurasthenia, that peculiarly upper-class affliction. "By the turn of the century," George Drinka writes, "the symptom pictures outlined by science, and the progressive symbols of society, such as railroads, seemed to be responsible for the breakdown of the human nervous system."²¹ Gillian Brown actually maintains that the scrivener foreshadows Beard's neurasthenia sufferer or "market-stricken man."²² But in fact, this breakdown and its anxious observance begin as early as the late 1830s. The narrator of "Cock-A-Doodle-Do!" in effect participates in the cultural dialogue on this developing trajectory and foresees, among other things, its most aggravated manifestation: accident shock. Melville's contribution is essentially figurative, making of dyspepsia an egalitarian sickness.

The reference to dyspepsia in the narrator's long litany of medical complaints seems incidental until he remarks a bit later in the story, "Well, I have an appetite for my breakfast this morning, if I have not had it for a week before. I meant to have only tea and toast; but I'll have coffee and eggs — no, brown-stout and a beef-steak. I want something hearty" (NN *Piazza Tales* 272). Aware of the claims of patent medicine, the narrator also evinces an awareness of the remedies commonly prescribed in popular digestion tracts of the day — though feeling temporarily better, he forgoes their austere prescriptions. These tracts generally advise a plainer diet, avoidance of alcohol, "ample exercise in the open air" (Combe 129), and a "more tranquil mode of life" (107). In his 1847 *On Indigestion and Costiveness*, the Englishman Edward Jukes (inventor of the stomach pump) contends that "the cure of indigestion, and the diseases consequent upon it, may be effected by a judicious system of dieting, and by the substitution of simple lavements for nauseous drugs."²³ The Englishman, Andrew Combe, in his immensely popular 1847 edition of *The Physiology of Digestion*, cites overeating, a sedentary occupation, indulgence in alcohol, too much reliance on meat in the diet, a failure to observe "mental and bodily repose after every meal" (Combe 102), and, in general, "over-exertion or anx-

²¹ George Drinka, *The Birth of Neurosis* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), 121.

²² Gillian Brown, "The Empire of Agoraphobia," *Representations* 20 (1987): 137. Hereafter cited as Brown. Where I talk about the scrivener's indigestion and consequent loss of appetite, Brown talks about the scrivener's anorexia. There is no way to do justice to Brown's argument here — in particular, to the subtle discussion of anorexia as a market response — but suffice it to say that she reads *Bartleby* as offering a protest against the "productive immobility" of the ideologically constructed domestic sphere: place of temporary and sustained refuge for the healthy and exhausted businessman respectively and place of permanent imprisonment for the "naturally" hysterical woman. While Brown's argument is compelling, she does not show how the phenomenon of nervous exhaustion is contemporaneous with Melville's story and neglects dyspepsia as a symptom of neurasthenia.

²³ Edward Jukes, *On Indigestion and Costiveness* (London: J. Churchill, 1847), viii.

iety of mind" (103) as the primary causes of indigestion. Significantly, with respect to this last culprit, he notes, "The prodigious influence of the nervous system on digestion is familiarly and unequivocally exhibited in almost every case of dyspepsia which each succeeding day brings under the notice of the physician. He knows well, from experience, that the diet may be selected with every care, its quantity duly proportioned and exercise rigidly practised, and yet all his curative treatment fail even to relieve, unless his patient be at the same time freed from the pressure of care" (102). By "pressures of care" Combe means generally "the hurry and bustle. . . the anxiety and excitement of business," all of which he feels to be dramatically on the rise (67).²⁴

Combe makes this point at least three more times while arguing that "overtaking" the brain in any way is bound to bring on indigestion. "The state of the mind, indeed, exerts a powerful influence, not only on the stomach, but on the whole process of nutrition," he says, "and greatly modifies the quantity which may be safely eaten. If the mind be gay and joyous, appetite will be comparatively keen, digestion effective and rapid, and nutrition complete" (Combe 104). If not, dyspepsia will invariably ensue. "This fact is exemplified," he maintains, "on a large scale in every commercial country, and especially in times of public distress and political change" (103). Quoting from *Caldwell's Thoughts on Physical Education*, Combe juxtaposes the digestion of English farmers and "merchants, manufacturers, and mechanics, who are engaged in a regular and well-established business . . . where the risk is slight and the profits sure" (103) with that of "literary men, officers of state, dealers in scrip, daring adventurers, and anxious and ambitious projectors of improvements . . . and every other brain-worn class of persons" (104). In the former group, "dyspepsia is almost a stranger" (104); in the latter, it is a "torment" (104), exhibiting itself in "lean frames and haggard countenances" (104).

Combe also connects the problem of indigestion with urban living itself, whatever the individual's occupation. He speaks of "the late hours, heated rooms, and numerous excitements of modern society" (Combe 107) as having "greatly assist[ed] in the production and aggravation of the evils consequent on an excess of the nervous temperament" (87). In fact, Combe nearly obsesses, as do many medical writers of the period, about "the impure atmosphere of a crowded city" (88), "the close atmosphere in the city" (97), "the ill-aired recesses of large towns" (97), "the populous districts of the country" (129), the "imperfect ventilation" (107) of the metropolis. Unwilling overtly to criti-

²⁴ Melville's familiarity with this material is evidenced by any number of seemingly incidental remarks. At one point in "Bartleby, the Scrivener," the narrator recommends that Bartleby take "wholesome exercise in the open air" (NN *Piazza Tales* 32). At another point, speculating about the scrivener's peculiar eating habits, he says, "He must be a vegetarian then; but no; he never eats even vegetables, he eats nothing but ginger-nuts" (23).

cize industrial progress, he offers a remedy — a more “tranquil mode of life,” which he associates with country living — that is its own critique of progress. But as the narrator of “Cock-A-Doodle-Do!” makes clear, even the most “tranquil mode of life” was finding itself reshaped by capitalist pressures.

In “Cock-A-Doodle-Do!” the narrator’s discussion of a “hearty” breakfast and an improved digestion comes to an abrupt end precisely when he hears a train in the distance and sardonically observes its jaunty, prosperous passengers:

Ah, here comes the down-train: white cars, flashing through the trees like a vein of silver. How cheerfully the steam-pipe chirps! Gay are the passengers. There waves a handkerchief — going down to the city to eat oysters, and see their friends, and drop in at the circus (NN *Piazza Tales* 272).

The narrator thus subtly identifies the train, his own condensed metonym for the divisiveness and hounding anxiety of industrial capitalism, as the source of his dyspepsia. And because he has already analogically connected his plight with the plight of other “oppressed peoples” (274, Melville’s emphasis), and because he views industrial capitalism as an assault on the values of democracy, the dyspepsia becomes an expression of general egalitarian sickness. Although Combe himself hardly issues an explicit indictment of industrial capitalism in the narrator’s terms, he suggests the incompatibility of proper digestion with heightened capitalist competition. He confirms, that is, the basis for the narrator’s metaphor making. “In the United States of America . . . indigestion prevails to an extent unknown elsewhere,” he contends. “The error . . . seems to be the result of the exciting circumstances amidst which the Americans live, than of any merely constitutional peculiarity; for similar effects, are only too common on our side of the Atlantic, whenever the spirit of competition runs high” (Combe 67). No matter how glorious “the improvements of the age” (NN *Piazza Tales* 270), in Melville’s phrase, such improvements, according to Combe, invariably wreak havoc on the stomach.

Melville seems to be familiar with much of this writing on dyspepsia — especially, as we will see in “Bartleby, the Scrivener,” working-class dyspepsia. Combe himself briefly treats the problem of working-class dyspepsia, though his avowed interest in ameliorating the “frightful state of bondage” (Combe 88) of the “young dressmakers of the metropolis,” for example, comes across as disingenuous at best. Each of his prescriptions for better digestion he justifies in terms of an “increased aptitude for work, and less frequent absence on account of illness” A much more adequate and sympathetic treatment of working class dyspepsia appears in the Englishman Peter Gaskell’s 1836 *Artisans*

and Machinery: *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Manufacturing Population*. (It is Gaskell upon whom Engels relies so heavily for medical insights in his *The Condition of the Working Class in England*.) “The class of manufacturers engaged in mill labour . . .,” Gaskell asserts, “are victims to a train of irregular morbid actions, chiefly indicated by disturbances in the functions of the digestive apparatus, with their consequent effects upon the nervous system; producing melancholy, extreme mental irritability, and great exhaustion.”²⁵ Gaskell takes note of the dyspepsia of the “higher classes” (Gaskell 236), attributing it to “too nourishing and stimulant a diet” (236) and commenting, “It is, indeed, a new feature in the history of medicine, to find the two extremes of the social confederacy labouring under the same maladies, running through a similar course, and producing the same peculiar feeling of morbid irritability, intermitting with the most profound melancholy” (236). And yet, Gaskell, unlike Combe, more honestly confronts the utter hopelessness of the dyspeptic laborer’s plight:

If the situation of the pampered man of wealth, who is the victim to dyspepsia, is pitiable, how shall that of the operative be described? Language wants force to depict its evils: unmitigated, as it is, by all those foreign aids which can be procured by individuals differently circumstanced, he is condemned to labour on, a prey to bodily sufferings, and the most deplorable mental anxiety — alternately drowning his troubles in the delirium of intoxication, or standing, a miserable and woe-worn figure, before his machine or loom (236).

The final line of the passage is reminiscent of the “miserable” Bartleby standing before his wall (or of the inebriated Turkey spilling his pens or of Nippers who, “if he wanted any thing, it was to be rid of a scrivener’s table altogether” (NN *Piazza Tales* 17)). But my point here is that the narrator of “Cock-A-Doodle-Do!” seems familiar with much of this material, in a way that the narrator of “Bartleby, the Scrivener” is not, and that it lurks behind his metonymic loathing of the locomotive. Thus, as if to underscore his preference for a slower, pre-industrial world, the narrator of “Cock-A-Doodle-Do!” proclaims about halfway through the story, “After an unwontedly sound, refreshing sleep I rose early, feeling like a carriage-spring” (NN *Piazza Tales* 275) — in other words, like an old-fashioned shock absorber.

Understanding expedited movement as the agent not only of a sometimes literal annihilation, and imagining in the future still faster and more efficient vehicles of exploitation, the narrator clings to the values of an imperfect

²⁵ Peter Gaskell, *Artisans and Machinery: The Moral and Physical Condition of the Manufacturing Population* (London: John W. Parker, 1836), 238. Hereafter cited as Gaskell.

past. "Who wants to travel so fast?" he asks. "My grandfather did not, and he was no fool" (NN *Piazza Tales* 270). Indeed, the narrator, like Benjamin, seems to imply that the real catastrophe is the *moving* locomotive, a catastrophe that simply finds its apt expression in a crash: "For two hundred and fifty miles that iron fiend goes yelling through the land, crying 'More! more! more!'" And the narrator's figure for such an injury to equality and independence, for the backward historical movement (or standstill) paradoxically accomplished by modernity's unregulated velocity and power is, at least initially, something like trauma: what he calls a "knocking on the head" and what, for a time, doctors in the latter part of the nineteenth century evocatively called "Railway Brain" (Schivelbusch 145).

Railway Brain

There is no better description of the narrator's own agitated, metonymic tendencies with respect to the railroad than this phrase. But I am proposing something slightly more audacious: that the narrator not only anticipates the phenomenon of medical shock but uses it to characterize his particular historical moment in much the same way that Benjamin does his. Presenting the locomotive as both his and the poor's merciless oppressor, the narrator decries — indeed, maps — an unacknowledged disaster, impossible without these new vehicles, whose effects cover the globe. And, importantly, he situates himself within a nexus of larger economic forces, showing that they absolutely do encroach upon the countryside of western Massachusetts. Of course, it is exactly this sort of explicit analogical mapping that "Bartleby, the Scrivener" lacks. As a result, the story asks us to deduce the implicit analogical mapping. "Cock-A-Doodle-Do!" provides not only a model for doing so but helps in diagnosing the scrivener's "incurable disorder" (NN *Piazza Tales* 29).

If the narrator of "Cock-A-Doodle-Do!" finally thinks "over my debts and other troubles, and over the unlucky risings of the poor oppressed peoples abroad, and over the railroad and steamboat accidents, and over even the loss of my dear friend, with a calm, good-natured rapture of defiance, which astound[s] myself" (NN *Piazza Tales* 274), thereby holding dyspepsia temporarily at bay, then Bartleby "thinks over" equivalent "troubles" in a much darker and more injurious manner. He bears a striking resemblance, in fact, to Benjamin's historical materialist, that injured egalitarian "passenger." In a note to "Theses on the Philosophy of History" that directly counters Marx's own euphoric sense of revolutions as the inevitable "locomotives of world history," Benjamin proclaims, "Perhaps it is totally different. Perhaps revolutions are the reaching of humanity traveling in this train for the emergency brake" (as qtd.

in Buck-Morss 92). In the face of the Nazi juggernaut and in the absence of any heroic braking action, Benjamin portrays the hundred years of industrialization leading up to 1940 as the "one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage" ("Theses" 257) at the feet of the Angel of History. What Bartleby sees in his "dead wall reverie" — indeed, what he performs — is precisely the catastrophic standstill or "knocking on the head" of capitalist progress. Put another way, Bartleby suggests the condensation of the traumatized triumvirate in "Cock-A-Doodle-Do!": the defeated revolutionaries, transportation enthusiasts, and debt-ridden narrator. He is himself an example of Benjamin's "dialectical image," which "appears," Benjamin explains, "when thinking reaches a standstill in a constellation saturated with tensions" ("N Theoretics" 24).

Interestingly enough, this Benjaminian "passenger" exhibits many of the symptoms of an actual railroad or steamboat accident survivor — symptoms that then take on an almost entirely figurative significance in the context of the story. I do not think it outlandish to propose that Melville was familiar with accident neurosis, however quaint and unscientific his appellation for it in "Cock-A-Doodle-Do!" might be. In *The Railway Journey*, Wolfgang Schivelbusch maintains that the "phenomenon of accident shock, i.e., a traumatization of the victim without discernible injury . . . existed before the English medical profession started devoting its systematic attention to it in the mid-1860s" (Schivelbusch 137). "There are reports," he writes, "of railroad accidents that describe travelers as exhibiting signs of strong psychic disruption, phobias, obsessive actions, etc. without having suffered any apparent injury" (137). In his 1840 *Steamboat Disasters and Railroad Accidents in the United States*, the first collection of its kind in this country, S.A. Howland describes otherwise uninjured survivors of steamboat boiler explosions as "horror-stricken" (Howland 42), people for whom "the power of utterance had ceased" (119). And in his 1849 account of the wreck of the brig *St. John* off Cape Cod, Henry David Thoreau writes of "survivors recovering from the shock which their bodies and minds had sustained."²⁶ In fact, like Howland, he, too, notes an accident's proclivity to render survivors mute. Relating his encounter with "one that was saved," he reports, "I asked him a few questions, which he answered; but he seemed unwilling to talk about it, and soon walked away" (Thoreau 444).

Of course, Bartleby is not, literally speaking, an accident victim,²⁷ but his

²⁶ Henry David Thoreau, "The Shipwreck," *Walden and Other Writings* (New York: Random House, 1965), 444-445. Hereafter cited as Thoreau.

²⁷ Indeed, one might resist such literal understanding altogether, saying, as Benjamin says of the influence of the urban crowd on the work of Baudelaire, that in "Bartleby" the accident is "imprinted on [Melville's] creativity as a hidden figure." See Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," *Illuminations* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1986), 165. Hereafter cited as "Some Motifs."

various behaviors— his “dead wall reverie,” general speechlessness, agoraphobia, and refusal to work and to eat — especially in the light of the explicit invocation of railroad and steamboat accidents in “Cock-A-Doodle-Do!” are clearly suggestive. The medical literature from the 1860s and 70s lists versions of all of these behaviors as symptoms of some sort of accident pathology. I am particularly interested in the final two symptoms and their connection to nervous dyspepsia, itself a symptom of shock and a central motif in “Bartleby.”

As Hilary Jewett indicates in *The Scene of the Accident in the Nineteenth Century*, an “utter incapacity for business” — really for work of any kind — shows up in the medical literature as a primary symptom of traumatic injury.²⁸ She describes men who had suddenly “lost all ability to re-enter the socio-economic narrative — the life story, from which [they] ha[d] been ejected” (Jewett 164). The resulting “house hugging,” in Gillian Brown’s phrase (144), is the emasculating forerunner to the “house hugging” of the neurasthenia sufferer and a provocative manifestation of a similarly interrupted business narrative.²⁹ But whereas Charles Beard understood nervous exhaustion and its accompanying dyspepsia as an essentially happy condition that signified both a victim’s superior class status and a civilization’s superior state of evolution, medical theorists in the 1860s and 70s agonized over the crisis of the idle or unproductive man. As Schivelbusch puts it, “Were physically undamaged, traumatized victims of railroad accidents mere malingerers, or was their suffering genuine?” (Schivelbusch 146). In his groundbreaking treatment of railway neuroses, *On Railway and Other Injuries of the Nervous System*, John Eric Erichsen, for example, vigorously contests the insurance companies’ claims that trauma victims were faking injury and, thus, should not be monetarily compensated.³⁰

“Bartleby, the Scrivener” hinges on a version of just such a question, as the narrator debates the etiology of Bartleby’s odd and unprecedented refusal. Like the railroad accident survivor, Bartleby, if not unable, is suddenly in the course of the story certainly unwilling to work. And nearly without fail, the typical shock victim is said to be fine for a few days after the accident and only

²⁸ Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1995, 157. The phrase is actually John Eric Erichsen’s. Hereafter cited as Jewett.

²⁹ In “Bartleby,” of course, public and private, home and work are suggestively confused, and Brown makes much of this fact, suggesting the impossibility of any genuine refuge from the burgeoning industrial marketplace. At one point in “Bartleby,” the narrator remarks, “Yes, thought I, it is evident enough that Bartleby has been making his home here. . . . Immediately then the thought came sweeping across me, What miserable friendlessness and loneliness are here revealed! (NN *Piazza Tales* 27). In what follows, I argue that the alienating “unfriendliness” of the urban street appears to have moved into Bartleby’s ironic “home.”

³⁰ Resisting any purely psychological understanding of shock, Erichsen posits the idea of “railway spine”: the registration of the accident on the body’s own version of the railroad track. After conducting autopsies and finding no such registration, later doctors identify “railway brain” as a small lesion that might be found somewhere inside the cranium. Finding no lesion there, still later doctors, such as Freud, move toward a more psychological understanding of trauma, slowly but surely taking the courts with them. The point here is the anxiety surrounding the notion of injury and how legally the injury needs to manifest itself in order for it to be monetarily compensated. Again, see Schivelbusch for a discussion of this material.

then snaps and finds himself unfit to satisfy his customary obligations. I say “etiology” because the narrator himself chooses repeatedly to understand the refusal as a sign of illness, at one point even imagining that the task of copying has injured Bartleby’s eyes. The narrator, however, fails to arrive at a diagnosis of shock, let alone exhaustion, despite his own numerous references to indigestion and nervousness. In order to understand Bartleby as a kind of accident victim, we must turn precisely to that other symptom heretofore mentioned: a loss of appetite or refusal to eat. Indeed, we must see how this second refusal turns out merely to be a version of the first.

Importantly, the narrator himself links the scrivener’s eating and copying in a figure that presents an admirable work ethic as a kind of unrecommended over-consumption. In doing so, he clearly (though unwittingly) signals the need to understand digestion and, by extension, the scrivener’s stomach in larger terms: as involving what Marx calls the “social relations of production.”³¹

For Melville, these “social relations of production” are the egalitarian catastrophe; the breakdown in the scrivener’s stomach points to the figurative breakdown of the vehicles that were supposed to have lifted Bartleby and others like him. “At first,” the narrator reports,

Bartleby did an extraordinary quantity of writing. As if long famishing for something to copy, he seemed to gorge himself on my documents. There was no pause for digestion. He ran a day and night line, copying by sun-light and by candle-light. I should have been quite delighted with his application, had he been cheerfully industrious. But he wrote on silently, palely, mechanically (NN *Piazza Tales* 19-20).

We might hear in these last lines Combe’s point about “the well-known preservative and restorative influence of cheerful dispositions and gratified activity of mind; and hence the depressing, morbid, and often fatal effects of corroding care, grief, and apprehension, on every organ of the body,” not to mention Gaskell’s portrait of a “woe-worn figure, before his machine or loom.” We might recall as well Combe’s prescription for an adjusted diet, slower eating, and mental and bodily repose after every meal. By depicting capitalist labor practices as requiring, for the working class, the utter disregard of every known guideline for proper digestion and, thus as invariably producing dyspepsia, Melville underscores the destructiveness of these social relations of production and the impossibility of the narrator’s cruelly ludicrous wish for “cheerful industry.”

After rendering digestion figurative in this manner, Melville carefully

³¹ Karl Marx, “The Grundrisse,” *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), 223-226.

fuses the laborer's "eating" to the issue of social mobility, thus joining the circulation or movement that is the economy's endless transformations (of labor into commodities and commodities into money and, in turn, of money into more commodities) and the class movement of individual aspirants in one highly resonant figure. Introducing Nippers, the narrator remarks,

I always deemed him the victim of two evil powers — ambition and indigestion. The ambition was evinced by a certain impatience of the duties of a mere copyist. . . . The indigestion seemed betokened in an occasional nervous testiness and grinning irritability, causing the teeth to audibly grind together over mistakes committed in copying . . . and especially by a continual discontent with the height of the table where he worked. Though of a very ingenious mechanical turn, Nippers could never get this table to suit him. He put chips under it, blocks of various sorts, bits of pasteboard, and at last went so far as to attempt an exquisite adjustment by final pieces of folded blotting-paper. But no invention would answer. . . . [T]he truth of the matter was, Nippers knew not what he wanted. Or, if he wanted anything, it was to be rid of a scrivener's table altogether (*NN Piazza Tales* 16-17).

Another unfeeling description of the injurious insolubility of the scrivener's plight, the passage reflects the narrator's relentless attention to issues of class and his own perverse etiology of dyspepsia: attempted social mobility or, as he describes it, "ambition." This desire to put people in their immovable place is everywhere in the story. For instance, describing Ginger Nut, the twelve-year-old errand boy, the narrator says, "His father was a carman, ambitious of seeing his son on the bench instead of a cart, before he died. So he sent him to my office as student at law, errand boy, and cleaner and sweeper, at the rate of one dollar a week" (18). By using the word "ambition," here, after having just associated it with disease in his description of Nippers, the narrator implies that Ginger Nut can look forward to a disgruntled stomach. Moreover, recounting a generous gift of an old coat to Turkey who consequently puts on airs, the narrator states unequivocally, "Turkey was a man whom prosperity harmed" (18).

Unlike Ginger Nut's father or Nippers — who is dissatisfied with the "mere duties [the figurative food] of the copyist," aspiring instead to an unhealthy social mobility — Bartleby humbly accepts his lot. And yet, this "food," the narrator contradictorily implies, if consumed according to the ideal of capitalist diligence, itself produces dyspepsia. Thus, because the prospects of social mobility for the working class are quite slim, the narrator's homily about the dangers of "ambition" only works to mask the inevitability of abdominal distress. Here, Melville more than intimates his feelings about the

profoundly anti-democratic nature of capitalist industrialization, which must intentionally strand a huge section of the population despite its enormous social and economic contribution. And here one can begin to see the meaning of Bartleby's "great stillness," his "long-continued motionlessness" or, translated back into the language of digestion, his desperate attempt at "dieting" to improve a rather hopeless metabolism. Of course, Melville's sad joke is lost on the narrator, who, though establishing the conceit of digestion himself, cannot seem to trace out its figurative implications with respect to the scrivener's sudden renunciation of work.³² The catastrophe of capitalist labor practices has made him sick, and his only recourse is to follow the good doctor's orders, which is to say that his only recourse is to put himself at peril for losing his job.

The Body of Progress

My intention is to situate "Bartleby, the Scrivener" amidst a cultural conversation about individual and social health in mid-nineteenth-century America. Two views predominate. One, already explored, insists that the pressures of industrialization invariably wreak havoc on the stomach. A second view, mobilizing the tradition of political anatomy, posits a social body actually inhibiting its own growth, beset by an inefficient circulatory system, unable to provide nourishment for all of its organs and appendages. Disease results from a lack of vital interconnection. In fact, as part of its purportedly utopian agenda, the call for improved communications envisions "reducing the distance not only from one point to another, but from one class to another" (as qtd. in Mattelart 106), as Michael Chevalier describes it, precisely as a way of eliminating both social and physiological disease. It imagines that all will be helped by faster, more convenient transportation even as such transportation has already created more inequity and division.

In his 1851 pamphlet "New York and the City Travel; Omnibus and Railroad. What Shall Be Done?" Erastus Benedict, for example, invokes this tradition of political anatomy to craft his plea for both innovation and better coordination of existing services — in effect, for the city's improved circulation. "The city is but one," he exclaims, "like the human body it has many parts, of different beauty and honor and value, but they are all necessary to all; the growth of one is the growth of all."³³ He warns of "arresting the progress of improvement. . . with fatal effect" (Benedict 3), as if remembering the words of Saint Simon in the late eighteenth century: "Money is to the body politic what blood is to the human heart. Any part where the blood ceases to circulate, languishes and is not

³² An appeal to the etymology of the word "dyspepsia" fleshes out the joke: "Dyspepsia," from the Greek words "dus" and "pepto," means literally "bad I concoct."

³³ Erastus Benedict, "New York and the City Travel; Omnibus and Railroad. What Shall be Done?" (New York: n.p., 1851), 1. Hereafter cited as Benedict.

long in dying" (as qtd. in Mattelart 89-90). "Every obstruction," Benedict insists, "injures the whole city — every interference with the easy, rapid and safe transit of men and things, is an interference with every man's interest — no matter what or where may be his business in the city" ("New York" 7).

Benedict simply assumes that all interests are identical, positing the idea of a democratic "whole" even as the city itself increasingly appears riven by the dictates of class. He projects a fantasy of political equality that conveniently ignores the grim reality of economic inequality (and its political repercussions), at the same time addressing himself again and again to "those who own property here . . . to every man who owns a lot of land on this island" (Benedict 6). Of course, this sort of clamoring regularly came from the kind of "rich men" for whom the narrator of "Bartleby" works: those, like John Jacob Astor, who wanted access to their shrewdly and cheaply acquired property just out of the acceptable reach of the omnibus or railroad. These men may be said systematically to have "created" the city as quickly as the new vehicles would allow them, in the process enabling the rich to move northward and stranding the poor in the slums on the southern tip. At one point, conceding the stress of development (and perhaps even the likelihood of dyspepsia), Benedict compares Manhattan unfavorably to the "enterprising corporation of Brooklyn" (4), which "was straining every nerve, to give every man access to his property" (3).

The rhetoric of political anatomy — in particular, the trope of digestion — is omnipresent in the nineteenth century, especially as a way of depicting the workings of the capitalist economy and, indeed, of the city and nation. Chevalier, for example, speaks of a "circulating civilization" (as qtd. in Mattelart 104) and of a proliferation of banks, following on the heels of new communications routes, that will send "a salutary chyle into all the veins of the body, with its devouring activity and its innumerable articulations" (104). But whereas the advocates of growth employ the rhetoric of political anatomy to further the interests of the propertied class, Karl Marx employs it for an entirely different reason. In *Capital*, he uses the metaphor of a "social metabolism" (*Capital* 198) repeatedly to characterize the circulatory transformations of an industrial money economy and to propose, with the periodic misalignment of supply and demand, the virtual certainty of a dyspeptic "stomach." Marx writes,

In the velocity of circulation . . . there appears the fluid unity of the antithetical and complementary phases, i.e., the transformation of the commodities from the form of utility into the form of value and their re-transformation in the reverse direction, or the two processes of sale and purchase. Inversely, when the circulation of money slows down, the two processes become separated, they assert their inde-

pendence and mutual antagonism; stagnation occurs in the changes of form, and hence in the metabolic process (217).

While Marx does not address the function of transportation innovation here, but focuses instead on the transformative vehicle of money, we know from *The Grundrisse* and elsewhere the importance of transportation for producing the infamous commodity (C)–money (M)–commodity (C) circuit in the first place — for establishing the "locational movement" that is the very foundation of the commodity.³⁴ If we remember the figure of a "social metabolism" for this series of crucial "metamorphoses" (*Capital* 198-220), including, by implication, the metamorphosis of labor, and if we remember Melville's own analogical fusion of work and eating, then we are able to conceive of Bartleby's stomach as a site of radical upset, a "crisis" in Marxian terms. In fact, Marx explicitly uses the word "crisis" (meaning a breakdown in these circulatory transformations) in his discussion of the "hurried nature of society's metabolic process" (*Capital* 217).³⁵ Ernst Bloch even furnishes a way of linking this conceit with the phenomenon of the locomotive disaster, when he describes both the locomotive disaster and the capitalist economy as a "crisis of the uncontrolled thing" (as qtd. in Schivelbusch 129). As Schivelbusch explains, "Marx provided a definition of economic crisis that reads like a translation of the technological accident back into the economic sphere" (132).

Thus, in the tradition of political anatomy and in opposition to writers like Chevalier and Benedict, we might extrapolate from an image of the scrivener's stomach in inevitable rebellion an image of a collective stomach in inevitable turmoil: an "uncontrolled thing" that "for two hundred and fifty miles . . . goes yelling through the land, crying 'More! more! more!'" as if "gorging" itself, in the lawyer's words. At once a reflection of the constant panics that plagued nineteenth-century economic life, a desire for the terminal dyspepsia (or stasis) of revolution, and even a kind of demoralized death-wish, the scrivener's multifaceted digestive standstill constitutes a utopian gesture: something like a protest manifesting itself as a devastating injury. While Bartleby is a character in the story, it is Bartleby's stomach that offers a reprimand to the body of progress. Put more prosaically, by connecting movement with digestion — by theorizing expedited circulation as an integral part of capitalist "eating" — Marx provides another way of understanding the scrivener's mysterious complaint and his initial attempt, along with a form of "judicious dieting," to treat himself.

³⁴ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 542.

³⁵ All over Marx's work is the imprint of the popular discourse of nervousness. When Marx speaks in *The Communist Manifesto* of industrial capitalism's "everlasting uncertainty and agitation" (476), he can't not be aware of the digestive problems that accompany such uncertainty and agitation. In fact, given Marx's own tendencies toward witty denunciation and the care with which he develops the idea of a "social metabolism," and given his penchant for personification — he speaks, for example, of "circulation sweat[ing] money from every pore" (208) and of the market being unable to "stomach the whole quantity" of goods produced (202) — it is astonishing that he does not make an explicit joke about dyspepsia in this section of *Capital*.

Inner Concerns

Before turning to the issue of Bartleby's ginger consumption, I want to try to account for the narrator's own paradoxical aversion to the "hurried nature of society's metabolic process" and, thus, for his strange, unconscious identification with Bartleby. While Bartleby suggests the condensation of the traumatized triumvirate in "Cock-A-Doodle-Do!" he also represents the plight of the alienated urban dweller, a plight that encompasses the scrivener's employer. The narrator makes six references to Nippers's indigestion and nervousness, but, as the story progresses, he also refers to his own "nervousness" as well, thus implying a similar vulnerability to dyspepsia. This development stands in stark contrast to the way the narrator introduces himself: "I belong to a profession proverbially energetic and nervous, even to turbulence, at times, yet nothing of that sort have I ever suffered to invade my peace. I am one of those *unambitious* lawyers who never addresses a jury, or in any way draws down public applause; but in the cool tranquility of a snug retreat, do a snug business among rich men's bonds and mortgages and title deeds" (NN *Piazza Tales* 14, my emphasis). And yet this "snug business" demands not only that he "push the clerks already with [him]" (19), but that he hire "additional help." In the course of the story, he speaks of "the heat of business" (16), of "business driving fast" (37), and twice of "[his] business hurr[ying him]" (21, 22). His "snug retreat," a description intended to make his office sound more like a home than a place of business, literally a "retreat" from the street, thus finds itself invaded by the pressures of the burgeoning industrial marketplace.

At one point, Melville even suggests that the city street, with all of its bustling movement, noise, and alienating crowds, has actually moved inside of the narrator's office. Having just received Bartleby's customary reply, the narrator notices that Nippers has begun to use the dreaded word "prefer":

"So you have got the word too," I said, slightly excited.

"With submission, what word, sir," asked Turkey, respectfully crowding himself into the contracted space behind the screen, and by doing so, making me jostle the scrivener. "What word, sir?"

"I would prefer to be left alone here," said Bartleby, as if offended at being mobbed in his privacy" (31).

"Mobbed in his privacy" — the phrase perfectly captures the sense of nearly impenetrable interiority that develops when herds of strangers, as in Edgar Allan Poe's famous story "The Man of the Crowd," move through an urban setting "jostling" one another. Again, Melville seems to imply that this gesture of polite alienation now defines the space that Bartleby parodically calls home. A bit later

in the story, as the narrator is walking downtown and debating in his head the possible success of his simple assumption — namely, "that depart [Bartleby] must" (NN *Piazza Tales* 34) — he comes upon a group of people on a street corner and imagines, if only for a second, that they, too, are talking about Bartleby:

"I'll take odds he doesn't," said a voice as I passed.

"Doesn't go?— done!" said I, "put up your money."

I was instinctively putting my hand in my pocket to produce my own, when I remembered that this was an election day. The words I had overheard bore no reference to Bartleby but to the success or non-success of some candidate for the mayoralty. In my intent frame of mind, I had, as it were, imagined that all Broadway shared in my excitement, and were debating the same question with me. I passed on, very thankful that the uproar of the street screened my momentary absent-mindedness (34).

Having appeared nine times previously in a story that is all about impenetrable barriers, the word "screen" indisputably connects the scrivener with "the uproar of the street," thereby suggesting the inadequacy of a strictly visual apprehension of another human being. In fact, "the uproar of the street" is figuratively what separates the narrator and Bartleby in the office, figuratively what prevents them from speaking to each other: something that the narrator, encumbered as he might be by his class prejudices, nevertheless feels a need, at least in part, to do. "What my own astonished eyes saw of Bartleby," the lawyer laments at the beginning of his narrative, "*that* is all I know of him" (13). And later, "Yes, Bartleby, stay behind your screen; . . . I never feel so private as when I know you are here" (37).

The modern city dweller's over-reliance on sight (as opposed to hearing), as Georg Simmel pointed out, produces a perverse sense of isolated, isolating individualism. "This can be attributed," according to Simmel, "chiefly to the institution of public conveyances. Before buses, railroads, and streetcars became fully established during the nineteenth century," Simmel maintains, "people were never put in a position of having to stare at one another for minutes or even hours on end without exchanging a word" (as qtd. in "Some Motifs"). Benjamin expands upon this fundamental insight in his essay "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," citing Engels's remark that "the greater the number of people that are packed into a tiny space, the more repulsive and offensive becomes the brutal indifference, the unfeeling concentration of each person on his private affairs" (167) and Paul Valéry's own indictment of progressive civilization: "The inhabitant of the great urban centers reverts to a state of savagery — that is, of isolation. The feeling of being dependent on others,

which used to be kept alive by need, is gradually blunted in the smooth functioning of the social mechanism" (174).

Benjamin understands the "social mechanism" in terms of its continuous improvement at the hands of technology, the effect of which is the individual's ever-intensifying alienation. "Man's inner concerns," he writes, "do not have their issueless private character by nature. They do so only when he is increasingly unable to assimilate the data of the world around him by way of experience" (158). Significantly, Jewett argues that the locomotive accident merely constitutes a moment "when the alienated and ruptured modernist consciousness becomes visible" (Jewett 5). "The accident is both a staging, a bringing to bear, of alienating industrial and economic forces already latently affecting the sense of self," she argues, "and a material, quantitative breaking open of a new 'private' space of the individual" (45). Put differently, the hyperbolic estrangement of accident trauma briefly illuminates for the ostensibly healthy capitalist subject her own alienating quotidian. For Melville, industrial capitalism threatens not only the social mobility implicit in earlier social relations of production (master-apprentice relations, for example) but a collective social vitality as well, creating an unknowable, forlorn figure like Bartleby. In this way, too, the motionless Bartleby and the city-dwellers who surround him are all accident victims.

... Lies the Virtue of Ginger

So, how did these various accident victims, particularly the working class, treat their illnesses? Ginger was one such way, and it turns out conveniently to frame a long history of industrial diseases and their purportedly democratic remedies. As the contents of the Warshaw Collection of Early Advertising at the Archives of the National Museum of American History demonstrate, as early as 1832 ginger was being widely marketed as a cure for dyspepsia and its accompanying melancholy and exhaustion.³⁶ It was also marketed as a cure for nausea, consumption, cholera, poor circulation, motion sickness, and a whole host of other complaints as well.³⁷ In his forthcoming book on ginger ale — essentially what the steward initially serves Queequeg in *Moby-Dick* — Ken Previtali reports that ginger was used explicitly as a carminative and anti-emetic on the steamers traveling from Liverpool to New York in the 1850s.³⁸

³⁶ See advertisements for Jamaica Ginger, especially Joseph T. Brown's "Essence of Jamaica Ginger," "an excellent Stomachic Cordial for the relief of troubles arising from Indigestion, Dyspepsia, etc.," see also David Armstrong, *The Great American Medicine Show* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1991), 27, for an advertisement for ginger from a "Botanic Medicine Store" in the 1830s. Hereafter cited as Armstrong.

³⁷ See J.T. Reason, *Motion Sickness* (London: New York Academic Press, 1975), for a brief mention of ginger as a cure for motion sickness in the nineteenth century.

³⁸ Ken Previtali, *The History of Ginger Ale*, forthcoming; see also John Brown, *Early American Beverages* (Rutland: C.E. Tuttle Co., 1966) for recipes for alcoholic and non-alcoholic medicinal ginger drinks from as early as 1813.

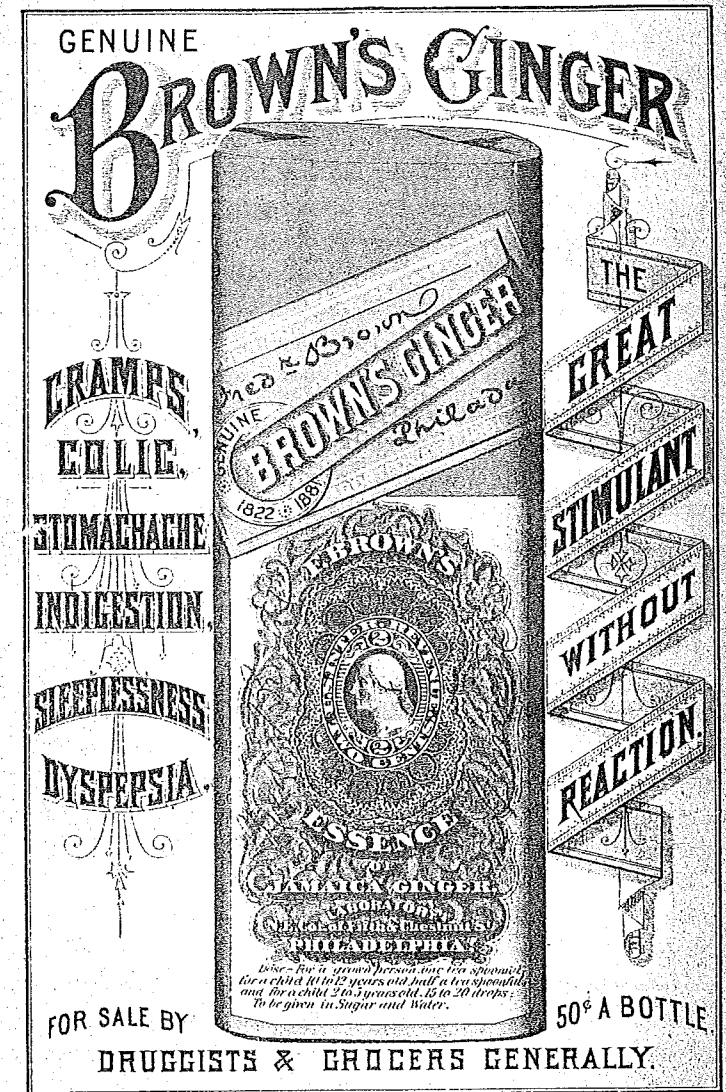


Figure 1. Victorian trading card from 1881, courtesy of the Warshaw Collection of Early Advertising, Archives of the National Museum of American History.

("Canada Dry," a manufacturer of ginger ale, takes its name from the Canadian Temperance Movement, which, like nineteenth-century temperance movements in America and Europe, sought a non-alcoholic substitute for the medicinal alcoholic ginger beers, bitters, and wines.)

Who can resist, in addition to the image of the dyspeptic Bartleby, the image of a nauseated Bartleby trying to remain perfectly still, made ill by the shark-infested motion of Wall Street? At one point in "Bartleby," the narrator even refers to the scrivener as "a bit of wreck in the mid Atlantic" (NN *Piazza Tales* 32). Melville seems to be aware of this use of ginger (even as he mocks it), for at the end of the heretofore quoted ginger passage in *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael remarks, as if the ocean itself needed soothing, "When Stubb reappeared, he came with a dark flask in one hand, and a sort of tea-caddy in the other. The first contained strong spirits, and was handed to Queequeg; the second was Aunt Charity's gift, and that was freely given to the waves" (NN MD 322).

Predominantly an energizing tonic, something to restore digestion and improve the circulation, ginger might thus be thought of, in the language of contemporary economics, as Bartleby's own interventionary stimulus package. By the 1880s, when neurasthenia was all the rage, ginger was being advertised as "The Great Invigorator," "The Great Health and Strength Restorer," a cure for "nervousness."³⁹ Picturing a wasted, drooping man, one ad asks, "Are you weary in Brain and Body; avoid intoxicants and rely on Parker's Ginger Tonic." Another pictures a similarly exhausted figure who, looking at his robust eating companion, exclaims, "Oh! that I had your health and appetite!" This eating companion then remarks, "I was miserable as you until Parker's Tonic cured me. An occasional dose before eating keeps me well." Still another ad pictures a bent over man who laments, "I shall die if I don't get relief." Almost certainly Melville saw the earlier ads, as they literally filled the back pages of every kind of newspaper. An ad from the 1850s for Frederick Brown's Essence of Jamaica Ginger refers to itself as "the stimulant without reaction" — a clear appeal to Temperance followers — and reminds readers that it was an effective remedy for cholera during the outbreaks of 1832 and 1849. (Recall that in "Cock-A-Doodle-Do!" the narrator refers to the locomotive as "com[ing] straight-bent through these vernal woods, like the Asiatic cholera," thus allowing us to imagine ginger as a cure for the metonymic locomotive itself.) Interestingly, herbal medicine continues to make astonishing claims for ginger as a digestive stimulant and anti-emetic.⁴⁰ In fact, Danish sailors are regularly given ginger as a preventative against sea-sickness, and there are reports of some shuttle astronauts

³⁹ See the Warshaw Collection for these advertisements and those that follow.

⁴⁰ See any number of popular herbal medicine books on ginger — for example, Paul Schultick, *Ginger: Common Spice and Wonder Drug* (Brattleboro: Herbal Free Press, 1996) — for contemporary claims made about this herb.

GENUINE BROWN'S GINGER.

THE GREAT STIMULANT WITHOUT RE-ACTION

IN USE OVER HALF A CENTURY

Highly Recommended for
CRAMPS AND COLICS,
STOMACH DISORDERS,
STOMACH-ACHE,
INDIGESTION,
DYSPEPSIA.

FOR SLEEPLESSNESS. — Try a hot tea made
with a teaspoonful of Ginger on going to bed.

In winter to counteract the effects of Extreme Cold.

To Sustain and Strengthen.

To Cause the Skin to Act Well.

SOLD BY DRUGGISTS. GROCERS AND GENERAL
DEALERS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

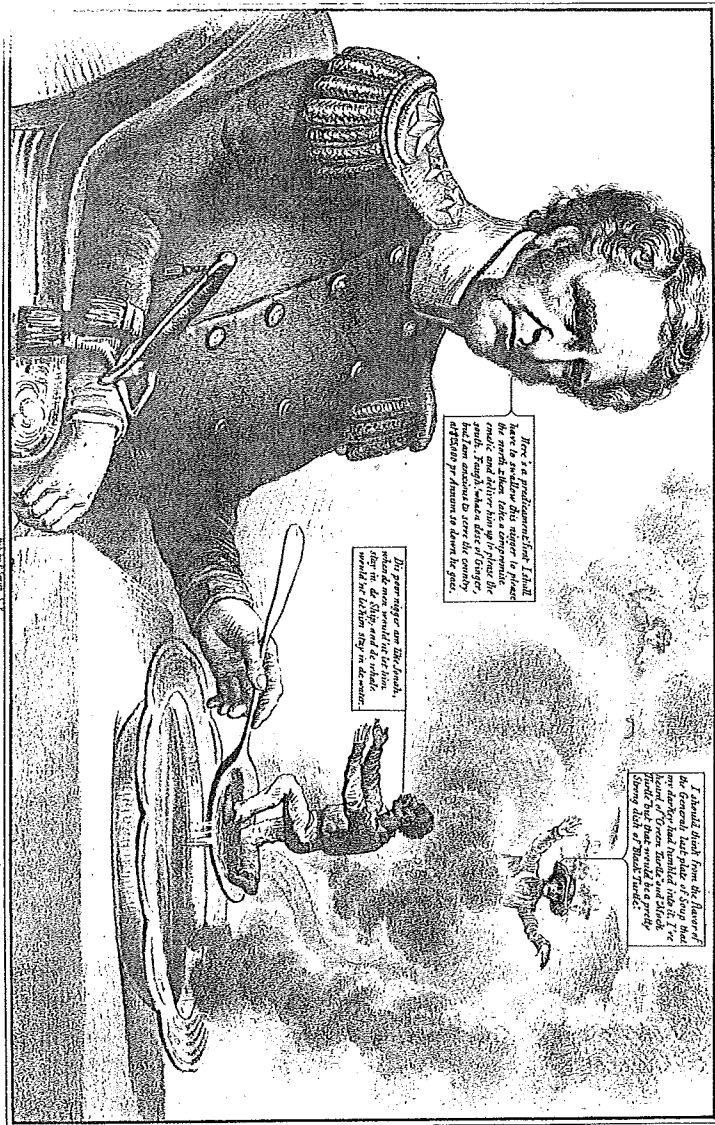
Remember! State FREDERICK BROWN'S
of Philadelphia

IMP. VALLET, MINOT & CO.

Figure 2. Victorian trading card from 1881, courtesy of the Warshaw Collection of Early Advertising, Archives of the National Museum of American History.

Figure 3. "A Dish of Black Turtle," first published in 1852 by P. Smith (i.e. Nathaniel Currier), courtesy of Library of Congress.

A. DISH OF "BLACK TURTLE".
For sale, 172, Spruce St. N.Y.



taking ginger for the motion sickness of space travel.⁴¹

Part of what drives Melville's skeptical response to patent medicines, a skepticism elaborately dramatized in *The Confidence-Man*, are their sweeping, often contradictory claims. The herb doctor asserts hyperbolically, "The Samaritan Pain Dissuader . . . will either cure or ease any pain you please, within ten minutes after its application" (NN CM 87). But how does it work? What, as one character asks, are the "ingredients of the medicine?" (80). What, for that matter, is ginger? Is it a stimulant or a purgative, an emetic or anti-emetic? In the passage from *Moby-Dick*, Stubb seems to think ginger a purgative, referring to it as that "calomel and jalap," and not the stimulant needed to "blow back the life into a half-drowned man" (NN MD 322).

There can be little doubt that Melville is poking melancholy fun at the unreliability of yet another championed "improvement of the age." Perhaps less obvious is the way that patent medicines take on political significance in "Bartleby." As a kind of analogical instruction, consider this cartoon from 1852 by John Magee entitled "A dish of 'black turtle.'" As the summary provided by the Library of Congress explains,

The cartoonist mocks the opportunism evident in Winfield Scott's endorsement of both the abolitionist cause and the Missouri Compromise. Scott, in military uniform, is seated at a table with a plate of soup before him. He lifts his spoon from the plate and finds in it a kneeling black man, with arms outstretched saying, "Dis poor nigger am like Jonah, when de men wouldn't let him stay in de Ship; and de whale wouldn't let him stay in de water." Scott observes, "Here's a predicament! first I shall have to swallow this nigger to please the north & then take a compromise emetic and deliver him up to please the south. Faugh! what a dose of Ginger, but I am anxious to serve the country at \$25,000 pr Annum so down he goes."⁴²

The politics in "Bartleby" have less to do with race particularly than with a more general assault on egalitarian principles. But we can see from the cartoon just how ubiquitous patent medicines were in the popular consciousness and, as well, how ginger might be mobilized figuratively to make a political point.

What links patent medicine, specifically ginger, to transportation innovation is its spurious rhetoric of radical democratization. Emerging from the populism of the Jacksonian period, patent medicine advertises itself as a corrective to class division in the arena of medical knowledge and care, allowing everyone simply to "doctor themselves," as any number of ads from the period unequivocally

⁴¹ "Ginger Root Against Seasickness: A Controlled Trial on the Open Sea," *Acta Otolaryngol* 105 (1988).

⁴² "A Dish of 'Black Turtle,'" Online Prints and Photographs Collection, Library of Congress.

cally state.⁴³ As James Cassedy writes, "The pluralistic countercultural medicine that emerged in the 1820s and 1830s was . . . solidly based in democratic precepts. It stood for such things as broader health education and better medical attention for all citizens, for the abolition of medical privilege, and for the freedom to choose among competing medical sects."⁴⁴ In the 1840s, all but three of the states repealed their medical licensing laws, so popular were the innumerable alternative medicine sects from which the patent medicine industry sprang. Thomsonianism, the movement founded by Samuel Thomson and based on a belief in basic herbal cures, for example, counted three million people, or one-sixth of the American population, as adherents in 1839. According to Cassedy, "The botanical system of Samuel Thomson was an attempt . . . to make the ultimate equation of medicine with democracy. Thomson's system emerged as part of a long tradition of providing medical advice to laymen on how to treat themselves. The tradition included the preparation of tracts aiming to meet the medical needs of travelers, sailors, isolated families along the frontier, or anyone who could not afford to consult a physician" (Cassedy 96). Sociologist Paul K. Starr is even more forceful in his depiction of Thomsonianism: "The Thomsonians viewed knowledge as an element in class conflict. . . . Thomsonianism was part of a broader movement under Andrew Jackson that mobilized working people against privileged elites. As Thomson condemned physicians, clergymen, and lawyers, Jacksonians condemned the rich, whom they considered parasites on the body politic" (as qtd. in Armstrong 27).

And yet, what began as a concern about social stratification and a threat to republican ideals ends as a way of simply making money — and a whole lot of it at that. In his book *The Toadstool Millionaires*, James Harvey Young recounts the emergence of some of the country's most unlikely millionaires.⁴⁵ As one scholar of patent medicine puts it, "If the tonics didn't deliver to the consumer all that they promised, they did deliver fortunes to many a would-be Horatio Alger" (Armstrong 162). More generally, by 1853 "Jacksonian dreams" are themselves, in the words of Michael Rogin, "exhausted" — not to be revived by any patent medicine, which, according to Engels, merely "fills the pockets of [its] proprietors."⁴⁶ In *The Confidence-Man*, Melville's herb doctor hawks the well-being of capitalist profit, unabashedly proposing the nineteenth-century equivalent of an Amway scheme: "Well, if two dollars a box seems too much, take a dozen boxes at twenty dollars; and that will be getting four boxes for

⁴³ For an example of an advertisement in which this phrase is used, see Elmer Smith, *Patent Medicine: the Golden Days of Quackery* (Lebanon: Applied Arts, 1975), 3.

⁴⁴ James H. Cassedy, *American Medicine and Statistical Thinking, 1800-1860* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 94. Hereafter cited as Cassedy.

⁴⁵ See James Harvey Young, *The Toadstool Millionaires: A Social History of Patent Medicines in America Before Federal Regulation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961) for an excellent discussion of the early days of patent medicines.

⁴⁶ Michael Rogin, *Subversive Genealogy: The Politics and Art of Herman Melville* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 193.

nothing, and you need use none but these four, the rest you can retail out at a premium, and so cure your cough, and make money by it. Come, you had better do it. Cash down. . . . Here now,' producing a box, 'pure herbs'" (NN CM 104-5). Thus, for Melville, the very thing that purported to redress the damage inflicted by the capitalist economy is an expression of it. And, hence, *Bartleby's* quiet repudiation of ginger and of capitalist "dinners"⁴⁷ altogether.

The Table of Redemption

"Those who are alive at any given moment see themselves in the midday of history. They are obliged to prepare a banquet for the past. The historian is the herald who invites those who are departed to the table" ("N Theoretics" 31). So Benjamin describes an obligation of remembrance to history's aggrieved in the notes for his *Arcades Project*. The remark is a fitting conclusion to an essay about a story in which a mid-nineteenth-century copyist on Wall Street gives up eating and, as a consequence, starves to death. The remark seems fitting, additionally, because, in connecting Benjamin with *Bartleby*, it carries the trace of their common fate — suicide — and it, in a sense, asks us to imagine inviting Benjamin to the table and preparing a banquet suitable for him as well.

Surely, though, for the scholar to invite either Benjamin or *Bartleby* to the table of redemption, she would have to be serving something other than what the narrator dishes up in his office and later, after the scrivener's death, in his mini-biography. Oblivious to the distinction between a moving and unmoving "reverie," the narrator is unable to determine the highly questionable "virtue of ginger": not only as a proclaimed cure for nervous exhaustion (and, hence, with respect to the story's metaphoric equivalencies, for the inequities and alienation of industrial capitalism) but as a kind of narrative "fuel" for the project of biography and historical remembrance. He is unable to recognize a "half-drowned man" of Wall Street, unable even to recognize what's at stake in the form of the scrivener's unmasterable utopian communiqué. Said another way, the narrative itself constitutes the *lawyer's* ginger: a stimulant designed unwittingly to help him recover from his encounter with the motionless *Bartleby*, to help him re-enter productive circulation. Honoring the scrivener's "knocking on the head" requires a very different approach — an analogous refusal to move on. *Bartleby* is the quintessential egalitarian "accident figure," a term, let us say, for an image of disrupted circulation that haunts American literature. Amidst the endless and increasingly competitive movement of late-capitalist life, we must picture him as still waiting — waiting *still* — for that redemptive banquet.

⁴⁷ At the end of "*Bartleby*" the grub-man at the Tombs asks, "'Won't [*Bartleby*] dine to-day, either? Or does he live without dining?'" To which, the narrator replies, "'Lives without dining'" (45 NN *Piazza Tales*).