

New Bedford, Capital of the 19th Century?

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ABSTRACT

Declaring New Bedford, not Paris, capital of the 19th century enables exploration of basic and yet remarkable issues in the relations of capitalism and culture. Paris, the city of light, needed New Bedford, the city that lit up the world. Following Boon, not Benjamin, takes us beyond the dazzle of commodity consumption and into the cultures of enterprise. Melville, not Marx, understands the ontology of enterprise and even its theology. And while Melville anticipates by generations Weber's interest in the complexities of Protestant ethics of the "fighting Quakers" and their nascent systems of company and finance, his fellow New Bedford resident Frederick Douglass explains the motives of crew, the racial history of work, and the significance of freedom in America. Benjamin's gender-challenged obsession with hunting for hidden, flashing meanings is more than matched by Boon's tactics for hunting and gathering; Boon teaches methods for non-symptomatic reading that can enable us to articulate race, company, finance and fiery hunt with fetish, class, and struggle in the history of capital. Pursuing surprises in the history of New England whaling, we juxtapose the views of C.L.R. James and D.H. Lawrence on race and colonial capitalism, as well as Edmund Burke, Henry David Thoreau, and Thorstein Veblen on the significance and politics of investment. In the end, we return to New Bedford and Paris in the 21st century, not because the dead are not safe, but because Boon has taught us to how to see new meanings living, not dead, even in the very Arcades haunted by the obsessions of Benjamin.

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There are some enterprises in which a careful disorderliness is the true method.

—Herman Melville (1964:465)

This tactic may seem strange; it is.

—James Boon (1999:xvii)

Nineteenth century Paris became the city of light. But night lighting owed more to New Bedford, the town reincorporated as a city in 1847, with the motto *lucem diffundo*. “I bring light.” Paris needed New Bedford, “the city that lit up the world.” Yes, the Paris nickname effloresced after gas lighting arrived in the 1860s—the same moment department stores could replace arcades—but Walter Benjamin’s Paris, the Paris of arcades, the Paris of dazzling markets, depended on the bright-burning whale oil delivered by New Bedford. And not vice versa. At the apogee of whaling, New Bedford was home to half of US whaling ships, and landed most of the US whale oil that dominated the world market and set its standards. Benjamin, however, was more interested in dialectical ironies of commodity dazzle—the bright lights putting city and world to sleep—than in industrial commodity chains, let alone the financial structures and culture, our topic. Can we learn to see the cultural genealogy of finance, without forgetting Benjamin’s insights?

New Bedford, capital of the 19th century. To honor James Boon and entertain him, to attempt his playful seriousness and advance some insights—notably, to push beyond prudent limits his musing on Melville as the American Marx—and to clarify the cultural history of capitalism, we assemble here witnesses (cf. Weber’s Ben Franklin) and virtual interlocutors (cf. Benjamin’s Louis Blanqui) a Borgesian set that, I hope, will illuminate each other: Herman Melville and his New Bedford neighbor Frederick Douglass, Walter Benjamin and Parisian arcades in the 21st century, and as occasion demands, authorities on Benjamin, social theory, whaling and/or literature, as interestingly placed as Edmund Burke, D.H. Lawrence and C.L.R James, or simply worth listening to. Like Melville, and James Boon.

“What could be more full of meaning?” Optimism and Damnation

Humanity figures there as damned.... Blanqui’s cosmic speculation conveys this lesson: that humanity will be prey to a mythic anguish so long as phantasmagoria occupies a place in it. ...

Resignation without hope is the last word of the great revolutionary. ... This world dominated by its phantasmagorias—**this**, to make use of Baudelaire’s term, **is “modernity.”**

—Walter Benjamin, “Paris, Capital of the 19th Century” (1939:15, 26, emphasis added)

I was now living in a new world, and was wide awake to its advantages.

—Frederick Douglass (1969:223)

What bitter blanks in those black-bordered marbles which cover no ashes! What despair in those immovable inscriptions! ... [and, behind the pulpit] a large painting representing a gallant ship beating against a terrible storm off a lee coast of black rocks and snowy breakers... But high above the flying scud and dark-rolling clouds, there floated a little isle of sunlight, which beamed forth an angel’s face; “Ah, noble ship,” the angel seemed to say, “beat on, beat on, thou noble ship, ...”

What could be more full of meaning?... Yes **the world’s a ship on its passage out, and not a voyage complete...**

—Melville, *Moby Dick* (1964:64–70, emphasis added)

In the 19th century, phantasmagoria put them to sleep in Paris. Let’s not doubt it. Paris was put to sleep. But in the same 19th century, is New Bedford waking up? In New Bedford, Frederick Douglass was wide awake to the prospects of a new world. And is Melville’s Ishmael dreaming or waking?

Ishmael was on the opposite tack from modernity-ensorcelled Blanqui. Benjamin quoted Blanqui’s despair: “There is no progress.” “One cannot in good conscience demand anything more.” “What we call ‘progress’ is confined to each particular world, and vanishes with it” (1939:25–26) Benjamin’s Blanqui was surrounded by phantasmagoria. “Everything new it could hope for turns out to be a reality that has always been present,” incapable of liberation, mere fashion (Benjamin 1939:15). Ishmael was

surrounded in the chapel by bleak tablets presaging his own near fate, the threat of perishing graveless, no body for resurrection. But Ishmael saw the fullest meaning in front of him, a world of risk and also hope, not a voyage complete.

For distinct but connected reasons, “Frederick Douglass” and “Ishmael” live in a world that is a ship on its passage out. We know neither’s actual name. And the future as well as the past of capitalism depends on where we put the capital of the 19th century.

We begin as we mean to go on. But for James Boon, also a little more. In pursuit of Benjaminian style, lots of quotes and tiger’s leaps, dialectical, or all the better, dialogical. But from James Boon something vital: a mood. Something outside the sober frame of Benjaminian tragic drama. I proceed with respect for Benjamin’s insight but not his tragic mopiness, at the end of the day preferring Boonian extra-vagance. As will become clear anon, let us be hunters but also gatherers, and above all an ally in James Boon’s absolutely enchanting embodiment of the vital quest to realize the analytic powers of an undetached sense of humor.

Paris, Benjamin, and the 19th Century

Nineteenth century Paris lived a life newly dominated by commodity display: arcades and flâneurs, dioramas and new fashions. In the 1930s, Benjamin intervened into the hothouse of Marxist conceptualization describing dreamworlds and dialectical images, dialectics at a standstill in worlds asleep. History with “a feeling of vertigo,” opened the dour 1939 version of Benjamin’s essay on “Paris, Capital of the 19th Century,” a world become “an endless series of facts congealed in the form of things” (1939:14). Gone from the 1939 draft are the optimistic oneiric politics of the 1935 draft, written for the rich cousins (now in New York) in the increasingly diasporic Frankfurt School, who sought reassurance that Walter B. and his strange Arcades Project was producing something with their financial support. He was. But Adorno et al. hated much about the first version, including the soon-to-vanish optimistic oneirics. In 1935, “The realization of dream elements, in the course of waking up, is the paradigm of dialectical thinking. Thus, dialectical thinking is the organ of historical awakening” (1935:13). Benjamin concluded, “Every epoch, in fact, not only dreams the one to follow but, in dreaming, precipitates its awakening” (1935:13). The last lines in 1939:

In the end, Blanqui views novelty as an attribute of all that is under sentence of damnation...The people of the nineteenth century, whom Blanqui addresses as if they were apparitions, are natives of this region. (1939:26)

Natives sentenced by an unseen judge, History. From the classic Marxist perception that men make history but not just as they please, we are all the way to damnation. In his theses on history, Benjamin identified with a traumatized Angel of History, blown out of paradise by the storm called progress. But the end of that text was about the Messiah. Whether an allegory for proletarian consciousness or a real person, this Messiah was, perhaps, going to open strait gates through time. In the 1939 Paris text, this Messiah is just about gone. A trajectory of educated despair crescendos late in Benjamin, too often emulated in critical quietism that enables cultural studies to be maximally political without particular tasks. Gershom Scholem always urged Benjamin to consider the Messiah an actual person, and Jewish. Scholem anticipated Benjamin's suicide and warned him against it. In their correspondence, Benjamin made clear a source of his increasing despair: the quest for possible politics. There was a city Benjamin thought capital of the 20th century, and that city was Berlin.

Benjamin describing 19th century Paris was always already talking about his 20th century (as *the* 20th century), not just Berlin but "West Berlin." He wrote Scholem in April 1931 that he could not do his work in Israel or even East or North Berlin. "The most sophisticated civilization and the most 'modern' culture are not only part of my private comfort; some of them are the very means of my production" (Scholem 1981:290–291). In 1931, Benjamin amalgamated despair with redemptive optimism. "All right, I am going to extremes. A castaway who drifts on a wreck by climbing to the top of an already crumbling mast. But from there he has a chance to give a signal leading to his rescue" (1981:291). By the mid-1930s, the chance for the hero to signal metamorphosed into grim need to seize the flash against a relentless and successful enemy. By 1939, Berlin was the secret paradigm for the damnation of Paris and "modernity."

The "new world" looked different to an intellectual and runaway slave; call me Frederick Douglass, he said in New Bedford (covering his tracks to protect others). Asleep, is he? Ensorcelled by imaginary utopias, was old Fred, actually on the path to damnation by coming into the city, now

a slave to commodity dreams? The new world stories of pilgrims and prospects, and “fiery hunts” (yes, Ahab too is coming soon), races, migrations, new places and life as a voyage out, the present made meaningful (“pragmatically,” to recall how more prosaic Americans would name it) by its relations to the future: are these too part of the famous second fetishization Benjamin documents in *Parisian Arcades*, dreamworld capitalism hiding behind the utopias it sells? Is New Bedford a provincial town on its way up, pathos in its hopes to be great? Do we explain about phantasmagoria and illusions of freedom to the Frederick Douglass crowd? We could quote Marx’s admonition to German readers of *Capital*, quoting Horace, “This tale is told of you!” (1976:90). Someday, New Bedford can become as advanced as Paris?

Or, we could find a 19th century where Paris is Paris, New Bedford is New Bedford, and difference is valuable in and for itself. (Disney [Inc.] rather than Hegel or Grandville could work out the dioramic animatronics.) A safer path, to be sure. And I know, the 19th century had no actual capital. It was mostly European empires each with a capital, Paris one of them. But what about the obstreperous republic already fencing off new politics for its new world, a place which Benjamin almost *never* wrote about?

Kumkum Sangari is right that “The history of the so-called west and the history of the ‘non-west,’ or, more accurately, the histories of imperialist and imperialized countries, are by now irrevocably different and irrevocably shared” (2000:919). The relationship of New Bedford and Paris has the same structure: neither is the other’s past or future. So, how did New Bedford figure in the manifestation of Frederick Douglass’s freedom? What drew F.D. there when finally free to go anywhere? This piece is inspired by something astonishing Boon has argued: that Melville be juxtaposed with Marx.

Sticking for the moment with Melville, it behooves me to stress a radical potential in that scrivener’s inducements to be read. Michael Rogin contends that *Pierre* (Melville’s countertranscendentalist “romance”) represents America’s *Eighteenth Brumaire*, making Melville himself something *like* “America’s Marx.” I find Rogin’s claim persuasive. Melville, I would add, was a Marx versed in considerably more cultures than his simile (whose works I nonetheless prize). Why, then, have critical critics been more enthralled by Marx than by Melville? I find their response mystifying. (Boon 1999:14)

So, we honor an American Benjamin with inquiry both into Melville's images and his America. Mystifying or not, we still find Benjamin and Frankfurt central in US American cultural studies, after a long American century. Despite work like Boon's, (and remembering a question of Ruth Benedict's), is the world yet ready for the ruthless criticism of everything American that studies of the future of capitalism might actually require? How deep is the genealogy of American capitalist forms and terms? It matters whether we trace the parentage of New York, actual capital of the 20th century, back to 19th century Paris or to such locales as New Bedford. More condescending explanations abound of America as the extension, apotheosis or mere epigone of European and commodity-fetishism centered capitalism.¹ Meanwhile, as Warren (2008) notes, criticism of things American—literature, for example—can be irrelevant if it is too skeptical of American ideologies, and can be triumphalist if it takes America too seriously; both of these this essay obviously refuses to fear.

We will get orienting images, dialectical or otherwise, from Mr. Melville, Mr. Douglass, and others. We will revisit the arcades—I sought out several mentioned in the published fragments of *The Arcades Project* while teaching in Paris in Autumn 2013—and the Seaman's Bethel and other sites in New Bedford. Yes, production and race will matter, not just consumption and class. But this essay is about more surprising things. Above all, we key to passages from Melville's *Moby Dick*, seeking what it conveys about America and especially New Bedford. Arcades? Or what? What sort of capitalism engages the whaling crews? Just what is Frederick Douglass doing there? How are the conditions of possibility of his freedom connected to forces of production, structures of finance, ideologies of investment and institutions of enterprise realized in New Bedford's new industry, and what did Melville want us to know about them?

The Fighting Quakers

The America of this New Bedford and the crew of Melville's fictional Pequod were not lily white. Melville took pains to explore this. Yet we will start with his foremost concern: not connecting New Bedford's industry to its social diversity, but to its theology. Self-emancipating people came to New Bedford for reasons connected to the callings of these Quakers. Frederick Douglass sought out the maritime city and relied on its new world to escape slavery: he escaped Baltimore dressed as a sailor, a plausible mode

of existence for a free Black man. It was Shakespearean: the slave freed himself by pretending to be what he was becoming, a man of the sea. If we start with Douglass's freedom, we take Melville's world for granted. Why did these Quakers devote their lives to build this industry, setting their fate at sea in ships pursuing the extraordinary violence of whaling?

According to Ryan Jordan, Melville's depiction of fighting Quakers in *Moby-Dick* "perpetuated the stereotype of Quaker hypocrisy. ...*Moby-Dick* followed in a long line of mocking portrayals of thieving and conniving ship captains and slave traders who claimed to belong to the Quaker faith" (2007:124). Alas, he wants Melville to be simple. We prepare instead for layers of irony and knots and loops in chains of end and means among Melville's fighting Quakers. Not for Melville the credulity of, say, Alexis de Tocqueville seeing something unproblematically admirable in New England enterprise culture. Nor in fact a condemnation for hypocrisy. Remembering Max Weber's interest in Ben Franklin's honesty is the best policy, we have Melville's icons to guide us through complex distinctions.

As Jordan shows, "Fighting Quakers" is not a Melville neologism, but a name—like "free Quakers"—grounded in a particular and strange Atlantic colony history. Only some Quakers "fought," joining the rebellion in the 1770s; these self-styled "free" or "fighting" Quakers were sometimes expelled from their Meetings. A "Free Quaker" meetinghouse for such dissenters from the ultimate dissenters, meetinghouse for post-ultimate dissenters (beyond conscientious objection merely from all worldly authority) was founded in Philadelphia in 1783, or as its dedication stone reads, "By General Subscription for the FREE QUAKERS Erected in the YEAR of OUR LORD 1783 of the EMPIRE 8." Yes, and Nantucket—18th century home of US whaling—partly founded and mostly led by Quakers, was almost entirely bereft, actually, of fighting or free Quakers. All through the great rebellion, Nantucket kept commerce in whale products afloat, sustaining through various formulae a neutrality mandated by its religion and suitable to its commerce, an honesty aligned with policy. It was hurt anyway by pillaging hostility from both political leviathans (Dolin 2007).

Melville's "fighting Quakers" in the whaling industry were surprising, quintessential, and various. The underlying dynamics of honesty and policy work out differently through three quintessentially different characters, the retired captains Peleg and Bildad and their employee Captain Ahab, all one sort or another of New Bedford fighting Quaker. Melville's narrator

Ishmael explained what fighting Quaker meant, connecting whales, enterprises, and investments into shares:

Seated on the transom was... Captain Bildad, who along with Captain Peleg was one of the largest owners of the vessel; the other shares, as is sometimes the case in these ports, being held by a crowd of old annuitants; widows, fatherless children, and chancery wards; each owning about the value of a timber head, or a foot of a plank, or a nail or two in the ship. People in Nantucket invest their money in whaling vessels, the same way you do yours in approved state stocks bringing in good interest.

Now, Bildad, like Peleg, and indeed many other Nantucketers, was a Quaker...to this day its inhabitants in general retain in an uncommon measure the peculiarities of the Quaker, only variously and anomalously modified by things altogether alien and heterogeneous. For some of these same Quakers are the most sanguinary of all sailors and whale-hunters. They are the fighting Quakers; they are Quakers with a vengeance. ...

Like Captain Peleg, Captain Bildad was a well-to-do, retired whaleman. But unlike Peleg... Captain Bildad had not only been originally educated according to the strictest set of Nantucket Quakerism, but all his subsequent ocean life, and the sight of many unclad, lovely island creatures...had not so much as altered one angle of his vest. Still, for all his immutableness, was there some lack of common consistency about worthy Captain Bildad. Though refusing, from conscientious scruples, to bear arms against land invaders, yet himself had illimitably invaded the Atlantic and Pacific; and though a sworn foe to human bloodshed, yet had he in his straight-bodies coat, spun tuns upon tuns of leviathan gore. How now in the contemplative evening of his days, the pious Bildad reconciled these things in the reminiscence, I do not know; but it did not seem to concern him much, and very probably he had long since come to the sage and sensible conclusion that a man's religion is one thing, and this practical world quite another. This world pays dividends. (1964:112).

There is much for us here, our first theological moment. Never mind, then, Mr. Melville's third person narrative, not so rigorously limited as Mr.

Dostoyevsky's, (cf. Bakhtin 1984). Melville's reader is guided toward all that Ishmael has to offer and more. Melville connected Quaker theology to the central enterprise and *raison d'être* of New Bedford, but also from the outset insisted on more than one articulation of theology and industry. He assembled congeries of elected affinities. Melville made this explicit in the paragraph I elided above, writing without naming him of Ahab's "greatly superior" ability to set aside Quaker certainties, how Ahab has "by the stillness and seclusion of many long night-watches in the remotest waters, and beneath constellations never seen here at the north, been led to think untraditionally and independently; receiving all nature's sweet or savage impressions fresh." Understanding Ahab's diseased, morbid greatness will take the whole book, Ishmael explained, "But, as yet we have not to do with such a one, but with quite another; and still a man, who, if indeed peculiar, it only results again from another phase of the Quaker, modified by individual circumstances."

Not everyone on the Pequod was Quaker. And there was a fourth iconic Quaker, like after all the four phases of the moon. The fourth is the Pequod's first mate, also not yet named in the text of *Moby Dick*; unlike the others it is a name Seattle entrepreneurs have since made famous. But Melville has good reasons for what he puts first, and first come these first two "phases of the Quaker," Peleg and Bildad. Bildad is a Biblical name, found in the Book of Job, Chapter 8. The Biblical Bildad attempted to comfort Job who had lost hope. Job could not fathom the wonders of God who created the constellations north and south (cf. Ahab in Melville's text). Bildad suggested that Job seek understanding in teachings of prior generations, and expect God to restore prosperity. What did not move Job was clearly sufficient for Bildad, "immutable" in all his ocean life, unmoved from his version of Quaker principle even by the unclad lovely island ladies. Melville described Nantucket Bildad's whaling:

For a pious man, especially for a Quaker, he was certainly rather hard-hearted, to say the least. He never used to swear, though, at his men, they said; but somehow he got an inordinate quantity of cruel, unmitigated hard work out of them. When Bildad was chief mate, to have his drab-coloured eye intently looking at you...Indolence and idleness perished before him. His own person was the exact embodiment of his utilitarian character. (1964:113)

Bildad, like Weber's Franklin, transformed utilitarian calculation from self-interest into religious duty, rewarded eventually by dividend. Bildad's honesty was ineluctably both chosen policy and God's law. Captain Peleg keeps us from deciding that this is iconic of all Nantucket Quakers, even before we meet Ahab and his first mate. Peleg was the first Quaker captain Ishmael met. Only after Peleg approved did he bring Ishmael the neophyte to his partner Bildad to be signed as crew. "I see thou art no Nantucketer," Peleg began in examination of Ishmael (1964:107). Not a concern for Bildad: what did Peleg care about? What, to Peleg, was great about Nantucketers?

Ishmael, writing *post festum*, as Marx would say, after the feast, was ironically critical of his more naïve self, who tried to impress Captain Peleg with accounts of his experience at sea in merchant ships. "Merchant service be damned," said Peleg, interesting in light of Bildad's embodiment of utilitarianism (to say almost nothing about motives in Paris). Peleg's exact, original question was, "I see thou art no Nantucketer—ever been in a stove boat?" Peleg asked the same question five ways, which Ishmael understands only *post festum*, after the sinking of the Pequod: "man, what makes thee want to go a whaling, eh?" (1964:108).

Peleg knew the difference between investing in shares in a whaling ship and signing up for the voyage (and I am saying here Benjamin understood neither, not even how the pragmatic temporality of investment awakens prudential connection of present and future time, let alone invested recalculation of risk and reward, especially for those all in). Ishmael replied that he wanted to see what whaling was, and that "I want to see the world." Peleg told Ishmael to take a good look at Ahab's peg-leg to know whaling. He objected to Ishmael's surmise that the leg was "lost." It was devoured by a monster, Peleg insisted, and Ishmael seemed too soft. To see the world he sent Ishmael to "take a peep over the weather-bow" (1964:109). "Art thou the man to pitch a harpoon down a live whale's throat, and then jump after it? Answer, quick!" (1964:109). Peleg clearly doubted Ishmael's grasp of whaling as a venture, but he needed crew, especially for Ahab's ship.

Finally Peleg and Bildad, agents for the ownership, prepared Ishmael's contract and negotiated his "lay," or promised share of profit. Thereby Melville simultaneously introduced payment by share and finished his first depiction of these different "phases of the Quaker." Peleg ridiculed

Bildad's incessant Bible study "30 years, to my certain knowledge. How far ye got, Bildad?" (1964:114) while Bildad recited Matthew 6:19–21, mumbling to himself, the need to lay up treasures in heaven, not on earth. Bildad switched Biblical passage, free-associating on "lay" and from Genesis 5:31 came up with the number 777 for Ishmael's lay. Ishmael expected at least the 275th and felt entitled by experience and skills even to a 200th. Most interestingly, Peleg took up his cause, while Bildad argued the rights of land-based owners. At Peleg's insistence the lay was resolved at 300th. Ishmael signed.

Nobody, in this scene, was motivated by any fetishism of the commodity. Even Bildad's Quaker version of utilitarian calculation was motivated by more than Marx's original grammar of valuation, oriented to more than either or both manifest use-value or quantified, abstract, embodied labor value. Nor can we confine Bildad, even, within Benjamin's onieric additions to the possibilities of "use" value in his arcade work, the forms of fetishized dazzle one sees in fashion, future, exotica, sex, or even death (this last comes closest, especially if we shift from what moves and orients Bildad to what inspires and situates Peleg). Bildad's dividends were God's reward for duties carried out in this world, gaining significance from divine distance. Bildad's familiar Franklinian composite of duty and utilitarian calculation is still not, as Weber put it, eudaemonistic—i.e., oriented toward worldly happiness—unlike Benjamin's flâneur-rewarding Paris. For Peleg, all the more, the voyage was the calling in and for itself, whaling was whaling, enabled by the lays not vice versa. Thus Peleg backed the sailor over land-based owners. Peleg saw in the violence of confrontation with worldly leviathan the superiority of this enterprise, an ideology of calling simultaneously gendered and morbid, as was so much in Melville's New Bedford. And for now, of Ahab note that Peleg thought himself a kindred spirit, explaining to Ishmael, "I know what he is—a good man—not a pious, good man, like Bildad, but a swearing good man—something like me—only there's a good deal more of him" (1964:120).

Auerbach might have called Melville's New Bedford tropes more Jewish than Greek, not arcadian dazzle promising this-worldly redemptions but callings, sounding from unseeable depths. Was Melville on to something about the whaling industry itself? As Dolin (2007) details in his history of whaling, the English conspicuously failed in centuries of efforts to unseat the New England industry. New England, led by Nantucket and then New Bedford, partnered with, out-competed, and absorbed the

Dutch-funded whaling industries especially of the Azores. Meanwhile, the ambivalent 18th century British state (a complex congeries itself, see accounts of “the myth of the state” [Abrams 1977]) both encouraged colonial industry as means for New England to have products to trade for English commodities, but also encouraged its own ports to elbow out the New Englanders and bring home to old England the obviously possible profits. But British ports lacked something enabling New England: Dolin terms it efficiency. It is a curious kind of efficiency, this drive to voyage into the Pacific after whaling the Atlantic exhausted supply (shall we say). This efficiency was determination to voyage long and longer, to do whatever necessary. New Englanders developed every necessary technology. Subsidiary industries for ships and tools continually improved (see below, on technology and its place in society). They helped develop ports, an almost global on-shore infrastructure, e.g., in Honolulu, for provisioning and transshipment. Above all were new modes of formalized finance. The lay system began, reports Dolan (2007:47) to organize local whaling companies on Long Island before 1700, and spread quickly to the better deepwater ports. The efficiency of the New Bedford whalers followed from the new system of enterprise, in which all received not worker’s wage but shares of profit.

As a commercial arrangement, its utility was obvious: risk defrayed wonderfully. Disappointed claimants went to the bottom of the ocean with the failed ventures, leaving owners with fewer extant debts on top of loss of a ship, and otherwise, unsuccessful cruises simply kept going. It was not only whaling. By the 18th century—probably earlier—many new world pirates lived by way of articles of agreement, sometimes actually written down, that promised shares and, thus, contracted enterprise. In their prize system, the British navy developed their own version. But Melville knew that what sustained this society in New England was as theological as it was political-economic. The lay system fit and extended the moral economy of New England better than the old. It was an industry built by and for fighting Quakers and other ambitious dissenters questing for a new world.

This is a strange story I tell. I am far from the first to seek Melville’s insight into capitalism. More than 50 years ago C.L.R. James, a detainee on Ellis Island soon to be deported as a subversive, wrote a book on Melville to pass his time and demonstrate Americanness. *Mariners, Renegades, & Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In*

(2001) reconsidered American management of a worldwide division of labor below deck. James's particular Marxism saw "modern industry" and, thus, "our world" arise first among these mariners, renegades, and castaways. His Melville was really telling the chilling story of the failure of the crew—the true heroes—to rebel against venal, profit-dominated American management, its failure to stop the incipient totalitarian Ahab. James's interpretation fit his age, just after Hitler and Stalin. The cautionary tale: workers of the world cannot trust venal management to stop the madness. They must act. His critique of totalitarian personalities (offered despite distaste for psychoanalytic history) came from a much less comfortable chair than Hannah Arendt's. Alas, his sick Ahab is unpersuasive. James was wrong to contrast Ahab and his fiery hunt from the rest of American management: all are phases of Melville's fighting Quaker. And he was wrong to emphasize the story of labor as the deepest truth. Recalling how recently bombs had fallen on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we feel his urgency denouncing Ahab. But Ahab's motives were reshaped to James's purposes, and those of the Pequod's investors, including the crew, forgotten altogether.

James connected the lay system to prospects for actual and global democracy, dreams of a universal republic (2001:18–20). Mindful of New Bedford's commitment to enterprise, let us reconsider basics about democracy and companies as bodies politic and corporate. British parliamentary history embraces classical vocabularies and seeks roots in Greek and Roman democracies and republics. Yet many innovations in Anglo-American egalitarianism and democracy quietly emerged first in governance of joint-stock companies. For example, the logic of one share, one vote was hard-won in companies long before a House of Commons won substantive right over the House of Lords. And the history of British companies is overwhelmingly maritime and colonial. It is the Americans, especially the New Englanders from the Mayflower Compact onward that endogenize the concept of company enterprise into the organizing principles of body politic. Tocqueville was profoundly impressed that religious pilgrims made their own government by free association, but utterly neglected that what the Mayflower Compact formed was a joint-stock company, a body politic, and corporate that was also an enterprise designed to produce future prosperity and profit for its owner-members. The whaling industry extended future-oriented enterprise culture into new scales of endeavor, stretching astonishingly in space and

time as it grounded present activity not in present value—exchanging like for like—as in the early chapters of *Capital*, and not in the dazzle of commodity fetishism, not simply futures promised by dialectical imagery intrinsic to commodities on display, as in Benjamin’s arcades (or Thoreau’s critique of the gold rush, see note 3 below, or Tocqueville’s of Virginia and slavery, see Tocqueville 2006).

This enterprise culture worked as an economy. Its super-profits sustained the northern Atlantic colonies while tobacco sustained plantation societies to the south. British Mercantilists had expected both, especially, the North, to fail, as Eric Williams (1944) once so eloquently documented. What failed were the British efforts to mimic and rival it (Dolin 2007). But profitability explains its acceleration better than its mainspring. (Or as Max Weber famously observed of Franklin’s capitalism, “to speak here of a reflection of material conditions in the ideal superstructure would be patent nonsense” [1958:75].) In 1702, Cotton Mather saw in “You that Encounter those mighty *sea-monsters* and Extend the *Empire of Mankind*” men who were “*Christians of the First Magnitude*,” aware that “*This is the Lords-doing*” (Dolin 2007:55; emphasis original to Mather). Before the Monroe Doctrine officially connected new world sovereignty to limits on Europe’s, in the lead up to war in 1812, Americans were concerned above all about their merchants and whalers at sea. Their first naval forays into the Pacific, extending the 1812 war, were not about imperialism in the sense of territory, but rather all about destiny, risk, and reward. American Commodore David Porter, a great liar, perfected the strategy of commandeering British whalers and cruisers by pretending to be English. Porter felt little compunction over lying, or ignoring his letters of instruction, because he had higher duties and goals. “If I should only succeed in driving the British from the ocean, and leaving it free for our vessels,” he wrote in his Journal, “I conceive that I shall have rendered an essential service to my country” (as quoted in Dolin 2007:194). Until he was undone by fame and hubris, Porter rallied his sailors not with revolutionary stories of republic versus empire, or even Israel versus Rome, as was so common in the newly United States, but by directly connecting enterprising nature and god’s favor.

Fortune has at length smiled on us, because we deserved her smiles, and the first time she enabled us to display *free trade and sailor’s rights*, assisted by your good conduct, she put in our possession nearly half a million of the enemy’s property.

Continue to be zealous, enterprising, and patient, and we will yet render the name of the *Essex* [no, not *that Essex*] as terrible to the enemy as that of any other vessel, before we return to the United States. (as quoted in Dolin 2007:195; emphasis in original)

Thus, hypocrisies in US power projection, confident use of extreme violence in asymmetric expansion of US scope of action, began long before a duty to be policeman of the world, long before military hegemony, long before the wars of the 20th century, and utterly without territorial imperialism as its goal, far more the agenda of a new Jerusalem than a new Rome. An enterprising American was drawn to the fiery hunt: that was Melville's point, after all. Something to contemplate still.

Ahab, and the Fiery Hunt

In his 1790 *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Edmund Burke was the first among social theorists to use the logic of joint-stock company enterprise to assess the “business” of government (as we might say). He forged the conception that the core of politics is management. Yuval Levin (2013) renews the cartoon image of Burke as a conservative doubting the enlightenment perfectibility of man. But Burke's relationship to American settler culture of enterprise (like Tom Paine's) is much more interesting than this. Burke confronted enlightenment theories of free rational individuality not with raw respect for continuity, but insisting on significances of participating in a going concern (as Veblen would put it). Burke emphasized “the stock of inheritance” (1790:50). Men should not “live and trade each on his own private stock of reason,” Burke argued, because such stocks are “small,” and “individuals would do better to avail themselves of the general bank and capital of nations and of ages” (1790:126). Otherwise, you “set up your trade without a capital” (1790:58) as did the revolutionary French.

Tom Paine on callings, times that try, and freedom in agency are also interesting. But Burke can help us more with Melville's allegory of American theology and fact, the story that plays out through many hundred pages: the conflict between Ahab and his first mate. Burke did not fully understand the Americans, any more than the first mate understands Captain Ahab. And none of the Americans on the Pequod is more Burkean than this doomed first mate. Time to name him: he is Starbuck. The utter failure of Starbuck's courage, prudence, and fortitude, the “undraped spectacle

of a valor-ruined man,” speaks the most difficult truths, Ishmael thought, about the democratic, egalitarian society and its God (1964:160).

Intervening unsuccessfully against the Restraining Act in 1775, 15 years before reflections on France, Burke explained the Americans as best he could to his peers, hoping for “prudent management,” not force, to sustain “profitable and subordinate connection” to people of extraordinary commerce (Dolin 2007:146–147). Whaling displayed American character, excesses Burke wrongly attributed to collective manly youth:

Neither the perseverance of Holland, nor the activity of France, nor the dexterous and firm sagacity of British enterprise, ever carried this most perilous mode of hard industry to the extent to which it has been pushed by this recent people; a people who are still, as it were, but in the gristle, and not yet hardened into the bone of manhood. (2007:146–147)

Starbuck was young, only 30, with a dignity “august,” “abounding,” and entirely “democratic,” courageous in a particular way:

Starbuck was no crusader after perils; in him courage was not a sentiment, but a thing simply useful to him, and always, at hand upon all mortally practical occasions. Besides, he thought, perhaps, that in this business of whaling, courage was one of the great staple outfits of the ship, like her beef and her bread, and not to be foolishly wasted. (1964:159)

Even Starbuck’s superstition was founded, Ishmael insisted, on intelligence, care, and prudence, seeking fair estimation of encountered peril (1964:158). Melville is neither Burke, nor Starbuck. Melville feared something different than loss of inheritance, wasted opportunity, or even failure of duty. Melville’s narrator Ishmael quailed at the telling, where it is the story of Starbuck. For “men may seem detestable as joint-stock companies and nations” (1964:160, fyi Mr. Burke)² but this tragedy speaks to more basic things than ethnicity, gender, politics, or history. Starbuck has a signature flaw: he cannot understand Ahab even though he sees, understands, and addresses every portent.

Consider the leaking oil, late in the voyage: Ahab did not want to stop, of course, to find the leak among the packed casks. Starbuck violated the

isolate sanctity of the captain's cabin to object in the name of the venture: "Either do that, sir, or waste in one day more oil than we may make good in a year. What we come 20,000 miles to get is worth saving, sir" (1964:603). Ahab was dismissive, rejecting even that the oil and not the white whale was the larger purpose of the voyage. "Begone! Let it leak! I'm all leak myself. ...Yet I don't stop to plug my leak; for who can find it in the deep-loaded hull; or how hope to plug it, even if found, in this life's howling gale?" (1964:603-604). "What will the owners say, sir?" Starbuck persisted. Ahab again dismissed the actual reckoning of invested capital, replacing financial enterprise with an existential one:

Let the owners stand on Nantucket beach and outyell the Typhoons. What cares Ahab? Owners, owners? Thou are always prating to me, Starbuck, about those miserly owners, as if the owners were my conscience. But look ye, the only real owner of anything is its commander; and hark ye, my conscience is in this ship's keel. —On deck! (1964:604)

Ahab's musket in his face, Starbuck dared to ask to "understand each other better." Ahab declared himself lord of the ship. Starbuck retreated, warning Ahab not to beware of Starbuck, "thou wouldst but laugh; but let Ahab beware of Ahab" (1964:605). Seeing "something there," Ahab relented enough to hoist the Burtons and spend days seeking deep leaks after all. But the larger pattern reduplicates. They sailed into a typhoon. The portents of ball lightning flowed evilly down into Ahab's face. He callously and righteously blew them out (Chapter 119, "The Candles"). Starbuck and the men wanted to turn the storm into a following wind toward clear skies and home, but Ahab sailed them into the heart of the tempest.

Ahab's downfall unfolded almost endlessly, but Starbuck's doom was actually completed very early, in Chapter 36, when Ahab revealed that the white whale had severed his leg. Moby-Dick "dismasted me," and "this is what ye have shipped for, men! to chase that white whale on both sides of the land, and over all sides of the earth, till he spouts black blood and rolls fin out. What say ye, men, will ye splice hands on it, now? I think ye do look brave" (1964:219). For Ahab, it all came together: manhood and courage, ships and their techniques, dismasting and splicing, companies and their purposes. The men rushed to agree, promised an ounce of gold (pounded

into the mast, another portent) for spotting the great white. Mr. Starbuck quietly objected by not joining in, and Ahab called him out; “Art thou not game?” Starbuck responded that he was game for the jaws of Death itself, “if it fairly comes in the way of the business we follow” but that vengeance “will not fetch thee much in our Nantucket market” (1964:220).

C.L.R James rightly emphasized injury in the origins of Ahab’s madness and his fiery hunt. The real origin of the obsession is insistence that the injury has a meaning, like a collapsed Zande granary. The meaning follows from enterprise culture already in its American place in Ahab’s psyche. Seeing Hitler in Ahab, James sought a parable about tendencies of modern capitalist civilization to totalitarian excess; I will prefer to reflect on 9/11 and madness launched when Dan Rather looked at his dismantled buildings and asked, for all Americans, “why do they hate us?”, as the US launched the fiery hunt of our age (see also Kelly, Jacobsen, and Morgan n.d.). James was right that the greatest tragedy is why no one can stop the fiery hunt, neither the leaders of actual business like Starbuck nor the various intelligent folk of the ship on its voyage out. All the more reason to understand why Starbuck’s fate was sealed so early, “this undraped spectacle of a valor-ruined man,” that speaks the most difficult truths. Far from shying away from criticism, as James thought, Melville actually, via Ishmael, raised his voice to God, when the subject was the tragedy of this good man Starbuck: “Thou who, in all Thy mighty, earthly marchings, ever cullest Thy selected champions from the kingly commons; bear me out in it, O God!” (1964:161). The adequacy of election and redemptive powers of democracy are themselves at stake, in finding a way to thwart American fiery hunts.

At the crux for Starbuck, Ahab wouldn’t contest prices. “Nantucket market! Hoot!” (1964:220). In this great binding of fate within collective enterprise, the argument between them was at one deep level, theological, and even deeper, an ultimate tragedy of Starbuck’s pragmatism itself. Starbuck was done in by his Burkean limits. He understood no more, ultimately, than the vitality of enterprise itself. “Vengeance on a dumb brute!” cried Starbuck, “that simply smote thee from blindest instinct! Madness! To be enraged with a dumb thing, Captain Ahab, seems blasphemous” (1964:220). In Ahab’s bizarre rejoinder, we meet the paranoid transvaluation intrinsic to all fiery hunts (e.g., Henry Kissinger’s “geopolitics,” which read all events as Cold War communications):

Hark ye again,—the little lower layer. All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event—the living act, the undoubted deed—there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask! ...Sometimes I think there's naught beyond. But 'tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him. (1964: 220–221).

We will return to whiteness and this mask. Here, the fire of the hunt. Ahab's fiery hunt is sacred. The quest against the Nemesis gives meaning. Thwarting more ordinary enterprise must itself be beyond ordinary criticism. "Talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I strike the sun if it insulted me....Who is over me? Truth has no confines. Take off thine eye! more intolerable than fiends' glarings is a doltish stare!" (1964:221). Still, what crows Starbuck into submission is not theology, but his prudent awareness of manifest enterprise. "The crew, man, the crew!" Ahab concluded. "Are they not one and all with Ahab, in this matter of the whale?...Stand up amid the general hurricane, thy one tost sapling cannot, Starbuck! And what is it? Reckon it. 'Tis but to strike a fin; no wondrous feat for Starbuck" (1964:222). Observing the impact on his enterprising mate, Ahab suddenly knew. The fight was over. Ahab spoke to himself under his breath. "Starbuck now is mine; cannot oppose me now, without rebellion" (1964:222). And Starbuck, meanwhile, was muttering too, seeking otherworldly solution in despair: "God keep me!—keep us all!" (1964:222).

Method: Hunters and Gatherers

Frederick Douglass was a hunter cross platform (they might say today), a hunter of freedom through speeches, interviews, newspapers, and above all autobiographies. Few distinguished persons of letters leave behind a corpus so dominated by the autobiographical; among these the Montaignes prove the rule, that such autobiographers really hunt something other than themselves, by their special means. Melville called the hunt itself into question. Ishmael rivaled no one in thrusting aggression,

but, like Melville, he is much more a gatherer of truth. Ahab's is a story about hunting. Can we engage it critically, without veering from the enterprise of knowing literature into our own fiery hunts? And if ethnography tends toward gathering, our times have seen some "fiery gather." But I think that ethnographic method requires a degree or at least long moments of uncritical inquiry, despite being haunted in quest for political effectiveness. Contrapositively, critical inquiry can, should, and does worry about its trading zone with inquisition. James Boon has drawn a firm line in his critical ethnographies against symptomatic reading, readings that suppose the critic sees truths that the agents of discourse cannot. The structure of agency in all reading is complicated; but the writer need not be patient when the reader becomes agent, and certainly need not become ill, or worse the unreasoning or less-reasoning mask through which the real principal speaks and acts. Thus, Boonian readings are not a hunt beyond masks to deeper principals and truths. I think that gathering has more in common with Bakhtinian dialogics, hunting with Hegelean and Marxist dialectics. Thus, it is not surprising that James Boon's cosmopolitan moments, what he calls cosmomes, do not transvalue into signs of global truths, deeper structures, and agencies, but nonetheless are irreducibly new kinds of meanings, uncanny presences thickening in our globalizing era. And it is not surprising that Benjamin sought what he called dialectical images, to seize in moments of danger, to unleash powers.

Walter Benjamin was clearly a gatherer among the hunters in the world of Marxist dialectics. He expressed contrapuntal appreciation for the quiet pleasures of collecting over subsumptive conclusion and public announcement. His arcades project might be an all-time monument to scholarly gathering, especially with its strange destiny. All the more interesting, then, that he valorized hunting, and saw his form of scholarship as hunting.

Flâneurs, the Ishmaels of his arcades, "like an ascetic animal" (1999:M1,3 p.417), were, Benjamin argued in fragment M1,6 (417-418), sometimes like werewolves, "restlessly roaming in a social wilderness." He described how flâneurs "performed" the "figure" of the detective. Requiring "a social legitimation of his habitus," it suited the flâneur "very well to see his indolence presented as a plausible front, behind which, in reality, hides the riveted attention of an observer who will not let the unsuspecting malefactor out of his sight."

In his Arcades Project collection of quotations and thoughts on “idleness” (called convolute m), Benjamin decried the end of heroic indolence in capitalist leisure, and therein located the scholar as hunter.

Whoever follows traces must not only pay attention; above all, he must have given heed already to a great many things. (The hunter must know about the hoof of the animal whose trail he is on; he must know the hour when that animal goes to drink; he must know the course of the river to which it turns, and the location of the ford by which he himself can get across.) ...And the hunt is, as work, very primitive. ...They have no sequence and no system. They are a product of chance, and have about them the essential interminability that distinguishes the preferred obligations of the idler. The fundamentally unfinishable collection of things worth knowing, whose utility depends upon chance, has its prototype in study (m2,1 pp.801–802).

Benjamin portrayed reading, too, as hunting (m2a,1 p.802), and in hunting connected “work” resistant to more industrial activity: “The spontaneity common to the student, to the gambler, to the flâneur is perhaps that of the hunter—which is to say, that of the oldest type of work, which may be intertwined closest of all with idleness” (m5,2 p.806).

Heroic hunting, scholars as detectives, as flâneurs, as werewolves—these are way too heroic in a Boonian universe. Boon likes Benjamin. He is “tempted” to see in Benjamin a scholar of extra-vagance (1999:284).³ But Boon lacks Benjamin’s gender trouble, everything that causes Walter to worry about whether he is werewolf enough while idling, while Jim is more interested in reconsidering Ruth Benedict’s interests in the charisma of a female Shasta shaman, and learning to read texts and cultures as Benedict does, generously as well as critically, with marvel at the extraordinary (1999:36). Thus, while Boon elicits Benjamin’s help in defining the cosmome (1999:107), he also makes the cosmopolitan moment or cosmome different from a Benjaminian “dialectical image.” “‘Cosmopolitan’ in this case implies no pat universal order achieved by some citizen of a post-Revolutionary world,” but, rather, collisions of meaning and location “so intense and multiply allusive that they cancel each other out, empty into one another,” as much showbiz as karma (1999:116). Parody and carnival, not radical necessity, “The fleet leaps effected are lower than Kierkegaardian,” Boon says, not exactly Benjamin’s dialectical tiger’s leaps through strait

gates in time, “but no less exhilarating” anyway (1999:116). Boon seeks “asymptotic approaches to rites and texts, genders and genres,” writing “met half-way by equivalent acts of reading” (1999:xiv). Not gathering versus hunting, but more roles here; in Boon’s universe it is not so much that you hunt the cosmome as that the cosmome hunts you: “Difficult to define, impossible to predict, the beast is unmistakable when it strikes” (1999:116). What method sets one out to be hunted down by meanings? Boonian, indeed Boasian, ethnography.

Boon learned things about consumption and fetishism by reading critical theory while sitting in the Coca-Cola Museum in Atlanta. “The object of consumption isolates,” he read, sitting in a museum devoted to old advertisements, surrounded by “persons (including Americans) consuming them conspicuously *together*” (1999:256). But, he says, “I never really got to intervene Baudrillard’s book into this scene of Coca-Cola’s self-celebrations; because right upon entering I had looked up; and Coke’s initial display just blew me away” (1999:257). A reverie about his own past, engendered by Coke’s deliberate engines of nostalgia, illustrated exactly how complex the cultural dimensions of the lived commercial history were, and overtook any chance at critical distance. This same method is not ruthless criticism so much as real, bringing text into juxtaposition with reality, a new “task of ethnography” (1999:256). In the course of this inquiry I have tried this method, in Paris, in Singapore,⁴ and especially in New Bedford.

In New Bedford in 2013, I learned something important while in experimental and, thus, parodic reduplication of Boon’s Coca-Cola museum method. It was dark by then, too dark to attempt any more pictures of the Lewis Temple statue on the left flank of New Bedford’s City Hall, a statue equal in stature and second in placement to the memorial to whaling itself on the right. (Lewis Temple? soon.) Contemplating New Bedford self-representations (and awaiting dinner at a moderately noisy local restaurant), I pulled out *The Arcades Project*, determined to find something interesting. Reading randomly, I was frustrated finding nothing relevant to New Bedford, not merely the absence of numbers, companies, investments, ships, colonial stuff, non-white people (with one exception, technology; cf. Lewis Temple, below). I skipped to the indexes, and my problem with Benjamin’s capitalism became radically simplified. In 800 pages of arcades project fragments there were no references to New Bedford, New England, or New York. Edgar Allen Poe, yes: ten index lines of page

references. Melville, nothing. I have read two Benjamin biographies, and I am quite taken by the quote from Benjamin's own reflection on Kafka, that Kafka had the grace following from belief that redemption was possible, but not for him. More than one biographer shows that the line applies all the better to Benjamin himself, and I am sympathetic to his suffering. But the idea, that in the end Benjamin chose to die rather than visit America, was inescapably born. A "Guide to Names and Terms," mostly names, runs with over 20 entries a page (from 1017–1053). It includes a grand total of eight Americans: Phineas Barnum, Thomas Bellamy, Ambrose Bierce, Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, Loie Fuller, Lewis Henry Morgan, and Frederick Winslow Taylor. Bierce is referred to three times in the arcades files, each of these others only once. Baudelaire gets literally a thousand references, Hugo a file of his own. Nothing on Frederick Douglass, Thorstein Veblen, the Dewey Lippmann debate, or even Woodrow Wilson and his Parisian star turn. It is of course a study of Paris and its arcades. And other Americans appear: Walt Disney once, Robert Fulton four times, and of course Poe. No whales, no whaling. Leviathans do haunt the city, but as omnibuses, and underground trains, and sewers. Not Melville, but Hugo (412, 434). Everything happens as if Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables* chapter on "the intestines of the Leviathan" reset Melville's image as the capitalist city itself, and led Benjamin to infrastructures and technologies of consumption as the sites of social and moral struggle.

Call Me Frederick Douglass

"It cannot be that I will live and die a slave. I will take to the water. ... There is a better day coming."

—Douglass (2000 [1845]:72)

Now, when I go to sea, I go as a simple sailor... True, they rather order me about some... What does that indignity amount to, weighed, I mean, in the scales of the New Testament?... Who aint a slave? Tell me that. ... Though I cannot tell why it was exactly that those stage managers, the Fates, put me down for this... I think I can see a little into the springs and motives... cajoling me into the delusion that it was a choice resulting from my own unbiased free will and

discriminating judgment. Chief among these ideas was the overwhelming idea of the great whale himself.

— Ishmael, in Melville (1964:27-29)

Our libraries include many oversimplifying accounts of American concepts of liberty. Locating it, following Melville, within cultures of enterprise makes it different. Frederick Douglass was called to freedom and its duty of work, called to lay preaching. After he stunned the crowd at an abolition rally he was literally called to his true vocation, witnessing for abolition. It appears that Douglass and Melville never met. Nor did they have significant literary interactions. Nonetheless, an impressive group of scholars pursue meanings of their brief co-residence in New Bedford (e.g., Wallace 2005, Levine and Otter 2008). I won't review conjectures of influence, some very possible, so we can focus: why did these two serious intellectuals find themselves (yes, in both senses) there?

This, for all that Melville can explain, Douglass explained better than Melville. Melville was too distracted by fantasies of freedom to fully understand its realities, a mistake that Douglass would never make. Called to freedom by sea, because there he could pretend to be what he was, the man named by his mother Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey first changed his name to Stanley, and on reaching New York became Frederick Johnson. He was awake and alive. In his first, 1845 autobiographical narrative, Douglass emphasized the determination required:

In coming to a fixed determination to run away, we did more than Patrick Henry ...With us it was a doubtful liberty at most, and almost certain death if we failed. (2000:88)

Later Douglass said more about the onset of that liberty. In 1845, he emphasized how bonds of love, and fear for others, held slaves back from any plan for the rest of their lives. In 1855, he added something else, more resonant with Marx's capitalist ironies.

Some apology can easily be made for the few slaves who have, after making good their escape, turned back to slavery, preferring the actual rule of their masters, to the life of loneliness, apprehension, hunger, and anxiety, which meets them on their first arrival in a free state.

...A man, homeless, shelterless, breadless, friendless, and moneyless, is not in a condition to assume a very proud or joyous tone; and in just such a condition was I, while wandering about the streets of New York city and lodging, at least for one night, among the barrels on one of its wharves. I was not only free from slavery, but I was free from home, as well. The reader will easily see that I had something more than the simple fact of being free to think of (1855:216).

In this condition, New Bedford saved him. Spotted for who he really was on the New York street, and connected with the underground railroad, Frederick Johnson was interviewed, advised, provided transportation, an advance, and connections. "Thus, in one fortnight after my flight from Maryland, I was safe in New Bedford, and regularly entered upon the exercise of rights, responsibilities, and duties of a freeman" (1855:217). Finding many in New Bedford already named Johnson, he accepted well-founded advice, kept his first name and adopted the surname Douglass.

New Bedford's booming whaling industry drew escaped slaves and free persons of color, close to ten percent of its population by the mid-19th century, a larger proportion than any other Northern town or city (for details see Mulderink 2012:33ff, Grover 2001:Chapter 2). By 1850, black men with no protection paper to verify their free citizenship made up more than 20 percent of the whaling crews. Who would risk Ahab, on cruises more than three years long, going to the end of the earth? Grover cites rare direct testimony from the 1840s: "I thought I would go on a whaling voyage, as being the place where I stood least chance of being arrested by slave hunters" (2001:58; see also Mulderink 2012).

In both 1845 and 1855, Douglass emphasized work for wages in New Bedford: "It was for me the starting-point of a new existence" (2009:113; cf. 1969:222). Here, Douglass and Melville were clearly in the same city. Why then Ishmael's ruminating doubts about his own delusion of free will, his "who aint a slave?" Listening to Douglass, we hear firm connection of pragmatics of planning with consciousness and reality of freedom of action, all bound for him within the concept of "determination." "I must do something," thought the slave in 1845, developing "my life-giving determination" (86) "unbending in our determination to go" (87) "coming to fixed determination to run away" (88) "It was truly a matter of life and death with us. Our determination was about to be fully tested" (89). Not an ensorcelling fetishized commodious materiality in sight.

One of the few Americans cited by Benjamin, Frederick Winslow Taylor, was a notorious efficiency engineer, author of *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1911) now best remembered via parody in *Cheaper by the Dozen*. Benjamin quoted Georges Friedmann's 1936 *The Crisis of Progress* for its argument that "Taylor's obsession, and that of his collaborators and successors, is the 'war on flanerie'" (Benjamin M10,1 436). The one kind of determination never enlisted by Douglass is John Locke's theology, the alternative to divine predestination, made into global politics by Woodrow Wilson at Versailles: war on flanerie indeed. The one kind of determination not embraced by Douglass is "self-determination," action as expression of identity. In their extremity, both Melville and Douglass said at different junctures, their protagonists had much more important things to worry about than their selves.

"Yes," said Ishmael, "the world's a ship on its passage out, and not a voyage complete." We have stopped the quotation at this point, as is common, including on the wall of the New Bedford Whaling museum. But Melville followed "complete" with a semicolon, not a period. "and the pulpit is its prow," he added, at the end of Chapter 8, "The Pulpit" (1964:70).

Lewis Temple, the Seaman's Bethel, and Representation in New Bedford

The world, a ship on its voyage out, with or without a pulpit at its prow: contending transvaluations haunt us. Extra-Vagant gathering helps differently than romantic anti-fetishism, not pursuing deepest underlying truths but showing by juxtaposition the sublime sensibilities generated by transvaluations in action. The paradox of freedom by way of participation in enterprises that are not self-determined, enterprises that neither begin nor end with us, like for example our languages and discourse, professions and politics, that paradox resolves differently if we return to theology or seek some other sublime. I will examine here two non-religious capitalist sublimes, the technological (or, for those still francophilic despite my honest efforts, following Deleuze, Badiou, and Latour, "the emergent") and the postcolonial (or for those who orient to axes of power, "the racial"; who can only imagine within liberalism, "the marginalized"). Marvellously, the technological/emergent and the postcolonial/racial/exmarginalized come together in New Bedford memory, which is also to say, New Bedford tourism, in the figuration of Lewis Temple.

In 1848, Lewis Temple, a black man, invented a stouter, sturdier version of the toggling harpoon. A harpoon topped with Temple's toggle locks vertically that won't break or tip when thrust into a whale; once the harpoon is embedded and pulled back, the toggle slides, turns, and locks horizontally, jamming the barb widely in the flesh. Temple's toggle was too new to appear in *Moby-Dick*, but it accelerated mass death of cetaceans worldwide. I still recall from my youth a side hall upstairs at the New Bedford Whaling Museum, explaining Temple's toggle in several panels, praising the black blacksmith for his contribution emblematic of African-American contributions to whaling generally. I was disappointed, a few years ago, to find that hallway gone—until I discovered how much of the main floor, with the elevation of New Bedford to status as National Park, had been devoted to the Lewis Temple story. Later, I discovered the statue, black blacksmith, thoughtfully looking over a harpoon tip, stationed on the lawn before New Bedford City Hall in 1987. New Bedford also has its statues to Frederick Douglass and to Herman Melville, but not right there. A positive way to recognize race and efficiently engineer inclusivity: by way of past contributions to the future. Seizing a flash at a moment of danger? Not exactly. A story of a beleaguered race redeemed by technology? A vicious technology redeemed by something? Both? And neither. The plaque on this statue carefully explains that Lewis Temple died without a patent for his invention, that he and his heirs shared none of the real profits of whaling. Together with the deaths of seamen and cetaceans, another haunting New Bedford story. The most secular New Bedford sublime is self-consciously post-triumphalist, while proudly giving Lewis Temple his due.

Tourism began in New Bedford long before the town enshrined redemptive ambivalence in multi-cultural thematics. Its first major tourist site was the Seaman's Bethel, the Quaker meetinghouse actually frequented by Melville, still open for worship. But if we expect that in the past things were simple, we are in for more surprises. I remember touring the Seaman's Bethel several years ago, and learning from a calm, elderly docent-type figure the intriguing inside story. Yes, Melville really prayed there, and his pew is properly marked, amidst memorials of deaths at sea every bit as morbid as described in *Moby-Dick*. But the pulpit is another story. Melville described Father Mapple thundering from a pulpit built to resemble the prow of a ship. This enabled his classic line, the world voyaging out, pulpit as its prow. But the actual Seaman's Bethel, being a

Quaker place, had nothing more than an open front stage, raised empty platform from which leaders of prayer could speak. This changed after John Huston's 1956 movie version of *Moby Dick*, which filmed its Father Mapple in a more scenic chapel in Scotland, and built a pulpit in the shape of a ship's prow. Thereafter, visitors to the actual Seaman's Bethel in New Bedford were too often disappointed. The community decided to install a pulpit, not merely as described by Melville, but to resemble the one in Huston's film, making everyone happy.

There is a problem with my memory. The US Park Service itself tells the story of the pulpit on a large placard installed in front of the Seaman's Bethel, front-staging the back story of adaptation to visitor expectations, from book and film. The placard does not look new. Did the kindly docent simply tell me a story readily available on the sign outside? Is the placard newer than my memory, the result of positive experiences of visitor reactions to the back story? Or is my memory false? Hard to say. But if New Bedford's Lewis Temple story fits squarely within the canons of contemporary tragic surrealism, its Seaman's Bethel manages to combine cenotaph authenticity with the postmodern elegance now similarly quaint. A national historical park with the history of its history already in plain sight.

White Sails, and the Whiteness of the Whale: Douglass and Ahab and D.H. Lawrence

So, what about the whiteness of this whale Moby-Dick? James, Glover, and others demonstrate that New Bedford history is much about race. Is the whiteness of the whale a statement about race? Race in America? Race in the universe? Race and God?

D.H. Lawrence had contempt for Melville's vision. Lawrence thought it was about white racial destiny, and about doom for "our civilization."

Melville knew. He knew his race was doomed. His white soul, doomed. His great white epoch, doomed. Himself, doomed...

What then is Moby Dick? He is the deepest blood-being of the white race; he is our deepest blood nature.

And he is hunted, hunted, hunted by the maniacal fanaticism of our white mental consciousness. We want to hunt him down. To subject him to our will. And in this maniacal conscious hunt of ourselves we get dark races and pale to help us, red, yellow, and black, east

and west, Quaker and fire-worshiper, we get them all to help us in this ghastly maniacal hunt which is our doom and our suicide.

The last phallic being of the white man. Hunted...Our blood-consciousness sapped by a parasitic mental or ideal consciousness. (1955:1060–1061)

Lawrence knew of Melville's disquisition on "whiteness," that "The great abstract fascinated him" (1955:1051), but he dismissed it as "awful flounderings in mystical waters," a source of the book's beauty but not its real meaning. To Lawrence, the real meaning is failure to face necessities of race relations. Lawrence compares Ahab's madness to Wilson's naïve plans for global democracy at Versailles (1955:1049). The colonizer's reading.

But how does the whiteness of the whale connect to the Americanness of the Pequod? Is there, in this whiteness so connected to Ahab's madness, anything like the freedom in Douglass's quest? Douglass shows no disquiet connecting whiteness and freedom, and one cannot say without cognizance. Douglass recalls vividly his open contemplations in his slave days, part of his coming to awareness of his own possibilities.

Our house stood within a few rods of Chesapeake Bay, whose broad bosom was ever white with sails from every quarter of the habitable globe. Those beautiful vessels, robed in purest white, so delightful to the eye of freemen, were to me so many shrouded ghosts, to terrify and torment me with thoughts of my wretched condition. I have often, in the deep stillness of a summer's Sabbath, stood all alone upon the lofty banks of that noble bay, and traced, with saddened heart and tearful eye, the countless number of sails moving off to the mighty ocean. ...there, with no audience but the Almighty, I would pour out my soul's complaint...You are freedom's swift-winged angels, that fly round the world; I am confined in bands of iron! ...Let me be free! Is there any God? Why am I a slave? I will run away. (2009:71)

Douglass attached whiteness to ships, sails, their motion, their freedom, the world, ghosts, angels, and God, in contrast to confinement, iron, and not his self but his condition, his wretchedness not of being but of state. Nobody's blood, in Douglass's tale, is white or black. He has no difficulty separating light and darkness in heart and soul from skin color, office, and authority. In the end, Douglass breaks with William Lloyd Garrison over the

principle of more perfect union, belief in a constitutional place for south and north, colored and white. He tells his “sable brothers” that “clouds and darkness” notwithstanding “bright skies shall yet shine on their pathway” (1969:262). Race matters, to borrow a contemporary locution, because his “great and primary work” is “the universal and unconditional emancipation of my entire race” (1969:262). Race matters, to Douglass, because emancipation matters most (see also Davis 2005). Light and dark mean more in theological good and evil than in variations of skin.

Both Lawrence’s frankly racial horror, and Douglass’s emancipatory sublime, contrast with Melville’s own, strange commentary on color and enterprise, especially in his chapter on “The Whiteness of the Whale.”

What the white whale was to Ahab, has been hinted; what, at times, he was to me, as yet remains unsaid. (252)...It was the whiteness of the whale that above all things appalled me. (253)...But not yet have we solved the incantation of whiteness, and learned why it appeals with such power to the soul;...at once the most meaning symbol of spiritual things, nay, the very veil of the Christian’s Deity; and yet should be as it is, the intensifying agent in things the most appalling to mankind.

Is it by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation, when beholding the white depths of the milky sky? Or is it, that as in essence whiteness is not so much a color as the visible absence of color, and at the same time the concrete of all colors, it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows—a colorless, all-color of atheism from which we shrink? (263–264)...And of all these things the Albino whale was the symbol. Wonder ye then at the fiery hunt? (264)

Ishmael is appalled, precisely, by what transfixes and reorients Ahab. Ahab, frustrated by the meaningless attack of unreasoning nature violently taking his leg and forever limiting his life, quests beyond the unreasoning mask to the Nemesis he must find and conquer to restore his triumphalist dreams. But Ishmael expects, from experience, that beyond appearances lies nothing. As Veblen (1978) shows within the mathematics of value, joint-stock companies and their credit-based financial systems

overwhelmed and colonized industry with their future-oriented valuations, the pragmatic optimism of enterprise investing new possibilities into the tangible. But it can collapse when pushed too far, especially by the fiery hunts of its own frustrations. Where Benjamin allied fashion and death, and sought solace among idler werewolves, Melville via Ishmael observes in the creative destruction of determination in enterprise, taken too far, the limits of free agency itself. An object, and in enterprise a process, only viable within the finitude of actual meaning.

Parisian Arcades: Good to Think With?

Benjamin thought that the dialectical images of the past could sometimes be hunted down, seized, their flashing energy captured. He wanted the 19th century utopias captured in the Parisian arcades, a superseded modernity of glass and steel without gas lighting—fantasy images of utmost commodity before the advent of department stores—to shock us out of the narcotic hold of capitalist fetishism and wake us up to capitalist realities. Melville has led us to three reconsiderations: first, that Benjamin’s critique of capitalism (even if we supplement it, say, with James Walvin’s fruits of empire, filling an imperial capital’s stores [see Walvin 1997]) attacks mainly ideology of circulation of commodity. Add production, labor, and its exploitation? This still ignores the companies, the going concerns, whose ideologies and institutions of investment change conditions of possibility, as when New Bedford whale oil lit Paris. Second, that the enterprise culture of this new world order actually relies on markets and marketing more as a means than an end, and has pragmatic structures of enterprise, meaning and value connecting not merely labor and its product but present investment sublimated into future destiny, a connected but distinct, more determined and austere dreamworld made real by active agency in enterprise. Yes, desirous flâneurs are disciplined episodically by circumstances, but Melville shows us internalized duties of freedom’s determination, that famous American quiet desperation we see in its phases in Ahab, Starbuck, and above all in Ishmael himself. And third, we can situate capitalism in relations with the whole world, race as well as class (and as Boon put it, genders and genres) with dialogics that inform as well as dialectics that reform. Because real enterprises are made to do so, in their own new terms, all the time, which is why they are real. (Including arcades in Paris.)

I have already made my plea for pretending that New Bedford, not Paris, was capital of the 19th century. Here, recalling Benjamin's hunt for insights into possible futures in the near ruins of past hopes, I want to finish with a long coda on the postmodern Paris arcades, the afterlife of the commodity's Parisian empire. I visited in autumn 2013 many of the arcades Benjamin mentioned, gathering impressions, and hunting for things in Paris's 21st century undreamt in Benjaminian philosophy. Six seem worth our attention.

* * *

Hausmann, or the barricades (no photo). As Parisians well know, the boulevards and the arcades are still there. The latest fashions on the Champs-Élysées include American house brands, yes Starbucks, but also their parody ("Best Mountain"). The Arc still declares Romanesque triumph. But before the 2015 terror attacks, and perhaps anticipating something like them, the state's security could no longer rely on the breadth of Hausmann's avenues. Men in uniform, not police but some kind of military, or military masquerade, fought the war on terror across the street from the triumphal Arc. Men in camouflage stopped some pedestrians behind me and demanded to check their papers. Pedestrians doing nothing, walking round the Arc, talking, possibly after all shopping, flâneurs we might hope in a Benjaminian interpretation but no, actually the inverse, pulled out of the thin crowd on the real street and inspected for illegitimacy, matter out of place, possible terrorists. Yes, they looked Arab, to me after they looked suspicious to the men in camouflage. Protecting the Arc from acts of terrorism. And perhaps teaching local Algerians their place. The pedestrians protested not at all.

Tanks rolling down the street are no longer the epitome of power projection: the state now has new problems, new forms of mobile hostility, new others to address. Police or military? Neither, exactly. Men decked out in camouflage not the least concealing of their presence, military peace keepers or police painted up for war: not Bea Jauregui's green, quiet, deliberately invisible deadly military force, but definitely Jauregui's blue, force dressed to be seen and intimidate rather than to actually deploy violence, yet in camouflage. French blue masquerading as French green. They let them go with a warning. Walking while Arab.

I find no Arab, or Algerian, in Benjamin's convolutes, the 800 pages. Algeria comes up in the file on Literary History, Hugo, in connection with

the effort of Narcisse, comte de Salvady, a government minister, to hire Alexandre Dumas in 1846 to travel to Algeria to write propaganda to inspire further French colonization. A humorous scandal, according to the quotation Benjamin clipped, ridicule on all sides once the shady details went public (1999:d4,1 pp.750-51). Around that time Tocqueville, so fond of egalite, seizing the flash of democracy in America in France's moment of danger, was also, already an active advocate for French settler colonization of Algeria. The collapse and withdrawal of native culture would take care of itself, Tocqueville thought: he wanted Camus, not Ibn Khaldun, or Fanon, or even Sartre, to invigorate France with new world settler enterprise values (see also Tocqueville 2003). Many enterprises do not work out in their own terms, but still have consequences

Forensic situations better justify symptomatic readings, a reason for their attractiveness. Benjamin found his near ruins and made them flash. But patients who aren't really dead set a limit to the jurisdiction of scholarly necromancy. This frustrates literate scholars less than it used to. Living through this sea change, and not passively, James Boon shows how to read, and see, otherwise than symptomatically. He opens the door to ethnography for cultural studies: toward the things and people in the world along with our philosophies. ■



PHOTO BY JOHN D. KELLY

Figure 1: *Passage des Panoramas* and *Passage Jouffroy*. What we might expect: heritage Paris, higher rent than it would seem, top hats, canes, books, and curios for sale, as deliberate in representation as anything in New Bedford, and often a lot more subtle. But flâneurie metamorphoses into panto on the one side and tourism on the other.



PHOTO BY JOHN D. KELLY

Figure 2: *Galerie Vivienne*. Upscale, a favorite of the guidebooks, few people actually in the shops. The tourists come by bus and the tour guides wear distinctive hats, and explain.



PHOTO BY JOHN D. KELLY

Figure 3: Galerie Colbert. No longer in the guidebooks, because no longer public, but equally upscale, now university property. Another Shakespearean moment: I enter, and am even given coffee, by pretending to be who I am, a Professor from another such place. In the side rooms a conference is under way. We meet the future of the arcade and it is us? Not only.



Figure 4: *Passage Choiseul*. Not so polished, still. The Theatre des Bouffes Parisiens, which interested Benjamin, is still there. As are bargain vendors, for example of shoes. But also something else. In 800 pages, Benjamin never notices anyone East Asian in the capital of the 19th century. But now, Paris also becomes part of China, Japan, and Korea's world. With and without English. Paris too is settled and colonized, for example in the *Passage Choiseul*.



PHOTO BY JOHN D. KELLY

Figure 5: *Passage Brady*. First photo of two. Renovation is also transformation, with South Asian style remodeling the Parisian arcade in more than one way.

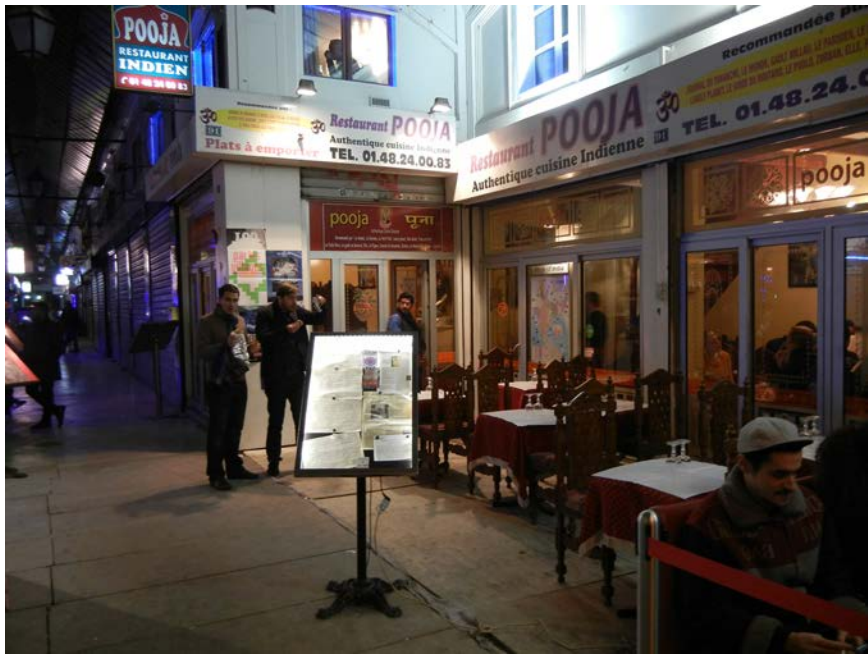


PHOTO BY JOHN D. KELLY

Figure 6: *Passage Brady*. Undergoing renaissance beyond the ken of Benjamin's history of fashions, as Paris becomes more actually cosmopolitan. New forms of commodiousness find new uses for some of Paris's arcades. Even the arcades are not safe from actual history, especially that of capitalist enterprises.

Endnotes:

¹For example, Baudrillard (1988). Simulacra for Baudrillard and phantasmagoria for Benjamin: if you want a paper clarifying the aporia that rise from attempts to connect them, you can write it.

²Here Melville is rebuking, albeit virtually, the depth of the ethics and quality of the perceptions of Mr. Burke as surely as he unwraps those of every phase of the Quaker.

³"Extra-Vagance" comes to Boon from Henry David Thoreau, whose world overlaps much with the life-worlds of Douglass and Melville (Gallagher 2013). For a New Bedford audience, Thoreau reflected on the connected evils of slavery, devotion to mere livelihood, and gold-rush values in contrast to free devotion to a real purpose: "The rush to California...That so many are ready to live by luck, and so get the means of commanding the labor of others less lucky, without contributing any value to society! And that is called enterprise!" In an 1854 letter to a New Bedford friend Thoreau reported on this lecture in Nantucket, there titled "What Shall It Profit?" published in 1862 as "Life Without Principle." "I was obliged to pay the usual tribute to the sea" but in the end, "I found them to be the very audience for me."

⁴I write in Singapore, influenced by the prospect that Singapore, its politics and all, may prove to be the capital of the 21st century. Patke (2003) precedes us in connecting Singapore with Benjamin's Arcades, depicting well the more-than-bourgeois postcolonial city. How we baseline Western capitalism affects our efforts to understand the quiet, contemporary competition between state, scientific, socialist capitalisms and what has come before, including European industrial empires and American free enterprise. Any genealogy of capital must give pride of place to London, which has the strongest claim, measured in actual financial capital, to be the capital of the 19th century, much as New York dominates the capital markets of the 20th century and does still (for a while at least). But, as Weber was perhaps the first to insist, the genealogy of capitalist cultures cultivates itself more strangely.

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New Bedford, Capital of the 19th Century?

[**Keywords:** arcades, Melville, Frederick Douglass, enterprise, race, capitalism, America, werewolves]

新贝德福，十九世纪之首都？

[**关键词:** 商场，梅尔维尔，弗雷德里克·道格拉斯，企业，种族，资本论，美国，狼人]

Нью-Бедфорд, столица XIX века?

[**Ключевые слова:** аркады, Мелвилл, Фредерик Дуглас, препринимательство, раса, капитализм, Америка, оборотни]

Nova Bedford, Capital do Século XIX?

[**Palavras-chave:** arcadas, Melville, Frederick Douglass, empresa, raça, capitalismo, América, lobisomens]

نيو بدفور، عاصمة القرن ٩١

كلمات البحث: الأروقة، ملفيل، فردريك دوغلاس، الشركة، السلالة، الرأسمالية، أمريكا، ذئاب ضارية

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