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# Introduction to Walt Whitman's "Life and Adventures of Jack Engle"

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# INTRODUCTION TO WALT WHITMAN'S *LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF JACK ENGLE*

ZACHARY TURPIN



Nothing is ever really lost, or can be lost.

—“Continuities” (1888)

IN THE AUTUMN of 1850, a newspaper called *The New-Yorker* was set to debut in Manhattan.<sup>1</sup> For “six and one-fourth cents per week” subscribers were offered the latest news, plus “a series of *Nouvelettes* or *Stories*, of the highest merit, in advance of any other publication.” Perhaps prematurely, it was promoted as “the best Family Paper in the Union.”<sup>2</sup> As a literary daily, *The New-Yorker* was going to need a steady stream of good fiction to maintain a readership—and indeed, its editor, Carlos D. Stuart, received plenty of mail from writers offering stirring tales at modest prices. One author, a novelist and short-story writer from Brooklyn, sent a letter on October 10 volunteering a particularly wide range of services. Did Stuart, he asks,

have any sort of “opening” in your new enterprise, for services that I could render? I am out of regular employment, and fond of the press—and, if you would be disposed to “try it on,” I should like to have an interview with you, for the purposing of seeing whether we could agree to something. My ideas of salary are *very* moderate.

Would you like a Story, of some length for your paper?<sup>3</sup>

After requesting a reply through the post office, the fiction writer signs off: “Yours, &c Walter Whitman.”

Though he rarely identified as an author of fiction, the fact remains that by the age of thirty, Whitman had published a popular novel and more than twenty well-received—and in some cases, widely republished—short stories and novellas.<sup>4</sup> In their time, his tales appeared alongside Hawthorne’s, Poe’s, Cooper’s, and Child’s, in some of

the premier literary magazines in the United States, including the *Democratic Review*, the *Columbian Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine*, the *American Review*, and the *Union Magazine*. Counting reprints, Whitman's tales saw publication in more than two hundred periodicals across the country. Even his temperance novel, *Franklin Evans* (1842), an early effort he would later detest, sold 20,000 copies—making it the bestselling literary creation of his lifetime.<sup>5</sup> Whitman's years of engagement with fiction, and his popular and commercial successes as a writer of stories, are enough to make one wonder, as Stephanie M. Blalock does, “why and how Whitman left fiction writing to pursue poetry.”<sup>6</sup>

It is a deceptively simple question. There is the instinct to point to *Leaves of Grass* as the full and final answer, to see it as a creative work that could only have come from the pencil of a committed poet. By this logic, Whitman put away fiction because he “had” to. It is tempting to think so. Indeed, Whitman is now so deeply dyed in the wool of American culture that it is difficult *not* to think so. How else to explain his shift from rather conventional newspaper poetry in the 1840s, to a revolutionary new prose-poetics, with free-verse effusions like “Blood-Money” (1850), “Resurgemus” (1850), and, eventually, *Leaves of Grass* (1855)? Surely something must have gotten left in the dust, and critics from Edgar Lee Masters to Paul Zweig have long assumed that that something was Whitman's fiction. According to them, Whitman was no good at fiction-writing—or, at the very least, it was insufficient for his expressive needs. After all, even poetry, Whitman writes, “can merely hint, or remind, often very indirectly, or at distant removes. Aught of real perfection, or the solution of any deep problem, or any completed statement of the moral, the true, the beautiful, eludes the greatest, deftest poet—flies away like an always uncaught bird.”<sup>7</sup> The fiction-writer, presumably, is left even more birdless.

While tidy, such reasoning is prey to what Henri Bergson calls “illusions of retrospective determinism,” the fallacy that because something happened, under the circumstances it *had* to happen.<sup>8</sup> Further, it is simply too easy to underestimate the breadth of Whitman's literary experimentation in fiction, and to downplay the extent to which his

fictions inform his poetic development. It always has been. Still, the fact remains: *Leaves of Grass* did not have to be, and came close enough not to being, poetry. In Whitman's notebooks pre-dating *Leaves of Grass*, we read the thoughts not of a decided poet but a young man in flux, an artist in search of the right artistic mode. How does one "personify the general objects of the creation and give them voice," he writes to himself, "every thing on the most august scale—a leaf of grass, with its equal voice"? In a "Novel?—Work of some sort / Play?—instead of sporadic characters—introduce them in large masses, on a far grander scale ... A spiritual novel?"<sup>9</sup> That *Leaves of Grass* might have emerged as fiction or drama is a detail of its inception that tends to go unrecalled.

To make matters worse, it has never been clear what, if any, fiction-writing Whitman may have done during the initial composition of *Leaves*, in the early 1850s.<sup>10</sup> Both publicly and privately, his silence on the matter was total. Indeed, beyond asserting that newspaper rejections clinched his transition away from prose, Whitman rarely mentioned *any* supplementary writing he may have done during those years. His late-life interviews are almost perfectly unhelpful in this regard: "I got a bee in my bonnet," he says in a typical example, "and took to the pen. I soon published 'Leaves of Grass.'"<sup>11</sup> That is all. Thus, when it comes to relating Whitman's fiction-writing to the development of *Leaves of Grass*, scholars have always been at a handicap. Traditionally, fiction and lyric poetry are designated as two nearly discrete phases of the poet's life, with little in the way of simultaneity. However, new bibliographic evidence complicates this view of Whitman's career.

During the three or so years spent composing the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, the poet wrote a great deal of fiction, and not merely fragmentary story drafts here and there.<sup>12</sup> Whitman wrote novels, too. The first, that "Story of some length" he offered to Stuart, is known as *The Sleptalker* (1850), a book Whitman loosely adapted from *The Childhood of King Erik Menved* (1828, transl. 1846), a long and somewhat repetitive historical romance by Danish novelist B. S. Ingemann. Now lost, *The Sleptalker* was almost certainly a completed novel, as Whitman's own letters attest. Before offering it to Stuart, he

had pitched it to the editors of the New York *Sun*, estimating that the book “would make about 65 leaded short columns”—that is, would fill three full newspaper columns a day for twenty-two days. Whitman thought his adaptation “most interesting, romantic, and full of incident,” but evidently the *Sun*’s editors did not agree.<sup>13</sup> They declined to publish the novel, and Stuart seems to have passed on it as well.

True to what we know of him in the 1850s, Whitman did not give up but began again. By this time, starting another novel must have felt fairly routine to Whitman; besides *Franklin Evans* and *The Sleptalker*, he had begun, and evidently abandoned, two additional novels in the mid-1840s, “The Madman” (1843) and “The Fireman’s Dream” (1844).<sup>14</sup> From his years as a journalist, he had become rather adept at whipping up “something *piquant*, and something solid, and something sentimental, and something humorous—and all dished up in ‘our own peculiar way’.”<sup>15</sup> Evidently, sentimental plots came naturally to him. In the handful that survive (penciled into a handmade red notebook), lovers reunite, sinners redeem themselves, and unrepentant thieves and murderers come to ironic ends.<sup>16</sup> They are just the sorts of moralistic, briskly straightforward plots he’d once made a good living on. For example:

a schoolmaster <sup>^while intoxicated</sup>, was married to a woman, by certain persons to cover their own guilt.

Money (bills) taken from a person who was down (died) of the smallpox, carried the contagion; and those who took it died of the same dis.— . . .

Introduce a character (pick-pocket—bad) who goes to California in haste, to escape detection and punishment for crime—After a short while they receive a letter—or read in a newspaper—an account of his being hung<sup>17</sup>

None of these fragments has any known connection to published material. The same, however, can no longer be said of the red notebook’s last and longest plot. In its entirety, it reads as follows:

Introduce Jack’s friends—two or three—

—————  
An elderly ~~man~~<sup>woman</sup> comes to the office to secure Covert’s services ~~fo~~ in behalf

of hiser son, who is arrested for

Martha, is the ward of Covert, inheriting property, so situated as to require the services of a limb-of-the-law.—(Her mother, <sup>^</sup>unt, the Old Quaker lady) is dead—and Martha lives in Covert's house, in the situation of half servant—

Jack, on going to Covert's house, <sup>^</sup>one evening recognizes the ~~like~~ portrait of the Old Lady—it affects him to tears<sup>18</sup>

Make Wigglesworth

Some remarks about the villainy of lawyers—tell the story of Covert's <sup>^</sup>father's swindling, about the house in Johnson st—damn him

Make Wigglesworth tell Jack a good long account of Covert and his character and villainies

(Covert has licentious feelings toward Martha and wishes to effect a marriage with her—also for the sake of her property

—He is divided in his libidinous feelings between Martha, and Miss Seligny

—The main hinge of the story will be Covert's determination to embezzle Martha's property—by means of withholding deeds, wills documents, &c &c—and Jack Engle, who early discovers that intention—being pervaded by a determination ~~th~~ to foil him—

With this view, he applies himself with zeal to study law, and watches with great sharpness—

The story of Martha ~~shall be~~ is that her father <sup>^</sup>Uncle, wealthy <sup>^</sup>who had adopted her a fine hearted man, (but possessed of a frightfully passionate temper,)—under the influence of his passion, commits homicide—(the victim is Jack's father)—He is arrested the shock is too much for him—while in prison,—he ~~divides his~~ makes a will,

dividing his property equally between Martha and the offspring of his victim—or the latter failing, it was all to go to Martha.—

The widow left Philadelphia, (where these sad events happened,) and came on to New York.—In consequence of the nature of the affair, she gradually withdrew from all her <sup>^</sup>relations and former friends, (she was extra

sensitive) and lived with Martha, shut out from the world and

Introduce some scene in a religious revival meeting—

Make a character of a ranting religious exhorter—sincere, but a great fool. Make Wigglesworth “get religion,” through Calvin Peterson

Dont forget Seligny  
(describe Tom Peterson fine young fellow

Smytthe  
Pepperich Ferris<sup>19</sup>

If so intricate a plot sounds like the basis of a novel rather than a tale, that is because it is. In 1852, ten years after the publication of *Franklin Evans*, Whitman wrote a short novel based on these notes, titling it (in full) *Life and Adventures of Jack Engle: An Auto-Biography; in Which the Reader Will Find Some Familiar Characters*. It was published anonymously in six installments, from March 14 to April 18, in Manhattan's *Sunday Dispatch* newspaper. Then, it was forgotten. Now, nearly 165 years after its original publication, the *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* is proud to reproduce Whitman's lost novella for the first time ever.

Unlike *Franklin Evans*, which was reprinted and excerpted several times during the 1840s, as well as mentioned in a literary notice or two, *Jack Engle* received little or no public response.<sup>20</sup> In fact, the novella seems to have enjoyed no literary afterlife at all—not a reprint, excerpt, literary review, letter to an editor, or listing among rosters of current literature. Even in the *Dispatch* itself, the story was neither promoted nor commented upon. The reading public's inattention could be blamed, in part, on Whitman's anonymity; as was his practice with other *Dispatch* pieces, he published *Jack Engle* under no byline. His name, had it appeared, would undoubtedly have attracted some attention. Equally relevant, I suspect, are the circumstances of the novella's promotion—or lack thereof. In a literary market already positively flooded with periodical fiction, *Jack Engle* appeared to uncommonly little fanfare. By the time readers of the *Dispatch* got their hands on it, just three literary notices had announced *Jack Engle*, all a single day in advance, all in New York newspapers: the *Tribune*, the *Herald*, and the recently founded *Daily Times*. To those eagle-eyed readers who spotted them, the ads grandly promised "A RICH REVELATION" (see Figure 1).

**A**FRICH REVELATION.—This week's SUNDAY DISPATCH will contain the LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF JACK ENGLE, an Auto-Biography, in which will be handled the Philosophy, Philanthropy, Pauperism, Law, Crime, Love, Matrimony. Morals, &c., which are characteristic of this great City at the present time, including the Manners and Morals of Boarding Houses. some Scenes from Church History, Operations in Wall-st., with graphic Sketches of Men and Women. as they appear to the public, and as they appear in other scenes not public. Read it and you will find some familiar cases and characters, with explanations necessary to properly understand what it is all about.

m13-1t

Figure 1. Newspaper notice for *Jack Engle*, published in the *New York Daily Times*, March 13, 1852, page 3. Image reproduced with the permission of ProQuest Historical Newspapers. The printer's abbreviation at bottom (m13-1t) means "March 13th, one time."

Such notices are typical of the *Dispatch*, which rarely promoted its fiction at much greater length. Founded in 1846 by editors Amor J. Williamson and William Burns, the *Dispatch* advertised itself as "the largest Three Cent Paper published in the United States," containing "more original matter in one number than some of the bloated vehicles of literature do in one month."<sup>21</sup> This may have been true. As a densely printed literary weekly, the *Dispatch* featured page after page of new tales, memoirs, serialized novels, and travel narratives. That said, like many papers that lived and died in the buzzing newsprint ecosystem of antebellum New York, it was a hardscrabble concern: quickly typeset, cheaply printed, and typo-prone. The *Dispatch's* budget seems to have only barely extended to advertising. Thus, to its detriment, *Jack Engle* appeared unsigned, practically unheralded, and riddled with typographical errors.

Most detrimental of all, though, Whitman seems to have mentioned his novella to no one, certainly never in extant correspondence or interviews.<sup>22</sup> His lifelong reticence on the matter left even Whitman's closest friends, disciples, and literary executors unaware of *Jack Engle*—

men who almost certainly would have republished the novella posthumously, had they known about it. In retrospect, this makes some sense. As he committed himself to the profession of poetry, Whitman fashioned his public image to be that of an easygoing poet (rather than some hard-scribbling ex-journalist), a myth that has had an exceedingly powerful effect on Whitman's subsequent reception. Indeed, its coherence depended on the poet's elision of several of his major midlife prose efforts—another prime example being “Manly Health and Training” (1858), a prose series lately recovered and published last year in *WWQR*. As with *Jack Engle*, Whitman's silence effectively buried it.<sup>23</sup> With the recovery of each new text, scholars may further reconstruct how he curated the reception of *Leaves of Grass* while cultivating his own celebrity.<sup>24</sup>

Such texts have been coming to light for decades. This is not even the first time a big, anonymous Whitman publication has been unearthed in the *Dispatch*. In 1973, Joseph Jay Rubin discovered “Letters from a Travelling Bachelor,” a lengthy travel-writing series published therein between October 1849 and January 1850.<sup>25</sup> More recently, scholars have found that Whitman submitted a number of shorter pieces to the *Dispatch*, too. In 2015, for example, Wendy Katz located “An Hour at the Academy of Design,” a piece of art criticism signed “W.W.” and published in the newspaper on April 25, 1852, just one week after the conclusion of *Jack Engle*.<sup>26</sup> Collectively, these covert publications prove that the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* was just one of several literary outlets Whitman experimented with in the early 1850s. It is certainly possible—even probable, given how quickly Whitman could write—that there is more fiction left to find.

The story of *Jack Engle* will seem both vaguely familiar and exceedingly strange to readers, I imagine. Formally, it is a short novel (or long tale) of about 36,000 words, a story of coincidence, adventure, and the incompatibility of love and greed.<sup>27</sup> Though formulaic at times (like many of Whitman's earlier fictions), *Jack Engle* is also beautifully lyrical, occasionally hilarious, and peopled throughout with charmingly eccentric characters. It is some of the better fiction Whitman produced. Readers familiar with *David Copperfield* or *Bleak House* will recognize much that is Dickensian in it; indeed, *Jack Engle* was likely

directly influenced by Dickens' novels. Not only was *Bleak House* published the same month, but also, much later, Whitman would admit to feeling "great admiration" for Dickens, "very great: I acknowledge him without question: he will live."<sup>28</sup> However, the novella is perhaps even more indebted to sentimentalism, which was easily the most popular genre of the day, thanks to the extraordinary output of writers like Fanny Fern, E.D.E.N. Southworth, Maria Susanna Cummins, and Lydia Sigourney. (And, arguably, Dickens.) The humanistic and reformist elements in sentimental fiction resonated particularly strongly with antebellum readers, as attested by sales figures: Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* (1850), for example, firmly established the mass-market appeal of sentimentalism by selling fourteen editions in just two years. (It is often cited as the first American bestseller.) Even more impressive was the eventual response to Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), a masterpiece of sentimental reform fiction that would sell millions of copies, becoming the bestselling novel of the nineteenth century. That Whitman chose to write in the sentimental mode is thus hardly a surprise.

As a fiction writer, Whitman himself is probably best categorized as a sentimentalist. The influence of this tradition on his writings has only recently garnered much attention, probably due, as Mary Louise Kete has suggested, to the general critical underemphasis of Whitman's fiction. Regardless, his stories nearly always foreground "sentimental topoi," which Kete notes include "death, broken families, childhood innocence, and transcendent love"—to which I would add themes like bodily suffering, empathy, and social reform.<sup>29</sup> In Whitman's fiction, such themes yield character resolutions that are almost invariably neat: the guilty are punished, the greedy impoverished, the innocent or repentant redeemed, and the parted reunited by coincidence. *Jack Engle* rarely veers from these well-polished tracks, though when it does the detours can be quite surprising.

As the story's plucky orphan and protagonist-narrator, Jack recounts his early life as one of hardship: "You have doubtless," he writes, "supposing you to have lived in or ever visited New-York, seen there many a little vagabond, in dirty tatters and shirtless. They generally wander along in men's boots, picked up somewhere, whose dispro-

portionate size makes it necessary for them to keep their feet sliding along, without lifting from the ground. The shuffling movement thus acquired sometimes sticks to them through life.”<sup>30</sup> The reader is given to understand that Jack would be shuffling even now, had his life not been relieved by the generosity of others. Those kindest to him are the poor (shopkeepers, clerks, office boys, and fellow orphans) or marginalized (dancers, madames, gambling house owners). As in Dickens, Jack’s adoption is a key episode, one that will propel him into the complicated adult world of employment, crime, and romance. His entry into the study of law provides the necessary conflict: true to Whitman’s plot notes, Jack’s employer, the aptly named Mr. Covert, is gradually revealed to be an unrepentant villain, scheming after the inheritance of his ward—that is, his adopted daughter—Martha. With the help of a merry band of friends, Jack sets out to save Martha, whose past he finds intriguingly bound up with his own. I will leave the remainder of the novella, and its many pleasures and peccadilloes, to the reader.

The tale of Jack’s maturity, of his “life and adventures,” anticipates a genre that American writers like Horatio Alger, Jr., would later develop to its apotheosis: the rags-to-riches story—or anyway, “rags to respectability,” to borrow a phrase from Alger scholar Gary Scharnhorst and editor Carl Bode.<sup>31</sup> Like Alger’s dozens and dozens of novels about impoverished ragamuffins, *Jack Engle* tells the tale of an orphan whose “luck and pluck” lift him from poverty and land him in love.<sup>32</sup> However, Jack earns respectability less by a good work ethic or acts of virtue than by his sincere empathy with the poor and downtrodden. Generosity—of spirit and specie—strongly divides the sympathetic characters in the story from the unsympathetic. Whitman leaves little ambiguity as to who is good and who bad: the former are grocers, street-sweepers, clerks, maids, dancers, orphans, and reformed alcoholics; the latter, lawyers, bankers, politicians, and social climbers. Their fates shake out accordingly. For that, this novella may also be classified as social reform fiction.<sup>33</sup> What it is not, though, is an exemplum of self-reliance. In *Jack Engle*, self-made characters are just as often thieves as they are honest tradespeople. In the scrabble to rise beyond poverty, Whitman ranks cooperation and generosity

far above hard work. Indeed, work ethic hardly seems to matter at all in *Jack Engle*. The titular character more than once admits to being a loafer, congenitally unsuited for nine-to-five work—an autobiographical detail, to be sure.

Still, *Jack Engle* is hardly the “Auto-Biography” its subtitle promises—or anyway, it is not a very strict one. In a brief preface, Whitman assures the reader that his “narrative is written in the first person; because it was originally jotted down by the principal actor in it, for the entertainment of a valued friend.”<sup>34</sup> The suggestion of truth is common to many of Whitman’s tales, as well as much moralistic fiction in general. See, for example, his early story “Bervance: or, Father and Son” (1841), which begins with the claim that, “almost incredible as it may seem, there is more truth than fiction in the following story.” In “Revenge and Requit: A Tale of a Murderer Escaped” (1845), another villainous-lawyer tale, Whitman frames the narrative as one of “mainly true incidents (for such they are).”<sup>35</sup> They are not, of course. The suggestion of truth is doubtless intended to drive home the moral, though one wonders why it is necessary, since, as the narrator of *Franklin Evans* notes, “the grandest truths are sometimes plain enough to enter into the minds of children.”<sup>36</sup>

While *Jack Engle* is billed as “mainly true,” Whitman does not claim to be its protagonist, as he had a decade before in *Franklin Evans*: “Reader, I was that youth.”<sup>37</sup> Instead, he offers the novella as the reminiscences of another, with himself—or the narrator, if there is a difference—acting mainly as editor. “From that narrative,” Whitman adds, with a touch of irony, “although the present is somewhat elaborated, with an unimportant leaving out here, and putting in there, there has been no departure in substance.”<sup>38</sup> There is an echo here of what Hawthorne, in his “Custom-House” preface, had referred to with irony as “the authenticity of the outline.”<sup>39</sup> Whether or not Whitman’s preface gives his own tale some authenticity, or tinges it with narratorial unreliability—or both—is hard to say.<sup>40</sup> The problem lies in determining whose tale it is supposed to be, exactly. Whitman’s notebook establishes his authorship of *Jack Engle* beyond any doubt, but his anonymity and the story’s layered voices—including an odd prefatory mention of “sources other than that above”—distance him significantly from

any “Auto-Biography.” As in Whitman’s “Bervance,” an unidentified narrator appears only to introduce another voice. Furthermore, it is unclear whether the opening narrator and the author are even meant to be the same person, since the author never declares himself in the first place—*Jack Engle* appeared unsigned, after all. As the narrator implies, this anonymity may be a protective measure against charges of libel. “There will be a sprinkling of our readers,” he concludes, “who will wonder how the deuce such facts, (as they happen to know them) ever got into print.”<sup>41</sup> Who those readers of the *Dispatch* were, and what of themselves they might have recognized in the narrative, are questions for future research.

Regardless of how “such facts” might color *Jack Engle*, the broad strokes of the novella are certainly untrue. Whitman was not an orphan, nor was he adopted. It is doubtful that he ever had a serious romantic relationship with a woman, despite his occasional undetailed assertions to the contrary.<sup>42</sup> And he did not study law, though he briefly clerked for lawyer James B. Clark and sons. (Young Walter, who had just dropped out of school, was eleven at the time.) *Jack Engle* is, not to put too fine a point on it, fiction. Even so, it must be admitted that the story incorporates a few recognizable elements of the life of its author, elements that are key to understanding who Whitman was.

Perhaps more than anything, he was a writer defined by place. “I was happy that I lived in this glorious New York,” says Jack Engle, “where, if one goes without activity and enjoyment, it must be his own fault in the main.”<sup>43</sup> Like Jack, Whitman was first and last a New Yorker—born and raised in Long Island, matured in Brooklyn, and by the 1850s a regular visitor to Manhattan, via the Brooklyn Ferry he would later immortalize in verse. In Whitman’s sole surviving letter from 1852, written to Senator John P. Hale, he says of himself and New York City, that

I know the people. I know well, (for I am practically in New York,) the real heart of this mighty city—the tens of thousands of young men, the mechanics, the writers, &c &c. In all these, under and behind the bosh of the regular politicians, there burns, almost with fierceness, the divine fire which more or less, during all ages, has only waited a chance to leap forth and confound the calculations of tyrants, hunkers, and all their tribe. At this moment, New York is the most

radical city in America.<sup>44</sup>

Though Whitman writes to encourage Hale to run for president, he might as well be speaking of himself when he adds that “the souls of the people ever leap and swell to any thing like a great liberal thought or principle, uttered by any well-known personage—and how deeply they love the man that promulges such principles with candor and power.” To Whitman, New York embodied the spirit, beauty, diversity, and flux of America. His identity as a New Yorker, and his attachment to the city as a sort of worldwide democracy in microcosm, inform *Jack Engle* every bit as much as they do *Leaves of Grass*. By 1852, Whitman had already traveled across the Midwest and down the Mississippi as far as New Orleans. Yet, while he was captivated by the size and sweep of the Great Plains, he would always be defined by New York: “the beautiful city, the city of hurried and sparkling waters! the city of spires and masts! / The city nested in bays! my city!” (LG1867 258). Among other things, then, *Jack Engle* is a tale of “seeing life as it is to be seen in a great city like New York,” where Whitman would spend more than half his life.<sup>45</sup>

Indeed, other than long stays in New Orleans and Washington, D.C., until he was in his fifties Whitman rarely left New York City and Long Island for more than a few weeks at a time. When he finally moved away for good, in 1873, it was to Camden, New Jersey, where he would live until the end of his life. Camden had been founded as a Quaker town, a ferry point for travelers looking to cross the Delaware River to Philadelphia, and Quakers had always meant a great deal to Whitman. Though not one himself, his maternal grandmother had been a Quaker, so he considered himself “of Quaker stock.” From childhood, Whitman maintained a lasting interest in the Society of Friends, their happy egalitarianism and lack of dogma. He attended a few Quaker meetings, and at least once heard a speech by the great Quaker orator Elias Hicks—though readers may notice Whitman still has some trouble with the *thee*’s and *thou*’s of the Quakers’ characteristic “plain speech.”<sup>46</sup> That the central antagonist of *Jack Engle*, Mr. Covert, is himself a Quaker is no doubt meant to be ironic. Like Ahab, Herman Melville’s bloodthirsty pacifist, Covert is a walking contradic-

tion—a chaste swindler, hard-working and respected yet thoroughly underhanded.<sup>47</sup> He is, in short, a stereotypically evil lawyer.

Beyond the usual reasons, Whitman seems to have had special cause to despise lawyers. When listing as many childhood addresses as he could recall, beside the entry “Johnson st. May 1st 1825”—the place where Whitman had celebrated his fifth birthday—he noted: “Covert the villain” (*NUPM* 1:10). Among his plottings for *Jack Engle*, it will be remembered that Whitman reminds himself to include “some remarks about the villainy of lawyers—tell the story of Covert’s father’s swindling, about the house in Johnson st—damn him.” What happened to Whitman and his family on Johnson Street is still a mystery, but it may be partially explained in *Jack Engle*, Chapter 7. It is here that Jack’s mentor and fellow clerk, Wigglesworth, reveals the unscrupulous ways of their employer. Long ago, he says, Covert and his father had contracted a “poor carpenter” to build a house, all the while reassuring the man that it need not be built on schedule. “Our carpenter was unsuspecting,” the narrator explains, “and he took the matter very easily, until the arrival of the period mentioned in the contract.” When the deadline passes, the Coverts refuse to pay. Inevitably, “the lumber and hardware merchants lev[y] for their bills, on the carpenter’s own little property.”<sup>48</sup> The unnamed carpenter—a housebuilder and head of a sizeable family, like Whitman’s own father—loses everything, his home and savings. Thus, while *Jack Engle* is a work of fiction, this episode may go some way toward explaining what happened to the Whitman family in 1825, and why Walt rarely trusted attorneys thereafter.<sup>49</sup>

*Jack Engle* isn’t Whitman’s first anti-lawyer revenge fantasy. Seven years earlier, in 1845, he had published “Revenge and Requitall,” a tale he later collected, with its ending modified, under the title “One Wicked Impulse!” This short parable, which first appeared in the *Democratic Review*, tells of a wicked lawyer named Adam Covert, who—much as detailed in the red notebook—has wards in his care, one of whom he attempts to force into marriage. But here ends any resemblance to the Covert of *Jack Engle*. Adam Covert is no Quaker, nor does he survive particularly long; in “Revenge and Requitall,” he is murdered for his villainy within two pages. Even so, due to

the similarity between this story and *Jack Engle*, the red notebook has long been associated (incorrectly) with “Revenge and Requitall.” However, I doubt the connection is entirely specious; given the parallels between the two antagonists, it is likely that the Covert of “Revenge and Requitall” is an earlier iteration of the one in *Jack Engle*.<sup>50</sup>

Because *Franklin Evans* features yet another dishonest bank lawyer, who yet again hires the protagonist as a clerk, it is tempting to trace all of Whitman’s villainous attorneys back to James B. Clark, the lawyer for whom Whitman clerked at age eleven. Overall, there is very little evidence to support this connection. Hardly anything is known of Clark or his disposition, positive or negative. If anything, Whitman’s employment under him seems to have been pleasant; among other things, Clark’s son, Edward, introduced young Walter to his first library. In his memoir, *Specimen Days* (1882), the poet attributes to this gesture his lifelong love of books and reading:

At about the same time [1829-1830] employ’d as a boy in an office, lawyers’, father and two sons, Clarke’s, Fulton street, near Orange. I had a nice desk and window-nook to myself; Edward C. kindly help’d me at my handwriting and composition, and, (the signal event of my life up to that time,) subscribed for me to a big circulating library. For a time I now revel’d in romance-reading of all kinds; first, the “Arabian Nights,” all the volumes, an amazing treat. Then, with sorties in very many other directions, took in Walter Scott’s novels, one after another, and his poetry, (and continue to enjoy novels and poetry to this day.)<sup>51</sup>

These hardly sound like memories of a “villain” and son. While it is possible that Clark’s legal profession informs Covert’s, for sheer sadism the Covert of *Jack Engle* might more properly be connected to B.B. Hallock, Whitman’s last and strictest schoolmaster. Hallock—a Quaker, like Covert—taught according to the Lancastrian system, a rather stern teaching method, and made extensive use of corporal punishment. It was his school Whitman left to go to work for Clark. In Whitman’s entire life, Hallock is one of the few Quakers he managed to dislike.<sup>52</sup> Yet, it should be noted that *Jack Engle* features Quakers both good and bad, whereas its lawyers are uniformly detestable.

Beyond whatever they may have done to his family, lawyers represent for Whitman nearly everything that is unhealthy about urban professional life. As he would later write in his wellness treatise, “Manly

Health and Training” (1858), the city’s “shambling professional and genteel persons”—a category into which Whitman lumps lawyers and clerks—are more often than not “pale, feeble, timid, quiet, dyspeptic, and uninteresting generally.”<sup>53</sup> They are also, as he portrays them, avaricious by nature. By contrast, Whitman depicts people of more physical (and less remunerative) trades as being healthier, happier, kinder. In *Jack Engle*, one of his representative tradesmen is the carpenter: hardworking, undissembling, generous, and not a little Christ-like.

In 1852, Whitman and his father both worked together as carpenters and real-estate developers, turning over a number of properties in Brooklyn. Life in such circumstances was not terribly steady. The two men, along with the rest of the Whitman family, moved often, usually only occupying a house long enough to build the next. Whitman lived in attics for years, rarely with more furniture than a bed, a chair, and a nightstand, the only decoration being prints of Bacchus and Hercules tacked to the wall.<sup>54</sup> Within the confines of Brooklyn, he was used to this nomadic life, in which he said one “possessed a home only in the sense that a ship possesses one.”<sup>55</sup> It would be another twenty years before Whitman would own a home he considered his own. Though he had nights to himself, it has generally been assumed that Whitman had little time for prose writing, in part because of his newfound devotion to poetry. He would soon remind himself in a note that “[i]t seems to be quite clear and determined that I should concentrate my powers [on] *Leaves of Grass*—not diverting any of my means, strength, interest to the construction of anything else—of any other book” (*NUPM* 1:329). Other than that, construction of the most literal sort probably occupied the majority of Whitman’s time, plus the strain of operating a bookstore and printing office out of an extension added to his Myrtle Street house.<sup>56</sup> In his own chronology of the period, Whitman’s succinct recap of the years between “’51 [and] ’53” was that he’d been “occupied in housebuilding in Brooklyn.”<sup>57</sup> That he found the time to generate a novella is a testament to his dedication to writing, and to the speed of his pen.

It may also indicate that he and his family needed whatever extra income they could get. Whitman’s paperwork confirms as much. Among his notes and receipts from this period, collected by Charles E.

Feinberg, nearly all of those for 1852 are bills for house-building materials and sundry daily items.<sup>58</sup> From them, we can infer a day-to-day existence that was comfortable, if a bit precarious. To develop his properties on Cumberland Street (five of them, as he would later recall),<sup>59</sup> Whitman employed a good deal of outside help, including contractors, woodworkers, framers, masons, and tinsmiths. Not everyone was worth the cost. To one hired carpenter who owed money elsewhere, Whitman paid \$31.65—three weeks' earnings, plus a small loan. On the back of the promissory note, Whitman records his certainty that "This sucker & Liar won't pay this bill."<sup>60</sup> It is unknown whether the sucker ever did.

Thus, while solvent, the Whitman family probably did not have much money to spare. Newspaper notices show that Whitman owed bills for advertising in 1852, and several assessment notices seem to have followed him throughout the year.<sup>61</sup> While he later recollected earning "quite a sum" this year, his younger brother George remembered otherwise, recalling how his older brother

got offers of literary work—good offers: and we thought he had chances to make money. Yet he would refuse to do anything except at his own notion—most likely when advised would say: "We won't talk about that!" or anything else to pass the matter off. [. . .] He never would make concessions for money—always was so. He always had his own way, or took it. There was a great boom in Brooklyn in the early fifties, and he had his chance then, but you know he made nothing of that chance.<sup>62</sup>

Certainly Whitman might have done better on the housing market; he later half-joked that "I ought to have stuck to the building of houses and buying real estate. If I had I should be a man of means now. As it is I am only the author of 'Leaves of Grass.'"<sup>63</sup> But for someone so insistent on his own loaferism, Whitman worked exceedingly hard in 1852. Though first and foremost a "Carpenter & Builder," as announced by a sign hung from his Cumberland Street house, he was also by turns a real-estate developer, printer, bookseller, freelance journalist, art critic, budding poet (writing the beginnings of a new national epic), and—it is now clear—novelist.<sup>64</sup> "I am large," Whitman would soon say of himself: "I contain multitudes" (*LG1855* 55).

*Jack Engle* is as multitudinous as its author. As the latest work of fiction Whitman is known to have published, the novella incorporates elements of nearly every genre of prose Whitman had ever made use of: sentimentalism, sensationalism, adventure fiction, reform literature, parables, the picaresque, autobiography (supposedly), suspense fiction, place painting, revenge narrative, didactic moralism, detective fiction, early realist fiction, the essay, journalistic reportage—and I do not doubt that I am leaving something out.<sup>65</sup> Even for Whitman, such playfulness in his fiction is unusual. His shifts in tone and pacing, the revealed conspiracies and the sudden disappearances of secondary characters, sometimes remind me of a pre-modern Thomas Pynchon. Yet, for every chapter of hot pursuit and devilish coincidence, there is another of natural beauty or urban serenity, one that could only have come from the man who was writing *Leaves of Grass* by candlelight. Chapter 19, which momentarily abandons any narrative, is a fine example: Jack, mourning the loss of a friend, spends a tranquil hour among the gravestones of Manhattan's Trinity Church. As he reads the epitaphs around him (which are real, and survive today), he is reminded of how young his country is—less than a century old—and yet how greatly it has changed in so little time.<sup>66</sup> He wonders whether those generations who preceded him might not have been very much the same: “Could it be that coffins, six feet below where I stood, enclosed the ashes of like young men, whose vestments, during life, had engrossed the same anxious care—and schoolboys and beautiful women; for they too were buried here, as well as the aged and infirm.”<sup>67</sup> These are what Whitman would later call “the similitudes of the past and those of the future” (LG1856 211). It is a theme common to much of the poetry Whitman was then composing: “What is it, then, between us? What is the count of the scores or hundreds of years between us?/ Whatever it is, it avails not—distance avails not, and place avails not./ I too lived” (LG1856 216–217). Invariably, thoughts of death renew his zest for life, as in “Song of Myself,” where the grass seems to be “the beautiful uncut hair of graves,” a thought that holds no darkness for Whitman: “It seems to me that everything in the light and air ought to be happy; / Whoever is not in his coffin and the dark grave, let him know he has enough” (LG1855 73). In its moments in the Trinity

Churchyard, *Jack Engle* strikes similar notes, and perhaps hints at the geographic origins of some of *Leaves of Grass*'s meditations on mortality.

*Jack Engle* also displays the breadth of Whitman's skill as a writer of fiction—abilities that, until recently, few critics have granted the poet. Until the last twenty-five years or so, the common critical view of Whitman's tales was uniformly negative, with especially uncharitable estimations of his fiction being that it was “pretty terrible” (Henry Seidel Canby), “magazine filler” (Paul Zweig), and “sentimental didacticism . . . in the worst tradition of American popular literature” (Floyd Stovall). Even Thomas L. Brasher, editor of the authoritative collection of Whitman's early work, *The Early Poems and the Fiction* (1963), felt that “the plain fact is that Whitman had no talent for fiction.”<sup>68</sup> For all its faults, *Jack Engle* belies the plainness of such a “fact.” It also suggests the importance of reading more sensitively the interplay between Whitman's fiction and poetry.

Fortunately, recent reappraisals of Whitman's tales have begun acknowledging this complex relationship, as well as exploring his fiction's embodiment of and engagements with social mores.<sup>69</sup> Taken together, Whitman's stories reflect a broader trend of the period, in which critics tasked American literature with establishing a unique and coherent national identity, even as that literature also sought to embody a new era of change and cultural upheaval. Hence, Whitman's stories contain “his most explicit and extended treatment of race, [as well as] an engagement with the reform movements that roiled the country,” write Stephanie M. Blalock and Nicole Gray, who add that the stories “express his conflicted engagement with the world around him within a range of existing models.”<sup>70</sup> As these two scholars go on to suggest, the full interplay between Whitman's mature fiction and embryonic poetics, and the extent to which the fiction anticipates—and, at times, contradicts—the politics and aesthetics of *Leaves of Grass*, have only just begun to be explored.

Those politics are not always as progressive as one might expect. In line with its quick pace and occasional clichés, *Jack Engle* is at times reliant on racist or sexist stereotypes for characterization. In the place of finer-grained development, this prejudiced shorthand risks

making caricatures of characters like Inez, the “Spanish dancing girl”; Rebecca Seligny, a wealthy “young Jewess”; or Barney Fox, a semiliterate Irish tradesman and father of seven. While such stereotypes may have been common in certain American discourses of the time, they are far less prevalent in Whitman’s published work. Or anyway, his *signed* work, a distinction that again underscores the license granted Whitman by anonymity. Notably, of his many engagements with race in America, there is a strong distinction between those intended for public readership and those meant for private audiences. This is why, regardless of Whitman’s use of stereotype-as-characterization, readers must question the extent to which Whitman is inhabiting his own sociopolitical views, versus meeting the expectations of his audience. In turn, one might also examine the functions of the novella’s sharp racial and gender divisions, particularly in a narrative that so strongly indicts class divisions and religious intolerance. And what of the novella’s engagement with sexual mores? How can readers square Whitman’s exceedingly traditional depictions of chaste, heteronormative man-woman relations in *Jack Engle* with the novella’s lengthier, more lingering descriptions of men’s beauty and manly magnetism?<sup>71</sup> Even if there were space here to explore these issues, I am unsure that I would have many answers.

Such questions are all the more vital given the novella’s proximity to the publication of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, the poetics of which hinge on themes of universal democracy and equality. In *Leaves*, the poet unbinds not only the binaries of society (of gender, race, class, geography, and sexuality), but of existence (of size, purpose, time, and being). “Births have brought us richness and variety,” Whitman would soon write, “And other births will bring us richness and variety. / I do not call one greater and one smaller, / That which fills its period and place is equal to any” (LG1855 49). The leaf of grass, his guiding poetic conceit in “Song of Myself,” is not the dross of the earth but “the journeywork of the stars,” just as “the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand, and the egg of the wren,” and so on (LG1855 34). Aesthetically as well as politically, Whitman’s ideal democracy is universal. As he sheds the barriers between himself and others, the poet blurs the distinctions between person and person, even down

to the microscopic level, such that “every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you” (LG1855 13). Yet, in *Jack Engle*, such distinctions seemingly stand firm. Compared to Whitman’s poetry of the period, why is this novella so much more conventional? Does it merely reflect the “familiar characters” of a particular place and time, as its subtitle suggests? Or are its (mostly) normative depictions of society and culture some function of its being fiction, as opposed to a more subjectivized lyric poetry? In short: for Whitman, is there something inherently more conventional about fiction?

It might seem so, at least if we take him at his word that by trading fiction for poetry, and embarking upon *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman “abandon’d the conventional,” leaving out “the stock ornamentation, or choice plots of love or war, or high, exceptional personages of Old-World song.”<sup>72</sup> However, I doubt that. Contrary to his word, Whitman rarely abandoned anything suddenly—not fiction, and certainly not conventionality. His bonds to literary convention were much stronger than Whitman tended to portray them.<sup>73</sup> Probably, the more conventional a work by an otherwise unconventional author, the more seriously we should interrogate his or her relationship to convention—particularly canonical authors who are in large part responsible for shaping their public image and literary legacy. Besides Benjamin Franklin, Whitman is perhaps the *ur*-example of such a writer in America. Thus, *Jack Engle* is vital not only as a unique literary work, but as an example of the limits of the extent to which an author, however powerful, may influence his or her own legacy. To read *Jack Engle* alongside Whitman’s more self-promoted and -celebrated poetry, and to attend to the resulting tensions between them, is to give visibility to submerged contradictions of authorial interest. One of the deepest conflicts, with which I will conclude here, is Whitman’s relationship to the problem of evil.

★

“Good and evil” may not sound like the sort of theme with which Whitman often concerns himself, and to an extent this is true of his poetry, where dichotomies rarely survive for long. His ethical philosophy in *Leaves of Grass*, such as it is, is rooted—like his aesthetic,

poetic, and political principles—mainly in synthesis.<sup>74</sup> Holism defines the push and pull of Whitman’s cosmos. Its beauty is in its unity. As the poet would later remark to friend and scribe Horace Traubel,

*Leaves of Grass* is not intellectual alone (I do not despise the intellectual—far from it: it is not to be despised—has its uses) nor sympathetic alone (though sympathetic enough, too) nor yet vaguely emotional—least of all this. I have always stood in *Leaves of Grass* for something higher than qualities, particulars. It is atmosphere, unity: it is never to be set down in traits but as a symphony. (WWWC 2:373)

Readers will notice that dualisms make little or no sense to the speaker of *Leaves*; he seems constitutionally incapable of embracing the half of something, without embracing its complement. This is as true of good and evil as it is of anything else. As one reviewer noted in 1874, it is “as if the grasp of his finite intellect were the underlying principle that welds things together, harmonizes all discords, annihilates all distinctions of good and evil, of pain and pleasure, of past and future, time and eternity.”<sup>75</sup> Such a radical departure from Western literary and moral traditions imbues Whitman’s mature poetics with a shocking modernity, even as it harkens back to ancient nondualist worldviews, like those of Parmenides or Laozi. It is a time-honored, if unpopular, point of view: the heartfelt affirmation of contradiction. If, like Whitman’s “noiseless patient spider,” one senses a connection to the furthest reaches of existence—if one is to experience what Romain Rolland called the “oceanic feeling”—one must admit to being a creature in whom contradictory impulses roil.<sup>76</sup> In his poetry, Whitman offers himself as that person:

I am the poet of commonsense and of the demonstrable and of immortality;  
And am not the poet of goodness only . . . . I do not decline to be the poet of  
wickedness also. [...]

What blurt is it about virtue and about vice?

Evil propels me, and reform of evil propels me . . . . I stand indifferent (LG1855 27-28)

Rather than apathy or anarchy, Whitman’s indifference is something more akin to an acceptance of contradiction—an acknowledgment, as Roger Asselineau puts it, that “the mere fact of existence implies perfection.”<sup>77</sup> Whitman’s poetry announces this recognition from the

very beginning: “How beautiful and perfect are the animals! How perfect is my soul! How perfect the earth, and the minutest thing upon it! What is called good is perfect, and what is called sin is just as perfect” (LG1855 69). Even after the American Civil War had tested his optimism, Whitman maintained his poetic equanimity about evil. Exhausted from nursing dying soldiers and partially paralyzed from a stroke, Whitman still writes in the 1867 edition of *Leaves of Grass*:

. . . let others ignore what they may,  
 I make the poem of evil also, I commemorate that part also,  
 I am myself just as much evil as good, and my nation is—and I  
 say there is in fact no evil,  
 (Or if there is I say it is just as important to you, to the land or  
 to me, as any thing else.) (LG1867 22)

It is easy to imagine contemporary readers reacting strongly to such nonconformism. (Emerson’s insistence that the Bible is not “closed” but may be added to, is hardly more unorthodox.<sup>78</sup>) More than once was Whitman’s poetry branded as immoral, when he himself construes it as amoral: “The greatest poet does not moralize or make applications of morals” (LG1855 vi). In his poetry, good and evil are inseparable and so become in some sense indistinguishable. “I am the poet of sin,” he writes in a notebook, “For I do not believe in sin.”<sup>79</sup> Given the unity of existence, Whitman concludes that the poet must proscribe nothing: “He judges not as the judge judges but as the sun falling around a helpless thing” (LG1855 v). But that is the poet. The fiction writer is another matter.

In his tales, Whitman confronts the existence of evil far more directly and traditionally, often drawing a sharp boundary between moral and immoral characters. There is plenty of crossover between righteousness and wickedness, of course—as Whitman notes in Chapter 12 of *Jack Engle*, many a repulsive character “is like all human specimens, a compound of both good and evil”—but for the most part his narrators judge “as the judge judges.”<sup>80</sup> Thus, Whitman’s fiction is almost invariably moralistic. His most dynamic characters tend to move from evil to good, rather than the other way around. Sinners see the error of their ways, as in his earliest tale, “Death in the School-Room.

A Fact” (1841), or they make up for their wrongs, as does the narrator of “Revenge and Requitall” (1845). At the very least, they realize the good they might have done, like the brother-killer in “The Angel of Tears” (1842). This Whitman, the fiction writer, is quite a long way from the poet who will say in 1855: “Great is wickedness . . . I find I often admire it just as much as I admire goodness” (LG1855 95). If anything, he *indicts* wickedness in his tales, invested as he was in a number of social reform movements of the 1840s. The reader rarely has to dig very deep to learn the dangers of drink, venery, corporal punishment, family separation, or murder. For this reason, it might be argued of Whitman’s fiction that an emphasis on virtue is one of its defining elements—perhaps *the* defining element. “Virtue,” as he writes in “Lingave’s Temptation” (1842), “is ever the sinew of true genius.”<sup>81</sup>

However, Whitman’s tales are rarely so simple. Virtue is not unerringly rewarded in his fictions, nor vice punished. As early as his parable “A Legend of Life and Love” (1842), Whitman may be caught complicating the moral straightforwardness of his tales. In “A Legend,” two brothers reunite after fifty years. One has protected his heart by avoiding all affections, while the other has loved and lost repeatedly. The latter says of his time with his late wife, for example, that, “there came crossings and evils, but we withstood them all, and holding each other by the hand, forgot that such a thing as sorrow remained in the world.” Pain, in other words, is essential to life’s pleasures, as inseparable from them as evil is from good:

I will not deny but that some in whom I thought virtue was strong, proved cunning hypocrites, and worthy no man’s trust. Yet are there many I have known, spotless as far as humanity may be spotless. Thus, to me, life has been alternately dark and fair. Have I lived happy? No, not completely; it is never for mortals to be so. But I can lay my hand upon my heart, and thank the Great Master, that the sunshine has been far oftener than the darkness of the clouds. Dear brother, the world has misery—but it is a pleasant world still, and affords much joy to the dwellers!<sup>82</sup>

Here the thematic strands of Whitman’s poetry and fiction begin to converge. While he does not go so far as to unify good and evil in some ontological way (as in *Leaves of Grass*), in “A Legend” Whitman

does suggest the ineluctable nature of evil, even for the steadily moral person. Such admissions, while easy to overlook in Whitman's fiction, are consistent enough to frustrate critical readings of his tales as being thematically oversimple, or merely reformist. On the contrary, Whitman's fiction in general, and *Jack Engle* in particular, directly address the complexities of evil: the origins of conduct and misconduct in childhood; the shifting motivations and rationalizations behind the immoral act; the social disagreement over what constitutes goodness; and the dislocation of the concept of evil during the spiritual and philosophical adolescence of the United States.

In the 1840s and 1850s, American moral philosophy was drifting from its dogmatic Calvinist beginnings toward more complex, even mystical, engagements with morality. This drift is reflected in the literature of the era, which while rooted in the sentimental and reformist traditions of the early 1800s, had also taken moral ambiguity as one of its central thematic concerns—as illustrated by Hawthorne's and Poe's dark romanticism, Emerson's, Thoreau's, and Fuller's Unitarian-inflected transcendentalism, Melville's early existentialism, and Rebecca Harding Davis's early realism. The literature of what F.O. Matthiessen dubbed the "American renaissance" deprioritizes strict moral prescription in exchange for a more philosophical exploration of what it means to be a good person in a diverse society. Evil, in turn, becomes an existential-nihilistic problem as much as a moral one. At issue is the very existence of Right and Wrong. Faced with such tectonic forces, the individual must come to terms with his or her own insignificance: think Ahab before the whale, the mourner before the raven, Thoreau before Ktaadn.<sup>83</sup> Even Emerson found himself at a loss here, over what Melville calls the "intangible malignity" of creation.<sup>84</sup> In manuscript notes for a lecture on "Fate"—which Whitman may have attended in New York in early 1852—Emerson theorizes that "the existence of evil & malignant men does not depend [on] themselves or on men; it seems to indicate a virulence that remains uncured in the Universe,—uncured & corrupting, & hurling out these pestilent rats and tigers, & men rat-like & wolf-like."<sup>85</sup> This concern suffuses Emerson's eventual lecture, in which he ponders those larger forces that drive "the meaning of what I do," whose "telegraphic signals are

every moment arriving to me out of the interior eternity.”<sup>86</sup> Whence comes evil, in a person, a nation, or a universe?

Whitman’s fictions represent a considered response to such concerns, one that reclaims evil as a social, rather than cosmic, problem. While in *Leaves of Grass* Whitman ostensibly presents a universe beyond good and evil, in his fiction good and evil exist, are discrete phenomena and affect daily human life. Their influences and interconnectedness are simply beyond human ken. In Whitman’s “The Angel of Tears” (1842), a short meditation on sin, all such metaphysics are said to be locked away in a “Shrouded Volume,” wherein “it might be perceived how this is a part of the mighty and beautiful Harmony; but our eyes are mortal, and the film is over them.”<sup>87</sup> What is left—and what sentimental narratives like *Jack Engle* explore—is the importance, in a diverse society, of the hard work of empathy. Whitman’s fictional characters do not always do what his narrators frame as the obvious moral act, particularly in a society churned by the effects of the Industrial Revolution. Even so, the hard choices that characters like Jack Engle make—and the good that they finally accomplish—have less to do with cosmic interconnectedness, and more to do with simple human connection. Coming from the poet of a soon-to-be-divided nation, this emphasis on comradeship makes a good deal of sense.



Of course, Whitman may not have wished such dynamics brought back to light, nor his novella either. Regarding *Jack Engle*, it is impossible not to wonder what he would have made of its rediscovery. A pertinent fact: Later in life, Whitman fumed any time his fiction received attention. “My serious wish,” he complained in *Specimen Days and Collect* (1882), “were to have all those crude and boyish pieces quietly dropp’d in oblivion.” Only “to avoid the annoyance of their surreptitious issue” had Whitman, “with some qualms, tack’d them on” to his collection of his life’s prose writings.<sup>88</sup> Qualms indeed: When he heard a critic was planning to republish some of his early tales, Whitman admitted that “I should almost be tempted to shoot him if I had

an opportunity” (*WWWC* 8:551). Fair enough. But if the Good Gray Poet had one eternal wish, it was to be embraced by new generations of American readers, and to find that “his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed it” (*LG1855* xxi). In many ways, the century since his death has seen his wish granted. Ezra Pound may have summed up Whitman’s afterlife best: “He *is* America.”<sup>89</sup> By that rationale, to recover Whitman’s lost works is to complicate what America is, and what American morality is. Thus, finding another of his “shrouded volumes” not only gives us more Whitman to absorb, but also reopens those pages on which the national character has been written, and rewritten.

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## NOTES

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perfect wife and the love of my life, she has had a hand in every stage of this project: search, discovery, imaging, transcription, editing, proofing, and publication. She and I did it all together, because we have “become really blended into one,” as Whitman says. “If we go anywhere we’ll go together to meet what happens.”

1 Not to be confused with the now-popular weekly magazine, which was founded in 1925. Stuart’s *New-Yorker* (co-edited with William Fairman) was a daily paper, collected each Saturday and augmented with tales under the banner *Weekly New-Yorker*. It folded within a year.

2 *The American Advertiser*, 5th ed. (New-York: Prall, Lewis, and Co., 1851), 104.

3 Walt Whitman, *The Correspondence, 1842-1867*, ed. Edwin Haviland Miller (New York: New York University Press, 1961), 38, emphasis in original.

4 For an exhaustive listing of these reprints, see Stephanie M. Blalock’s “Bibliography of Walt Whitman’s Short Fiction in Periodicals,” *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 30.4 (Summer 2013), 181-250. The bibliography is also available, in full (and regularly updated), on the *Walt Whitman Archive* ([www.whitmanarchive.org](http://www.whitmanarchive.org)).

5 The statistics quoted here originate in Blalock’s “Walt Whitman’s Early Fiction in Periodicals: Over 250 Newly Discovered Reprints,” *WWQR* 30.4 (Summer 2013), 171-180.

6 Blalock, “Walt Whitman’s Early Fiction,” 179.

7 Walt Whitman, *Prose Works 1892*, 2 vols., ed. Floyd Stovall (New York: New York University Press, 1964), 2:558.

8 Quoted in Timothy Garton Ash’s *History of the Present: Essays, Sketches, and Dispatches from Europe in the 1990s* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), xvii.

9 See Whitman’s “med Cophosis” notebook (ca. 1852-1854) in *Daybooks and Notebooks*, 3 vols., ed. William White (New York: New York University Press, 1978), 3:775. Also available online at the *Walt Whitman Archive*.

10 Until now, Whitman was thought to have published his last story—titled “The Shadow and the Light of a Young Man’s Soul”—in 1848. A moralistic tale of a country teacher, the story appeared in the June issue of the *Union Magazine of Literature and Art*. When collecting *The Early Poems and the Fiction* of Whitman, editor Thomas L. Brasher suggested that “other of Whitman’s tales may later be discovered,” but he warned that “the odds are against a tale being first published after 1848.” See Walt Whitman, *The Early Poems and the Fiction*, ed. Thomas L. Brasher (New York: New York University Press, 1963), xv, xvii.

11 See the interview “A Visit to Walt Whitman,” published in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (July 11, 1886), 10. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive*.

12 Several survive today in manuscript, each named for the leading words of its first page. See, for example, “Of a summer evening,” “distinctness every syllable,” and “This singular young man,” in Whitman’s *Notebooks and Unpublished Prose*

*Manuscripts*, 6 vols., ed. Edward F. Grier (New York: New York University Press, 1984), 1:46-52; hereafter abbreviated as *NUPM*. Currently, these handwritten manuscripts are housed in Duke University's Trent Collection of Whitmaniana.

13 For quotes, see William White's "Whitman's First 'Literary' Letter," *American Literature* 35.1 (March 1963), 84.

14 The latter tale was only discovered in 1982, under the full title "The Fireman's Dream: With the Story of His Strange Companion, A Tale of Fantasie." For the complete text, plus commentary from its discoverer, Herbert Bergman, see "A Hitherto Unknown Whitman Story and a Possible Early Poem," in the *Walt Whitman Review* 28 (1982), 3-15.

15 Whitman promises as much to the readers of the New York *Aurora*, for which he'd become editor in 1842. Quoted in *The Journalism*, Volume 1, ed. Herbert Bergman, Douglas A. Noverr, and Edward J. Recchia (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), 105; as well as David S. Reynolds' *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 98. Italics in original.

16 This notebook is traditionally titled "a schoolmaster," after its first words; for convenience I refer to it here as Whitman's red notebook, for its distinctive hand-made covers. After the poet's death, it was collected by Thomas Biggs Harned, one of Whitman's friends and literary executors, and later donated to the Library of Congress. Today, a full transcription of the notebook, complete with page images, is available on the *Walt Whitman Archive*. Considering the publication date of *Jack Engle*, this notebook was almost certainly composed in 1852. The dates of its two pasted-in *Tribune* clippings (leaf 3, recto) just precede the first installment of *Jack Engle*, in one case by only two days; both appeared in the *New York Tribune*, on March 5 and (as noted by Whitman himself) March 12, respectively. For now, they have no clear connection to this or any other text. Perhaps Whitman clipped them as seeds for future story ideas.

17 These lines appear on leaf 2, recto and verso, of the red notebook.

18 This transposition is set off from the text for clarity.

19 *NUPM* 1:97-99. All dashes and marks are Whitman's; page breaks have been eliminated. This text may be viewed in full, complete with page images, on the *Walt Whitman Archive*.

20 For an explanation of the rather complex dissemination of *Franklin Evans* during Whitman's lifetime—much of it directed, during the 1840s, by the poet himself—see Stephanie M. Blalock and Nicole Gray's "Introduction to *Franklin Evans* and 'Fortunes of a Country-Boy,'" available on the *Walt Whitman Archive*.

21 "The Sunday Dispatch For To-Morrow" [classified ad], *New York Herald* (March 28, 1846), 7.

22 It is worth noting that, of Whitman's correspondence written prior to 1860,

very little survives today.

23 “Manly Health and Training” may be read in its entirety in *WWQR* 33.3/4 (2016), 184-310. See also Zachary Turpin’s “Introduction to Walt Whitman’s ‘Manly Health and Training,’” 147-183.

24 For more on this subject, see David Haven Blake’s excellent study, *Walt Whitman and the Culture of American Celebrity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

25 These letters may be viewed online at the *Walt Whitman Archive*. To learn more about their rediscovery, see Rubin’s *The Historic Whitman* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1973), 311-354.

26 See Katz’s “Previously Undocumented Art Criticism by Walt Whitman” in *WWQR* 32 (2015), 215-229.

27 For comparison, *Franklin Evans* runs to about 50,000 words as originally published. “Arrow-Tip” (later revised and republished as “The Half-Breed”) was formerly thought to be Whitman’s next-longest work of fiction; it is roughly 16,000 words in length.

28 *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, vol. 2 (New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1915), 553, hereafter referred to as *WWWC*. Though Whitman never met Dickens, he wrote about him as early as 1842, shortly after Boz’s first voyage to the US, and may even have helped contribute to a forged Dickens letter disparaging American greed. For more, see Martin T. Buinicki’s “‘Boz’s Opinions of Us’: Whitman, Dickens, and the Forged Letter” in *WWQR* 21.1 (2003), 35-38.

29 See Kete’s “Sentimentality,” in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Walt Whitman*, 626. For critical engagements with Whitman’s sentimentality, Kete recommends Michael Lasser’s “Sex and Sentimentality in Whitman’s Poetry,” *Emerson Society Quarterly* 43 (1966), 94-97; and M. Jimmie Killingsworth’s more recent “Sentimentality and Homosexuality in Whitman’s ‘Calamus’ Poems,” *ESQ* 29 (1983), 144-153; to which I would add Kete’s own *Sentimental Collaborations: Mourning and Middle-class Identity in Nineteenth-Century America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000). Other in-depth discussions include Michael Moon’s “Rendering the Text and the Body Fluid: The Cases of ‘The Child’s Champion’ and the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*,” in his *Disseminating Whitman: Revision and Corporeality in Leaves of Grass* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 26-58; Glenn Hendler’s “Bloated Bodies and Sober Sentiments: Masculinity in 1840s Temperance Narratives,” in *Sentimental Men: Masculinity and the Politics of Affect in American Culture*, ed. Mary Chapman and Glenn Hendler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 125-148, later integrated into his *Public Sentiments: Structures of Feeling in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Michael Milner’s “The Fear Passing the Love of Women: Sodomy and Male Sentimental Citizenship in the Antebellum City,” *Arizona Quarterly* 58.2 (2002), 19-52; Adam C. Bradford’s *Communities of*

*Death: Whitman, Poe, and the American Culture of Mourning* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2014); and Jason Stacy's "Washington's Tears: Sentimental Anecdote and Walt Whitman's Battle of Long Island," *WWQR* 27.4 (2010), 213-226.

30 "Life and Adventures of Jack Engle: An Auto-Biography; in Which the Reader Will Find Some Familiar Characters," *Sunday Dispatch* 7.16 (March 14, 1852), [1].

31 See Gary Scharnhorst's *The Lost Life of Horatio Alger, Jr.* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 83; and Alger's *Ragged Dick and Struggling Upward*, ed. Carl Bode (New York: Penguin, 1985), ix.

32 *Ragged Dick* is undoubtedly the most famous of these stories, of which Alger wrote nearly one hundred in all. The phrase "luck and pluck" originates in an Alger novel of the same name (1869), which in turn led to an eight-book *Luck and Pluck Series*, with such Darwinian titles as *Sink or Swim* (1870), *Strong and Steady* (1871), *Strive and Succeed* (1872), and *Bound to Rise* (1873).

33 For more on Whitman's political affiliations with the Hunkers and barnburners, and his related reform journalism, see Jason Stacy's *Walt Whitman's Multitudes: Labor Reform and Persona in Whitman's Journalism and the First Leaves of Grass, 1840-1855* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008).

34 "Jack Engle," *Sunday Dispatch* 7.16 (March 14, 1852), [1].

35 See *The Early Poems and the Fiction*, 80, 317. Whether the incidents of *Jack Engle* are indeed "mainly true" I take up later in this essay. For Whitman's most in-depth preface alleging the truth of a tale, see his introduction to "Some Fact-Romances" (1845), in *The Early Poems and the Fiction*, 319.

36 *The Early Poems and the Fiction*, 126.

37 Of course, when *Franklin Evans* saw republication in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle and Kings County Democrat*, its updated byline—the pseudonym "J.R.S."—contradicted this claim.

38 "Jack Engle," *Sunday Dispatch* 7.16 (March 14, 1852), [1].

39 See Hawthorne's prefatory sketch, "The Custom-House," in *The Scarlet Letter*, ed. William Charvat et al., *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1962), 33.

40 From the earliest examples onward, novelistic prefaces have tended toward epistemological destabilization. Kevin Dunn examines this long tradition in his *Pretexts of Authority: The Rhetoric of Authorship in the Renaissance Preface* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), as does Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek in *The Social Dimensions of Fiction: On the Rhetoric and Function of Prefacing Novels in the Nineteenth-Century Canadas* (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher, 1993).

41 "Jack Engle," *Sunday Dispatch* 7.16 (March 14, 1852), [1].

42 His most famous assertion was made to scholar John Addington Symonds in 1890. Having hounded Whitman for the better part of two decades about the meaning of the “Calamus” cluster—whether or not, that is, it authorizes sex between men—Whitman finally told him: “Tho’ always unmarried I have had six children—two are dead—One living southern grandchild, fine boy, who writes to me occasionally. Circumstances connected with their benefit and fortune have separated me from intimate relations.” For this quote, see Ed Folsom and Kenneth Price’s “Walt Whitman,” a comprehensive biography of the poet available on the *Walt Whitman Archive*. For their part, Folsom and Price call this quote “a lie of grand proportions.” Even Whitman himself, after Symonds’s years of probing, seems to have begun to doubt his own official line on the “meaning” of the “Calamus” cluster: “You know how I hate to be catechised,” he told Horace Traubel, but “Symonds is right no doubt, to ask the questions: I am just as much right if I do not answer them: just as much right if I do answer them. I often say to myself about Calamus—perhaps it means more or less than what I thought myself—means different: perhaps I don’t know what it all means—perhaps never did know. My first instinct about all that Symonds writes is violently reactionary—is strong and brutal for no, no, no. Then the thought intervenes that I maybe do not know all my own meanings: I say to myself: ‘You, too, go away, come back, study your own book—an alien or stranger, study your own book, see what it amounts to’; Sometime or other I will have to write him definitively about Calamus—give him my word for it what I meant or mean it to mean.” (*WWWC* 1:76-77)

43 “Jack Engle,” *Sunday Dispatch* 7.20 (April 11, 1852), [1].

44 Whitman, *Correspondence, 1842-1867*, 40.

45 “Jack Engle,” *Sunday Dispatch* 7.18 (March 28, 1852), [1].

46 For more on Whitman’s complicated relationship to Quakerism, see Mitchell Santine Gould’s “Walt Whitman’s Quaker Paradox,” in *Quaker History* 96.1 (2007), 1-23; and Lawrence Templin’s “The Quaker Influence on Walt Whitman,” in *American Literature* 42.2 (1970), 165-80.

47 For what it is worth, Melville’s *Moby-Dick* debuted in the US just four months before *Jack Engle*.

48 “Jack Engle,” *Sunday Dispatch* 7.17 (March 21, 1852), [1].

49 As he would later tell Traubel, “[t]he doctor is certainly better than the lawyer—oh! far better: the lawyer is buried deep in red-taperies, dead phraseologies, antique precedents” (*WWWC* 4:84). Whitman would also marvel: “What case under heaven but in the hands of a cute lawyer may not evidence white black and black white” (*WWWC* 6:127).

50 For this reason, Natalie O’Neal, Nicole Gray, and Kenneth M. Price previously suspected that “this notebook contains notes towards a different, as-yet-un-discovered piece of early fiction.” Clearly, their suspicions were well founded. See

their editorial note for “a schoolmaster,” available on the *Walt Whitman Archive*.

51 *Prose Works 1892*, 1:13.

52 For an overview of Whitman’s schooling under Hallock, see Natalie A. Naylor’s “Walter Whitman at School: Education and Teaching in the Nineteenth Century,” *New York History* 86.1 (2005), 6–27; as well as David S. Reynolds’s *Walt Whitman’s America: A Cultural Biography* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 34–35. For his part, Hallock would later claim to remember Whitman as “a big, good-natured lad, clumsy and slovenly in appearance, but not otherwise remarkable.” Of Whitman’s eventual fame as a poet and writer, Hallock added, perhaps a little underhandedly, that “[w]e need never be discouraged over anyone.” See *The Uncollected Poetry and Prose of Walt Whitman*, 2 vols., ed. Emory Holloway (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1921), 1:xxvi n9; also quoted in Reynolds, *Walt Whitman’s America*, 34.

53 “Manly Health and Training,” *WWQR* 33.3/4 (2016), 264.

54 This description is based on the recollections of Bronson Alcott, who, with Henry David Thoreau in tow, visited Whitman in his attic in 1856. See Robert D. Richardson, Jr.’s *Henry Thoreau: A Life of the Mind* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 347–348.

55 For the quote, see “Walt Whitman in Camden,” in *The Critic* (February 28, 1885), 97. Part of the *Critic*’s “Authors at Home” series, this profile was in fact written by Whitman himself, under the pseudonym “George Selwyn.”

56 Whitman mentions the extension in an interview titled “A Visit to Walt Whitman,” 10.

57 Walt Whitman, *Specimen Days & Collect* (Philadelphia: Rees Welsh & Co., 1882–3), 20. Richard Maurice Bucke, a friend and devoted reader, writes similarly of Whitman that in “1851, ’52, ’53, ’54” the poet occupied himself “[c]arpentering—building houses in Brooklyn, and selling them.” See *Walt Whitman* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1883), 9. Whitman often looked over Bucke’s writings and may have reviewed this chronology; if so, he apparently kept silent about his novel-writing.

58 For a transcript of one of his jotted memoranda pages, now housed in Duke’s Trent Collection, see *NUPM* 1:100.

59 “A Visit to Walt Whitman,” 10.

60 Charles E. Feinberg, “A Whitman Collector Destroys a Whitman Myth,” *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 52 (January 1, 1958), 88.

61 For Whitman’s advertising bill, see the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (December 10, 1851), [2]. Throughout 1852, his assessment notices appeared repeatedly in this same paper—for sewage notices, see page 4 for January 23, January 30, and February 6; for a gas and lamp notice, much later, see page 1 for December 24.

62 *In Re Walt Whitman*, ed. Horace L. Traubel, Richard Maurice Bucke, and Thomas B. Harned (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1893), 33-34. "Quite a sum" comes from the interview "A Visit to Walt Whitman," 10.

63 "A Visit to Walt Whitman," 10.

64 Of what he calls "Walter Whitman Jr.'s involvement in Brooklyn real estate development and the influence this had on the production method, themes and style of his subsequent book of poems" (170), Peter J. Riley has written extensively and perceptively. See his "Leaves of Grass and Real Estate," in *WWQR* 28.4 (2011), 163-187.

65 For an informative examination of Whitman's engagements with the many categories of popular fiction, see David S. Reynolds' "From Periodical Writer to Poet: Whitman's Journey through Popular Culture," in *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. Kenneth M. Price and Susan Belasco Smith (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 35-50.

66 Stephanie Blalock has recently discovered that Whitman directly quotes not only the churchyard epitaphs but also *himself*. The life of Captain James Lawrence—as inscribed on a monument protected by "a rough pine shed"—first appeared, transcribed in full, in Whitman's 1846 article "One of the Bold and True" (*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, November 18). For *Jack Engle* Whitman borrows directly from his *BDE* transcription, including his own detail about the shed and a parenthetical interjection directing the reader to further inscription "[o]n the opposite side." Compare Chapter 19 of *Jack Engle* (in this issue of *WWQR*, page 335) with "One of the Bold and True," reprinted in *The Journalism*, Volume 2, ed. Herbert Bergman, Douglas A. Noverr, and Edward J. Recchia (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 122. Scholars like Blalock have increasingly noted Whitman's tendency to recycle his own material (or plagiarize others'), a dynamic that further underscores the remarkable interplay between his journalism and his fiction.

67 "Jack Engle," *Sunday Dispatch* 7.20 (April 11, 1852), [1].

68 A kinder estimation comes from Emory Holloway, who writes that "in fiction and other narrative Whitman was rather less successful than he was in the essay or sketch form," citing Whitman's tendency toward preaching and propagandizing. For Zweig's comment, see *Walt Whitman: The Making of the Poet* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 115; for Brasher's, *The Early Poems and the Fiction*, xviii. The remainder may be found quoted in William White's "Walt Whitman's Short Stories: Some Comments and a Bibliography," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 52 (January 1, 1958), 300-306.

69 By far the most in-depth reappraisal of Whitman's fiction is Stephanie M. Blalock and Nicole Gray's "Introduction to Walt Whitman's Short Fiction," which is now available on the *Walt Whitman Archive*. It is the culmination, however, of twenty years' worth of sensitive critical readings of Whitman's fictions, the majority of which focus on Whitman's temperance novel, *Franklin Evans*. These

include Michael Moon's "Rendering the Text and the Body Fluid: The Cases of 'The Child's Champion' and the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*" (see endnote 29); Michael Warner's "Whitman Drunk," an explication of *Franklin Evans*'s rhetoric of addiction, first published in *Breaking Bounds: Whitman and American Cultural Studies*, ed. Betsy Erkkila and Jay Grossman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 30-43; Vivian Pollak's "Why Whitman Gave Up Fiction," in her book-length study of *The Erotic Whitman* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 37-55; Jay Grossman's "Representing Men," in his *Reconstituting the American Renaissance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 161-206; Thomas C. Gannon's "Reading Boddo's Body: Crossing the Borders of Race and Sexuality in Whitman's 'Half-Breed,'" in *WWQR* 22 (2004), 87-107; Christopher Castiglia and Glenn Hendler's extensive introduction to their recent critical edition of *Franklin Evans* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Blalock's "Walt Whitman's Early Fiction in Periodicals" in *WWQR* (2013); Amina Gautier's "The 'Creole Episode': Slavery and Temperance in *Franklin Evans*," in *Whitman Noir: Black America and the Good Gray Poet*, ed. Ivy Wilson (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014), 32-53; and Blalock and Gray's illuminating "Introduction to *Franklin Evans* and 'Fortunes of a Country-Boy'" (2015), available on the *Walt Whitman Archive*. Among Whitman biographies and historical studies, his fiction has received substantial attention in several recent volumes, including in Reynolds's *Walt Whitman's America* (1995) and Jerome Loving's *Walt Whitman: The Song of Himself* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

70 From Blalock and Gray's "Tales of a 'Half-grown (angry?) boy': The Travels and Tribulations of Walt Whitman's Early Fiction."

71 To this question, Vivian Pollak has already hypothesized that the heteronormative mold is precisely what drove Whitman to quit fiction. Keeping in mind that her work pre-dates the rediscovery of *Jack Engle*, Pollak argues that Whitman "stopped writing fiction when the conflict between his desire to uphold the heterosexual values of middle-class family life and his desire to undermine those values in print could no longer be ignored." See *The Erotic Whitman*, 55.

72 "A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads," from *Leaves of Grass* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1891-92), 427.

73 For discussions of the interplay between Whitman's poetry and the nineteenth century's more conventional literary forms, see Kenneth Price's *Whitman and Tradition: The Poet in His Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Gary Schmidgall's *Containing Multitudes: Walt Whitman and the British Literary Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); and Ed Folsom's "'Affording the Rising Generation an Adequate Notion': Walt Whitman in Nineteenth-Century Textbooks, Handbooks, and Anthologies," in *Studies in the American Renaissance*, ed. Joel Myerson (1991), 345-374. The "long foreground" quote is from Emerson's letter of greeting to Whitman, printed without permission in the 1856 edition of *Leaves of Grass* (Brooklyn: Fowler & Wells), 345.

74 Probably the best summary of the moral philosophy of Whitman's poetry may be found in the "Ethics" chapter of Roger Asselineau's *The Evolution of Walt Whitman: The Creation of a Book* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999), 78-90. For a longer, if less straightforward, discussion of Whitman's "ethics of comradeship," see Juan A. Herrero Brasas's *Walt Whitman's Mystical Ethics of Comradeship: Homosexuality and the Marginality of Friendship at the Crossroads of Modernity* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010).

75 John Charles Earle [unsigned in original], "American Poets [Part 2]," *Dublin Review* (July 1874), 83. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive*.

76 See Rolland's letter to Sigmund Freud, dated December 5, 1927, later published in *Un Beau Visage à Tous Sens: Choix de Lettres de Romain Rolland, 1866-1944* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1967), 264-266. For Freud's interpretation of the idea, see the introduction to his *Civilization and Its Discontents*, translated and edited by James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1989), 11-21.

77 *The Evolution of Walt Whitman: The Creation of a Book*, 79.

78 Meaning "not yet fully written." In other words, if the "open soul" of Paul singlehandedly received and wrote a significant portion of the New Testament, what was to prevent an American divinity student, say, from penning the New Testament? Emerson posed this thought to Harvard Divinity School's graduating class of 1838, and found himself barred from speaking there for the next thirty years. See Emerson's "Divinity School Address" in the Library of America's *Essays and Lectures* volume (New York: Library of America, 1983), 75-92; the "open soul" and "closed" Bible quotes may be found on pages 83 and 88, respectively.

79 See the "Talbot Wilson" notebook, leaf 46 verso, available on the *Walt Whitman Archive*.

80 "Jack Engle," *Sunday Dispatch* 7.20 (April 11, 1852), [1].

81 *The Early Poems and the Fiction*, 334.

82 Both quotes are taken from *The Early Poems and the Fiction*, 118-119.

83 As Thoreau says of confronting the malignity of the mountain, "this was what you might call a bran-new [*sic*] country; the only roads were of Nature's making, and the few houses were camps. Here, then, one could no longer accuse institutions and society, but must front the true source of evil." See the "Ktaadn" section of *The Maine Woods*, in the first of two Library of America volumes of Thoreau (New York: Library of America, 1985), 603.

84 Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; or, the Whale* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press and the Newberry Library, 1988), 184.

85 *The Later Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 2 vols., ed. Ronald A. Bosco and Joel Myerson (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 1:249.

86 *The Later Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 1:253.

87 *The Early Poems and the Fiction*, 122.

88 *Prose Works 1892*, 2:360.

89 Ezra Pound, *Selected Prose, 1909-1965*, ed. William Cookson (New York: New Directions, 1973), 145. Pound doesn't so much celebrate Whitman's influence as he is forced to admit it, a bit begrudgingly. If anything, this adds force to his assertion.