

Textual fluidity

Biography, history, and adaptive revision

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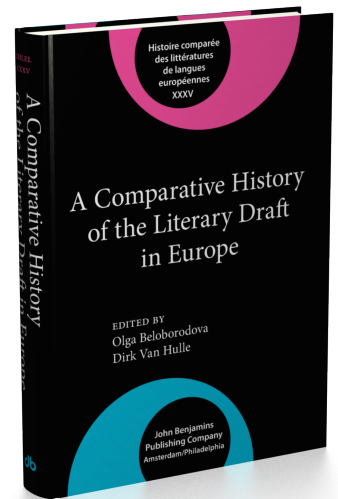
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1.5.1 Textual fluidity

Biography, history, and adaptive revision

John Bryant

Grounding biography and literary history in the phenomena of writing requires a theory of textual fluidity that unifies authorised and adapted versions. Such theorizing should also account for the anxieties of historicism in matters of textual evolution (Henry Adams) and of source appropriation as “replay” (Claude Monet). Melville’s late “adaptive revision” of William James’s naval history and of his own recollected biographical events in his writing of *Billy Budd* constitutes an alternative historicism that enhances his “inside narrative” voice. Tracing adaptive revision from these personal and literary appropriations in *Billy Budd* to adaptations in translation and film versions of *Moby-Dick* expands the biographical scope of Melville’s writing as a modern phenomenon. The full range of adaptive revision is best represented in digital editing with a highly atomised database such as OCHRE that can accommodate asymmetric collation, revision sequencing and narration, and the interoperability of online editions.

Keywords: adaptive revision, *Billy Budd*, biography, collation, fluid-text editing, historicism, Melville Electronic Library, race, replay, source appropriation, version

Finding ways to ground biography and literary history more effectively in documentary evidence would seem easy enough. After all, whether a history follows the life of an individual writer, or the lives that constitute a literary group or movement, or those writing in a particular genre, the historian’s impulse is to build upon primary materials: sources, official documents, journals, letters, manuscripts, first editions, and the like, which record a writer’s works and the work of writers writing. But these visible materials also contain evidence of invisible processes, which, despite their invisibility, afford us new perspectives on how texts evolve, how writers, readers, and cultures interact, and how historical events happen, from the smallest acts of creation to discernible patterns within the larger networks of creativity.

At issue, here, is the phenomenon of textual fluidity and, more specifically, how fluid texts evolve through multiple versions due to authorial, editorial, and adaptive revision. But if we are to “see” the panoply of a fluid text’s versions, the invisible phenomenon of fluidity must be edited into visibility. In fluid-text editing – especially as developed digitally in the *Melville Electronic Library* (MEL)¹ – our critical editions assist readers in navigating the versions of an edited work. They provide revision sequences and revision narratives that explain those sequences; and, because revision sequencing is necessarily hypothetical, the editions enable

1. Bryant, Kelley and Ohge 2010–; <https://melville.electroniclibrary.org>

scholars to create revision narratives of their own, thereby adding back into the edition's database different analyses of the same revision data. MEL's editorial process is critical, collaborative, reiterative, fundamentally historicist, and a natural foundation for biography and literary history. But because fluid-text editing is historical, it poses problems of method and scope.

Like any historicist approach that attempts to account for how and why texts evolve in a cultural milieu, fluid-text analysis is fraught with the familiar anxieties concerning causation. American historian Henry Adams speaks to this condition in his autobiographical *Education of Henry Adams* (1918). Addressing his attempts to teach his Harvard students how they might "treat history" – in a chapter suggestively titled "Failure" – he argues that historians may write history as "a catalogue, a record, a romance", but their approach also aspires to some fuller narrative of causation that emulates scientific method; something that resembles "evolution". Putting "evolution" beside "romance" is telling. Theory and Myth may differ as do fact and fiction, but as grand narratives based on leaps of imagination or inference, histories are similarly doomed by their leaps. In some degree, they "falsify" (Adams 1973: 300). Thus, Adams laments that "[h]e had no theory of evolution to teach, and could not make the facts fit one". He cannot resist the need to make sense of facts but doubts the ability to draw historical conclusions; he cannot escape the scepticism of a historian: "All he could prove was change... what he valued most was Motion ... what attracted his mind was Change" (Adams 1973: 231).

The historian's dilemma speaks to the condition of the fluid-text editor. The fact that written works are not stable but "change" and are therefore in "Motion" from one version to the next; the fact that some broader concept of "Change" is a constant in writing, identity, and culture: these facts of creativity are what attract our minds to fluid-text analysis. And yet, because the causes of the phenomenon of textual change are invisible to us, we risk imposing upon a perceived pattern of revisions in a sequence of versions a reductive theory of "Change" to make the facts "fit" a grand narrative of our desire. The fluid-text editor's historicist anxiety over incautiously leaping from inferences about textual changes to a theory of Revision wakens editors and critics to the limits of historicism that Adams articulates. Even so, those limitations do not negate the phenomenon of revision, or our need to analyse the forces that result in versions, or our impulse to write biographies and literary histories.

I do not mean to reject fact-based theories of revision – they are inevitable and useful – I mean only to assert the obvious: they must be developed within an editorial framework that exposes the phenomena that link the textual evidence of change to interpretation and theory. In promoting this degree of transparency and reader engagement in the making, sharing, and unmaking of revision narratives, a fluid-text edition is a forum for working through historicist anxiety. However, if this mode of critical editing is to provide a broader foundation for literary history, it must widen its scope beyond the exclusively authorial. It must include other versions of textual fluidity, in particular source appropriation and non-authorised adaptation. While this extension will give access to evidence of artists interacting in social contexts for the literary historian, it will augment not mitigate historicist angst. It will require more thought about the ontology of versions and different modes of revision.

Versions of the version: Replay

We think of revision as textual changes visibly inscribed in revision sites on manuscript leaves or inductively retrieved through the collation of print versions. Though we may find other hands (editors, family, and friends) in these documents and versions, the focus of attention is invariably on the single writer's revision practices. The authorial focus is understandable if not advisable. While non-authorial changes (by publishers, copy-editors, and printers) are part of a writer's revision process, critical editions generally prioritise authorised revisions over editorial interventions. In doing so, they instantiate a conception of the genesis of a written work as an exclusively authorial enterprise. A fluid-text approach expands its scope beyond genetic editing to include non-authorised works, but this expansion has its own conceptual and practical challenges. Giving validity to such creative adaptations as abridgement, translation, and illustration; stage, film, and opera; art works and music, even cultural memes (Bryant 2013), editors take the written work out of the originating author's hands and into the clutches of non-authorised adaptors, whose recreations stray from the author's purposes, and whose versions embody their interpretation of the originating work. I call these clutchings, strayings, recreations, and interpretive embodiments "adaptive revision".

Adaptation remains for some an assault upon the original. Again, understandably so, for while adaptation arguably extends the life of the originating work, it risks replacing the original and diminishing our contact with its historical moment. Since the 1920s, many readers' first experience of *Moby-Dick* might be in children's books, adult abridgements, or their viewing of its film versions, not the original text itself. Nevertheless, as an instrument of textual evolution, adaptation is useful to critics, biographers, and literary historians in tracking the forces of social change. The trick for editors in delivering such historical evidence is crafting editions (print and digital) that integrate authorial and adaptive revision and enable readers to navigate the sequential versions of the evolving work.

Authorial and adaptive revisions differ in practice and in the versions they produce. Authorial revision alters the text of an already existing work in progress. Micro-revisions make stylistic changes that modulate local effects within a version; macro-revision alters the work rhetorically, resulting in a distinctive new version. Either way, this mode of revision reveals a generative relation to the versions that come before and after.

Consider Herman Melville's *Billy Budd, Sailor* (*An inside narrative.*). Analysis of the manuscript, which was not prepared for publication until after Melville's death, reveals that this prose novella began as a ballad sung by a mutinous sailor about to be hanged. Affixed to the poem was a brief explanatory head note in prose. But the head note evolved, through eight stages of micro-revision and three macro-revisional growth-spurts, each resulting in a distinctive version. In these sequential stages and versions, Melville revised the guilty Billy into an innocent in both the concluding poem and the prose development of his character that precedes it. He also added chapter-long sections on the malevolent Claggart and the detached Captain Vere. Along the way, Melville modulated his narrative voice. The resulting prose-and-poem novella gives us

a handsome, charismatic, peace-making sailor, falsely accused of mutiny by an iniquitous petty officer, and unfairly tried, tragically condemned, and hanged by a misguided father-captain.

This narrative arc is fully developed, but the manuscript is replete with unfinished micro-revisions. Equally complicated is that the eight stages of composition and three versions are not individual entities neatly stashed in separate folders; rather, evidence of these macro-revisions exist as cut-and-paste fragments of previous stages carried forward to new stages and interspersed throughout on renumbered leaves in the single 360-leaf document. In short, while the revisions attest to recognisable patterns of change, the stages, versions, and the evolutions they represent can only be inferred; they are hypothetical and necessarily debatable. Nevertheless, the revisions in pencil and ink, the cutting and pasting, the insertions of new material on sequential leaves of text, the renumbering of those leaves – in short, the physical transformations from the head-noted ballad to a novella with poem – are indisputably Melville's.

Adaptive revision differs from authorial revision in concept and practice. Though adaptation is evolutionary in that it involves textual changes and/or inter-medial transformations, it is not generative, rhizomatic, or Darwinian in relation to the originating work. Nor is it theft, plagiarism, or piracy, though these misdemeanours are certainly modes of adaptation. Kinder words for adaptive revision are borrowing, homage, modernisation, updating, even improvement. The broader term is appropriation. Until we find a word less derogatory or condescending, I call adaptive revision a form of “replay”.

Whatever the name, the phenomenon is familiar. Adaptors and producers – often in other formats, genres, and media – rewrite the originating work. A translation transforms each page, word for word, in the idioms of a different language; abridgements remove chapters you really need not bother with, an illustrated edition visualises and thereby modulates fictionalised characters and scenes; a play converts narrative into dialogue and stage direction; artistic abstractions and music evoke the moods of a work through colour, shape, and sound; the meme compresses the originating work into an iconic image (think wounded, angry Ahab; think White Whale). These variant kinds of adaptation do not contribute to the generation of the originating work; rather, they are separate works created by independent readers seeking some kind of possession of the original, some new delivery of it, some kind of replay.

The pictures of French impressionist Claude Monet help us distinguish adaptive replay from authorial revision. In his mid-to-late career, Monet embarked on a project of creating multiple (sometimes up to eight) canvases a day, each picture focusing on the same object *en plein air* – haystacks, Rouen Cathedral, London Bridge – but each necessarily and purposefully re-painted at a different time of day, often from different perspectives to capture the varying, altering effects of light and aspect, on the retina and in mind. Monet's experiment in perception was a replaying of time, space, and consciousness.

Monet's canvases challenge our standard conception of a version. As different renderings of the same natural object, these serial representations do not, of course, revise the rendered original object itself; nor is a given haystack painting a revision of an earlier one; nor is any canvas a sketch in preparation for a final rendering. Monet's haystacks are not products of sequenced stages of revision as *Billy Budd* most definitely is, although each picture is a “re-vision”, in the

root sense of that word; each is a re-seeing; each, in this sense, is a version. Thus, when we consider Monet's project of generating different but similar instances of the same object, each canvas evokes the same canny feeling of similitude-yet-difference that we associate with our experience of versions generated through textual revision. When one Monet haystack is displayed next to another, we understand that these two paintings are similar enough as to be near copies yet so discernibly different as to invite questions about not only their uniqueness but also their relation to the others. Monet's project is evident in the new ways of looking that any pairing of his haystack paintings may induce: our consciousness of difference in light, perspective, and time heightens our awareness of the relation of perception and object, even though the object – a haystack, in a field, in Giverny, one day in 1890 – no longer exists.

This phenomenon in which difference both affirms and undoes similitude – on the canvas, in our minds – gets to the heart of textual fluidity and the ontology of the adaptive version. Monet's haystack canvases may be called versions in that each replays in paint the idea of our altered perception of an object in time. Furthermore, when seen together, the multiple replays are an embodiment of Monet's project: the work of his project lies in our vision of these re-seings, these adaptive versions. Similarly, the adaptations of an originating literary work stand in the same relation to that original as canvases to haystack. Though the meaning of an adaptive version is conditioned by its relation to the work it replays, it is also inflected by the conditions of its own moment of creation and in its relation to preceding and subsequent adaptive versions.

The idea of adaptation as replay is useful in distinguishing adaptive revision from authorial revision, but it does not remove the stain of appropriation from the phenomenon of adaptation. The notion of the adaptor seeking possession of an original rubs us the wrong way. As evidence of the adaptor's apparent controlling love of the original, an adaptation seems a violation of identity; it is not an act of independent origination but seems to be opportunistic, even predatory, at best derivative, mere imitation. It argues that reading the original *Moby-Dick* is not enough; it must be rewritten to fit the conditions of some other time, place, or desire. An adaptation threatens to diminish the intimacy of our own idiosyncratic experience of the original. In this sense of dis-possession, adaptation seems to be a felonious appropriation. Despite laudatory critical advances that validate adaptation and translation studies, this stigma lingers.

But if the history of human culture is itself a series of appropriations – Romans and Greeks; Europeans and Indigenes; America and Africa – we need to destigmatise the phenomenon in order to understand it more fully. Slavery is an unjustifiable fact in these linked cultures, and any comprehensive history of slavery requires a sequencing of cultural versions played out differently over time and space. American Jazz is the invention of Africans conditioned by their kidnapping and brutalisation by white colonisers and capitalists; it is a perpetual evolution of a series of sequential, indigenous, colonial, and post-colonial accommodations: African folk traditions, Black appropriations of white hymns, white appropriation of Black song, dance, and spirituals, then Black and white appropriations of each other. As a cultural phenomenon, appropriation and its adaptive forms – acts of possession and self-identification – are a replaying of centuries of trauma and moments of delight. When rightly heard in this context, every

bending of a blue note sings not only of the pain of genocidal slavery but also of release and the capacity of freedom. No one would consider telling the history of Jazz without celebrating the phenomenon of adaptation; no one would edit Jazz without sequencing its riffs, bendings, samplings, and multitudinous versions: Ella Fitzgerald singing the Gershwins making songs out of DuBose Heyward's white appropriation of Gullah stories. But scholars still resist the editing of literary adaptation. I argue we do so at the risk of forgetting ourselves, culture, and history.

Our resistance to adaptation has less to do with quandaries over originalism than with the anxiety of fluidity and historicism. If we reckon that as a cultural inevitability the phenomenon of adaptive revision is as fundamental to creative process and social identity as authorial revision, we must then, like Henry Adams, worry about new categories of "change" and "motion" and how to "fit" adaptive facts into our theories of evolving texts. Our editing anxiously draws a line between the revision history of an originating work and the history of the adaptations associated with it. But when we consider that originating authors revise when they "borrow" from a source and that adaptors revise like authors as they adapt, we recognise that authorial revision and adaptive replay, though ontologically different, are complementary cultural phenomena. For a century, we have studied how Melville revised *Billy Budd* in manuscript by re-editing that document differently (and usefully) at least four times since 1924 (Melville 1924, 1948, 1962, 2019), but we do not yet have ways to edit how adaptors replayed the novella into an opera, play, and film. The anxious line between origination and adaptation needs to be erased, though not without anxiety.

The first step toward integrating authorial and adaptive revision within a fluid-text edition is to acknowledge that in revising their sources, authors become adaptors just as adaptors replaying original works become authors. Each possesses another writers' words; each bends them to fit an agenda. The example of Melville's adaptive revision of a source in *Billy Budd* also reveals his own anxieties regarding the history, biography, and narrative voice.

Replaying sources I: Versions of history

In any written work, we are bound to find traces of source appropriation, whether it be an attributed quotation, the lifting of words, or an echoing of tropes. These borrowings "embedded" in the text are sites of revision that replay the original source; they are one writer's version of another writer's writing.² Melville was an inveterate reader, and his appropriations are well-documented in studies of his sources, reading practices, and marginalia (Bercaw 1987; Sealts 1988; Olsen-Smith and Norberg 2008–). But rarely do we find instances of Melville's adaptive revision played out in the writer's hand. One exception is a pair of library call slips recording research that triggered Melville's manuscript expansion of a key version of *Billy Budd* involving the duplicitous Claggart. The following revision narrative focuses on Melville's quarrel with a

2. For the notion of the "embedded narrative" – that is, slave narratives included in white-authored travel books – see Aljoe 2011.

source, his alternative thoughts on history, and his strategy of concealment and indirection in the late re-crafting of his “inside narrative”.

Melville died in 1891 before he could prepare a fair copy of *Billy Budd* for publication. The manuscript is an assemblage of generally equally sized leaves, many of which have attached to them leaf fragments from other stages of composition. These attachments may be either “clips” of text cut-and-pasted from earlier, discarded leaves, or “patches” of newly inscribed text designed to replace heavily revised passages on a leaf. In addition, during all stages of composition, Melville inscribed micro-revisions throughout the patchwork document. A textual collage, Melville’s manuscript physically embodies what the narrator calls the “ragged edges” of any narrative that attempts to tell truths. As noted earlier, the novella’s three expanded versions – involving Billy, Claggart, and Vere – do not exist as full texts. Nor can we piece together from the surviving fragments the full text of the earliest version that preceded these expansions. Nevertheless, Melville’s repeated re-numberings of his leaves – consistently inscribed in different colours and positions on each leaf and the consequence of his having added new material – enable us to infer the existence and sequencing of the versions.

For instance, evidence of the second expansion – which develops Billy’s false accuser John Claggart – spans what are now Chapters 3 to 8. On most leaves in these six chapters, we find sets of leaf numbers, in various combinations, representing stages of composition designated B, D, or E.³ Because stage B leaf numbers appear in consecutive order in the bookend Chapters 3 and 8 only, and not in the inner Chapters 4 to 7, we can conclude that these stage B leaves were once contiguous and originally part of an earlier, stage B chapter. Later, in stages D and E, Melville split this original chapter in two, expanded each half into the full texts of Chapters 3 and 8, and inserted Chapters 4 through 7 between them. Much of the stage B content in Chapters 3 and 8 speculates on Claggart’s background, his suggested homosexual envy of the beautiful Billy, and the vexed narrator’s failure to resolve “the mystery of iniquity” in Claggart’s heart. As Melville’s narrator puts it in a new, stage E opening to Chapter 8, “His portrait I essay, but shall never hit it” (Melville 2019).⁴

One revision scenario of how Melville’s second expansion version unfolded seems clear. In order to ground his tragedy in the historical tensions of the Napoleonic wars and to show how

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3. Improving significantly on Weaver’s first transcription of *Billy Budd* (Melville 1924), Freeman (Melville 1948) established that *Billy Budd* evolved in stages, but his argument that the novella began as a short story, which he titled “Baby Budd”, has been discounted. In their more detailed analysis of the manuscript’s page numberings, Hayford and Sealts (Melville 1962) discerned eight generally consecutive stages of composition (B through G, x, and p). In their independent, digital transcription, Bryant, Kelley, and Ohge (Melville 2019) adopt the Hayford-Sealts stage designations in their encoding of Melville’s leaves and revision texts for *Versions of Billy Budd* in the *Melville Electronic Library* (MEL).
 4. Melville’s stage E leaf numbers appear in red in the top right corner of the leaf; this Chapter 8 passage is inscribed on stage E leaf “100”. To access it in print and manuscript in MEL’s *Versions of Billy Budd*, select Chapter 8, search for the text, and click the corresponding thumbnail leaf image in the right margin; see also <https://app.textlab.org/transcriptions/15676>.

Claggart may have been recruited into the Navy and assigned to Billy's ship, Melville researched England's Great Mutiny of 1797, but his research angered him. Two library call slips, accompanying the *Billy Budd* manuscript, attest to Melville's research; his anger would come as he revised. The slips are standard forms for requesting books, but instead Melville used two such forms as scrap paper, on which he scribbled notes from a source he already had in hand: Volume 2 of William James's *Naval History of Great Britain* (James 1826). He filled the margins and blank spaces of these forms with quotes and paraphrasings from James's treatment of the Great Mutiny. None of Melville's scribbles hint at Melville's later resistance to James in his revisions to Chapters 3 and 8, which F. Barron Freeman succinctly characterises: "Melville's sympathy for the underprivileged sailor made it impossible for him to accept James's pompous belief in the righteousness of those in authority" (Melville 1948: 40).

Class resentments aside, Melville also bristled at the historian's authority in shaping the past. James's announced method was to focus on the causes and consequences of events without scrutinising the lives of the actors acting out those events: "historical impartiality", he wrote in a passage that Melville quotes verbatim, "forbids any such fastidiousness"; James will "abridge" (that is delete) such fastidious, personal detail from his official history.⁵ But, in treating the national embarrassment of the Great Mutiny, James made an exception to his policy: he scrutinised the personality of a single, underclass mutineer in order to defame him. Bristling at James's hypocrisies, Melville would pursue a contrary agenda: he would penetrate the lives of three men, expose their limits in order to understand their hidden motives in the context of historical events, not only to sympathise with underprivileged Billy's vulnerability during the time of the Great Mutiny but also to comprehend the tragic consequences of Claggart's repression and Vere's misreading of his crew. In quarrelling with James over how to write history, Melville scratched at the anxieties of historicism in order to create not only an alternative to James's history but also a necessarily ragged "inside narrative" that would not, in Adams's word, "falsify" human events. The James-induced expansions of Chapters 3 and 8 also show how Melville's adaptive revisions of his source brought family and personal experience into his historicised fiction-making. His subsequent adaptations push us further into biography.

In an early-stage B revision appearing mid-Chapter 3, Melville quotes the gist of James's loosely-followed policy that a historian's "impartiality forbid[s] fastidiousness", without attributing the quotation to James, referring to him instead as "one" of any number of "naval historians".⁶ He concludes that in such official histories "national pride" has the tendency to "shade" embarrassing events "into the historical background". Melville dismisses James's disingenuous lapse into "fastidiousness" (without alluding to his maligning of mutinous sailors) and then offers his own historical approach that prioritises the inner lives of such individuals. Melville writes that disturbing moments like the Great Mutiny "can not be ignored, but there

5. For Melville's call slip quotation of James, go to <https://app.textlab.org/#documents/121>, click on Miscellaneous, and select leaf 826; for the quoted passage in context, see James 1826: 2.42.

6. Melville's stage B page numbers appear in green in the middle of the top margin of the leaf; this Chapter 3 passage is inscribed on stage B leaf "13". See also <https://app.textlab.org/transcriptions/15517>.

is a considerate way of historically treating them”.⁷ His “considerate way” is both familial and personal. He writes, on this same stage B leaf, that “If a well-constituted individual refrains from blazoning aught amiss or calamitous in his *history*; a nation in the like circumstance may without reproach be equally discreet” (my emphasis here and below). That is, in dealing with presumed affronts to national pride, a historian need only emulate the balance of honesty and discretion that an individual might employ in exposing the calamities of “his history”, i.e., his personal past. However, the comparison between individual and nation evolves in revision when, at a later stage of composition, Melville substituted for “history” the word “*family*”. Do not “blazon” the truth acrimoniously, he asserts, but voice it nonetheless with discretion, as if in consideration of one’s obligation to speak openly with one’s family.

This single revision from “history” to “family” resonates with the broader biographical context for mutiny in *Billy Budd*. In 1842, Melville was incarcerated as a mutineer for participating in a work stoppage aboard the whaling ship *Lucy Ann*. That same year in a different ocean, Melville’s cousin US Navy Lieutenant Guert Gansevoort was complicit in the controversial drumhead trial and hanging of three alleged mutineers on board the training ship *Somers*. Over four decades later, during the composition of *Billy Budd*, Melville’s “considerate” approach to the history of mutiny was not merely a matter of research; it was personal, familial, and experiential. Like Billy, he had been an accused mutineer; like Vere, his cousin had hanged three sailors dubiously convicted of mutiny. Both Herman and Guert had much to explain to their family; Melville would laugh off his mutinous behaviour in *Omoo*; his cousin, dogged by guilt, would die alcoholic.⁸

Two later revisions tighten Melville’s personalised historicism. In a revised opening to Chapter 3 composed in stage E, Melville interrupts his perfunctory narration of ship manoeuvres and announces that he will henceforth “restrict” his story “to the inner life of one particular ship and the career of an individual man”.⁹ Significantly, Melville later revised “man” to “sailor”, thereby implying a focus not on captain Vere or officer Claggart but on the subaltern seaman Billy. Later still, perhaps after stage E, perhaps while proofreading, Melville returned to his originally unattributed quotation of William James to add the historian’s name parenthetically: “(James)”.¹⁰ Melville was drawing a line between conventional histories that obscure inner lives and his “considerate” history that draws them out.

Just as naval historian William James was a catalyst for Melville’s alternative history in Chapter 3 of *Billy Budd*, the same source triggered revisions in Chapter 8 exposing Claggart’s nefarious past. On the verso of Call Slip 1, Melville had quoted directly from James’s lengthy

7. This Chapter 3 passage is inscribed on stage B [green] leaf “14”; see also <https://app.textlab.org/transcriptions/15518>.

8. See Bryant 2021, Vol. 2, chapters 81–83 and 86.

9. This Chapter 3 passage appears on stage E [red] leaf “43”; see also <https://app.textlab.org/transcriptions/15512>.

10. See <https://app.textlab.org/transcriptions/15517>. Melville’s wife, Elizabeth Shaw Melville, often assisted him by inscribing revisions as he dictated them; this insertion is in her hand.

excoriation of Richard Parker, the hanged instigator of the Nore mutiny. In James's view (as quoted by Melville), Parker was that kind of "culprit [who] possessed wit enough for his roguery just to elude the letter of the law".¹¹ Rather than prosecute these culprits, a notorious "custom had long prevailed for the London police" to send such a social "pest ... on board a ship of war" (James 1826: 2.73). In fact, Melville would not use the quoted "culprit" passage to describe Claggart in his revisions to Chapter 8. Instead, to explain Claggart's enlistment, he paraphrased the rumour of collusion between the "London police" and British Navy.

Melville's revisions in Chapter 8 reveal a strategy to involve readers in the narrator's thwarted attempts to resolve "the mystery of [Claggart's] iniquity". He achieves this effect by engaging us in his narrator's anxious historicism. Originally, Melville had treated Claggart routinely, describing his high forehead and pallid appearance, intimating his sharp intellect and yet moral defect. Further revisions insinuate that Claggart was "going incog." in the Navy, that he was rumoured to have been a "*chevalier*" (or con man, Melville's emphasis) caught in a "swindle", that he had been charged with fraud and had escaped indictment by volunteering to enlist in the Navy. In revising Claggart, Melville replays James's treatment of Parker. Claggart is a version of the type of "culprit" that the "London Police" would put "on board a war ship" instead of lock up. Like James's Parker, Claggart is a wit and a rogue who knows the law enough to bend it. He is an ironist who games the system, a manipulative schemer, conning for the sake of the con, who has been, it is alleged, dispatched into the Navy. In these same Chapter 8 revisions, the narrator voices his reticence to leap from insinuation to judgement; his narratorial restraint embodies the historian's scepticism in leaping from rumours about Claggart to the perilous certitude of theory. The revised chapter ends anxiously: "the dearth of real knowledge [of Claggart's past] opened to the invidious, a wide field for unfavorable doubt and surmise".¹² Melville was crafting what he would eventually call in the novella's subtitle an "inside narrative" that would, for the sake of his "considerate" history and the ungraspability of human iniquity, penetrate only so far.

Continuing to revise, he would draw upon memories from his personal history. But before getting to these biographical penetrations, let me offer the following interlude.

Interlude: Fluidity, language, race

A provocative racial term, used by Melville, appears in the next section of this chapter. This five-letter word – in use as early as the seventeenth century and now designated by the OED as "historical" and "out of date or even offensive" – was substitute wording for the inflammatory six-letter "n-word", reviled by white and Black Americans alike. The five-letter alternative was a white person's term of respect for a person of colour in Melville's day and one of racial

11. Go to <https://app.textlab.org/#documents/121>, click on Miscellaneous, and select leaf 826.

12. This Chapter 8 passage was heavily revised on stage B [green] leaf "20₁" and fair copied for stage E [red] leaf "106"; see also <https://app.textlab.org/transcriptions/15661> and <https://app.textlab.org/transcriptions/15686>, respectively.

pride among Black American compatriots, including Frederick Douglass, W.E. B. DuBois, and Booker T. Washington (who also preferred the word to be capitalised). The upper-case spelling became standard in the 1930s and remained in usage until the mid-1960s when it was replaced by versions of “African American” (first with and then without hyphen), “Black”, and “person of colour”. Today, the five-letter word is offensive in Europe, though merely antiquated in the US; and generally proscribed.

This proscription raises editorial and critical challenges regarding the need to edit past writing in light of present-day usages. Scholarly, journalistic, and trade editors may choose to expurgate, censor, abbreviate, or revise the word; or advise readers of its coming. Whatever their choices, editors are obliged to explain their decisions. In the instance treated below, Melville’s lower-case version of the five-letter word appears in an example crucial to my argument about adaptive revision, biography, and the anxieties of historicism. I have chosen to retain the example and not delete or disguise the word. I do so because the controversy over the word’s evolving connotations reinforces my argument on a broader scale. Apart from its adaptation in the context of an episode in Melville’s source revisions of *Billy Budd*, the word’s appearance requires us to confront our culture’s post-colonial discourse regarding race, identity, and textuality. The word, then and now, encapsulates the shared, evolving, cultural anxieties of historicism evident in adaptive revision. The word itself is a fluid text.

Choosing discourse over erasure is particularly important with regard to *Billy Budd*. A major pattern in Melville’s creative process involves two late additions of Black sailors, drawn from his recollection of past experiences. As he was revising his novella, lynchings of African Americans in the US had reached an unprecedented level, with one such terrorist act occurring in New Jersey across the Hudson from Melville’s Manhattan home. Melville’s reminiscences of Black peoples, during this national crisis, bears directly on how we comprehend Melville’s adaptive revisions of himself as a source.

In the early stages of composition, Melville had characterised Billy as a “white fore-castle-magnate”. Later, in the first of his two expansions, he inserted an “intensely black” African sailor in Chapter 1, and at the same time revised “white fore-castle-magnate” to the un-racialised “handsome sailor”. This de-racialising of masculine beauty neutralises racial categories in *Billy Budd* during the nation’s epidemic of lynching (Bryant 2014). Melville’s second racial revision – this time in Chapter 8 – is the addition of a “Trafalgar man”, a retired Black sailor from Baltimore, who had served with Nelson. Unlike the first expansion, this African American figure comes with the aforementioned five-letter racial identifier. Melville retained that word through subsequent rounds of revision but with a familiarising strategy, congruent with that in Chapter 1, which, in effect, further humanises the Black American war veteran. In both revision scenarios, Melville adapted personal recollections of previously admired Black sailors into his fictionalised history, thereby registering the presence of Blackness in his principal character type, the heroic “handsome sailor”, and in masculine beauty as well.¹³

13. I have not found in the Melville and Melville Family documents any use of the six-letter derogation. For Melville’s exposure to Black peoples in Manhattan, Albany, Liverpool, and at sea, see Bryant 2021, in particular Vol. 1, Chapters 3, 13–15, 31, 48–50, 53 and Vol. 2, Chapters 61, 68–69, 93.

In effect, Melville was treating memory as a source, and his replay of those memories reveals a racial consciousness that ran counter to history and to obfuscating naval historians of his day. Editing and discussing all traces of Melville's personalised adaptive revision – even if doing so means retaining his positive use of a term now considered racially offensive – seems to me not only essential biographically, historically, and editorially but also crucial for anyone committed to liberal democracy. Melville's racialised revisions prefigure experiential and textual adaptive revisions of our own during the continuing crisis of racism that still infects our lives. His encounter with fluidity, language, and race, as it adumbrates ours, suggests a constant of change in social institutions, and one worth further textual analysis. Hence, this interlude.

In the following, you will find Melville's usage of the five-letter word only as it appears in his hand. I do not repeat the word in my voice but rather adapt it in the idiom of today.

Replaying sources II: Versions of biography

In stage D, Melville returned to what would become Chapter 8, to focus on Claggart. He took William James's insinuation of collusion between the London police and British Navy, elevated it from rumour to fact, and augmented this claim with authentic sailor testimony: it is "a strange thing which I heard in my youth from an old American negro who had years before served in the British Navy". When a ship or squadron was "short of hands", Melville's narrator continues, the crew's "deficient quota would sometimes be eked out by draughts culled direct from the jails".¹⁴ Without alluding to James, Melville corroborates James's charge with his own personal recollection. But as Melville tinkered with this passage, more precise memories from his "youth" emerged, in particular his not so youthful visit at age thirty to London in 1849. He used blue pencil to cross out this stage D passage, and in stage E patched over it a more detailed account. On this patch, the language concerning "quota", "deficiency", and "jails" remains, but the Black "American" sailor becomes a Black sailor from "Baltimore", and more.

The full revision text begins with the narrator claiming "some scruple in" adducing this personal testimony, but he continues, nevertheless: it is

something I remember having seen in print though the book I can not recall; but the same thing was personally communicated to me now more than forty years ago by an old pensioner in a cocked hat with whom I had a most interesting talk on the terrace at Greenwich, a Baltimore negro, a Trafalgar man.¹⁵

Scholars long ago connected the Black sailor from Baltimore in *Billy Budd* to a November 21 entry in Melville's 1849 London travel journal, which records his visit to "Greenwich Hospi-

14. This deleted manuscript version in print Chapter 8 is inscribed on stage D [green, upper left corner] leaf "61"; see <https://app.textlab.org/transcriptions/15696>.

15. The stage E patch on which this fair-copied revision passage appears is affixed to the stage D [green] leaf "61" (see note 14), which has been renumbered stage E [red] "108"; see <https://app.textlab.org/transcriptions/15694>.

tal”, the naval facility for retired seamen, many of whom had served with Nelson. On that day, Melville “Saw the Pensioners at dinner. over 1500. Remarkable sight”. He adds simply: “The negro. – Hat off! – Hat on!” Presumably, this Black sailor in Melville’s London journal participated in some risible, dinner-time hat doffing ritual during grace. On that day, Melville also toured the Greenwich Park grounds and Observatory, above the hospital, with its “Fine view from a hill”, noting that he had a “talk with an old pensioner there” (Melville 1989: 23).¹⁶

Given his journal entry, Melville’s replayed recollection, in *Billy Budd*, of “a most interesting talk on the terrace [not dining hall] at Greenwich” with the Black “Baltimore” sailor “in a cocked hat” is clearly a conflation of the Black sailor (homeland unstated) residing in Greenwich Hospital, who doffs his (unspecified) hat at dinner with the “old pensioner” whom Melville met on a hill (not terrace) overlooking Greenwich Park. Moreover, in *Billy Budd*, Melville’s narrator dates his encounter with the Black sailor as being “now more than forty years ago”, which, in light of other evidence dating Melville’s late revisions to 1889–1891, comports precisely with Melville’s 1849 London visit. In crafting his inside narrative of Claggart, Melville revises his own journal entry; he replays himself.

Notice, too, Melville’s tango of indirection and self-exposure. As he researches his journal to corroborate James’s outing of the British Navy’s corrupt enlistment of criminals, he revises and conceals both sources. He calls the practice “something I remember having seen in print”, but adds an apparently breath-taking disclaimer: “though the book I can not recall”.¹⁷ Melville’s stage E lie flatly contradicts his later parenthetical insertion of “(James)” in Chapter 3, identifying the historian he has previously admonished. While it is possible that Melville’s disclaimer is an aging author’s slip of the mind corrected in one chapter and not the other, this apparent false forgetting directs us more deeply into the interplay of Henry Adams’s notion of “Change” and the anxieties of historicity in the evolution of Melville’s “inside narrative” voice. The semblance of the narrator’s memory simulates the historian’s condition as he questions the authority of historical sources, official and personal, in his attempt to examine the “inner life” of a ship and get inside the mind of a culprit like Claggart, a victim like Billy, and a disciplinarian like Vere. The effect is to make his inside narrative seem more personal than historical, and therefore more historical than history.

This account of Melville’s strategies – call it an “inside revision narrative” – draws upon the interpenetrating fluidities of authorial revision and adaptive replay. As a history of textual change, cultural resistance, and personal transformation, it demonstrates how authors become adaptors; it records the inner life of a writer writing.

Melville’s appropriations of William James and of himself are fundamentally biographical. Non-authorised adaptations of Melville take us into the broader sphere of literary history.

16. For MEL’s image of the November 21, Greenwich Hospital entry in Melville’s 1849 *Journal of a Voyage from New York to London*, see part B, leaf 27 at <https://app.textlab.org/#documents/101>. For a prospectus of MEL’s edition of Melville’s travel journals, see <https://melville.electroniclibrary.org/journals>.

17. This Chapter 8 passage appears in stage E [red] “108” (<https://app.textlab.org/transcriptions/15694>).

Editing Adaptive Revision: Digital versions

In its current development, fluid-text theory treats source appropriation and non-authorised adaptation as different modes of adaptive revision; they are versions within and following an originating work. But since the revision sites of any version must be edited into existence before they can be read, sequenced, and analysed, the future of a fluid-text approach that can accommodate biography and literary history depends on developing editorial practices that integrate both authorial and adaptive revision sites, thereby enabling us to navigate from one kind of version to another.

The first step in identifying the navigable revision sites is collation. In this familiar editorial process, editors compare the texts of all versions in pairs: one against the next, and all against each other. In deriving the textual similarities and differences in Melville's use of historian William James, we would manually collate James's source-text with Melville's call-slip-text with the *Billy Budd* manuscript-text. Technologically, this task may be performed with minimal editorial intervention because we would be comparing symmetrical formats: text to text. Even so, editors must manipulate the texts in order to align corresponding textual units, and collating certain all-text adaptations – abridgements and translations – poses further challenges: how, for instance, do you collate missing chapters or an entire text in a different language?¹⁸ Matching textual and trans-medial adaptive versions – such as the *Billy Budd* manuscript to added or deleted scenes in print, or print versions to audio-visual images, and performative or kinetic moments in the play, opera, and film versions – requires what I call “asymmetric collation”.

In transforming an originating literary work for stage or screen, adaptors invariably cut, conflate, and revise; they invent speeches, characters, and scenes; they add visual and aural elements; actors and directors change words or perform them in interpretive ways. For an asymmetric collation to register adaptive revision sites in John Huston's 1956 film adaptation of *Moby-Dick*, editors must assemble Melville's 1851 text, Ray Bradbury's screenplay, John Huston's and script-doctor John Godley's separate revisions to it, Stephen Grimes's storyboards, and Huston's final cut. Not only must they segment chunks of textual speeches and scenes as well as their digitised visuals, audio files, and video equivalents, but, in order to align these formal units for collation, they must also supply place-holding blanks to account for speeches and scenes that have been dropped. These interventions are arduous but not insurmountable challenges.

A further challenge is more discursive than technological: how might editors make the asymmetrically collated revision sites accessible in a workspace, available to editors, scholars, instructors, and students alike, that enables critical thinking about the versions, such as the sequencing and narrating of adaptive revisions? Because the revision sequence and revision narrative are fundamental protocols in fluid-text editing, MEL's editing tool TextLab facilitates

18. Translation may be the biggest challenge to collation. Though a translation is textual, it is a radically asymmetric fluid text in that each textual unit is transformed into different words, idioms, and positions, or not at all.

these vital features. With this tool, editors can encode multiple sequences and narratives for any given set of revision sites. In addition, TextLab stores the sites, sequences, and narratives so that readers can compare differing hypotheses of the same revision acts. In this regard, MEL's editions provide a discourse field for the study of textual evolution.¹⁹ As a step toward asymmetric collation, an early (now unsupported) iteration of TextLab used the collation technology called Juxta to facilitate the sequencing and narration of collated revision sites in both manuscript and print texts. Hopefully, that technology or something similar will be revived or developed. But TextLab's Juxta collator was not designed to perform the kind of asymmetric, trans-medial collations necessary for the fluid-text study of adaptive replay. Surely, the scholarly benefit of building such a tool would outweigh the cost of its development, especially in the pursuit of histories that seek to integrate literature and cinema. A moment in Huston's film indicates why.

In a scene adapted from "The Chart" (Chapter 44), Gregory Peck's Ahab explains how he has mapped the seasonal sightings of Moby Dick, how he can predict the white whale's future movement, and how he will encounter his nemesis at a certain time and place in the vast Pacific. To this extent, the film parallels the book, and in both, the scene lends credibility to Ahab's obsession and realism to a prediction that would otherwise seem mere madness. But in the film, the camera provides an added reality. It shows Ahab's finger on his sea chart, pointing to where in the Pacific he expects to encounter Moby Dick. In the novel, that spot is simply on the "Line", that is, the equator. In the film, Ahab's finger on the map points to the words "Bikini Atoll" in the north Pacific. For Huston's audience, this iconic 1950s "meme" – the island site of repeated US hydrogen bomb tests – links Melville's omnipotent, destructive whale of 1851 to the threat of thermonuclear annihilation in 1956. Huston's split-second, cinematic cut – a dramatic Cold War adaptation – comports with other applications of *Moby-Dick* to modern politics, including critiques of authoritarianism involving Presidents Andrew Jackson and Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the obsessively ethnophobic treatment of Islam in the wake of 9/11 (Bryant 2010). Taken together, these interpretive moments register a culture's anxious debates in American literary history over the risks of and to liberal democracy. The asymmetric collation of "The Chart" in book and film opens this moment of adaptation for future critical thinking and further revision narratives.

Huston's adaptive revision – a departure from Chapter 41 – is nothing Melville could have conceived of in his pre-nuclear era. But as a replay of Melville's own apocalyptic version of the whale-as-Armageddon, it stands in relation to Melville's novel as Monet's versions of a haystack in paint stand in relation to their originating haystack. Huston's *Moby Dick* is original in its own right, and yet as a transformation of a moment in *Moby-Dick* reset in a different time, space, and light, its departures register a different set of meanings and yet one resonant with Melville's original and, for that matter, other adaptations of *Moby-Dick*.

19. Where available, revision sequences and narratives in MEL's *Versions of Billy Budd* appear below the leaf and diplomatic transcription displays, which are accessed through the reading text's marginal thumbnails (Melville 2019; for example, <https://app.textlab.org/transcriptions/16903>). Revision narratives in *Versions of Moby-Dick* appear in pop-up annotations of bolded passages in the reading text (Melville 2020).

A defining element of all adaptation is the dynamic we feel between resemblance and departure. The dissonance urges us to discern replay from original, to marvel at the Bradbury-Huston leap, to reconsider in retrospect our interpretation of the original, and to learn to read novel and film as an integrated, interpretable phenomenon. How did the Bikini Atoll replay come about in the context of the film's creative collaborations, themselves situated in the context of personal biography and Cold War history? How might our present interpretation of Huston's departure influence our reconsiderations of the historical moment of Melville's writing of *Moby-Dick*? After all, both works play upon the possibility of political, species, and personal annihilation. In speaking of the power of the whale's tail, Ishmael asserts: "Could annihilation occur to matter, this were the thing to do it" (Chapter 86). Ahab's finger on Bikini Atoll modulates Ishmael's sense of a nothingness in ourselves, humanity, consciousness, even matter itself: both tail and bomb are weapons of mass destruction. But the meanings we find in our adaptive revisions of Melville are rooted in textual and visual facts brought to light by the editing of revision and best articulated in editions through discourse. We cannot adequately engage these interpretive potentials aesthetically, biographically, and historically, until novel and film are edited together as fluid texts.

Consider, then, the stakes and challenges as MEL seeks to integrate adaptation into its fluid-text edition of *Moby-Dick*. MEL's goal is to provide tools for textual and visual analytics in its Projects workspace that will enable scholars, instructors, and students to compose and share alternate revision narratives drawn from MEL's Archive and Editions. In one project inspired by scholar Pilar Martínez Benedí's study of Melville in translation, we will collate Italian novelist Cesare Pavese's 1932 translation of the novel with his "revised and improved" 1941 version (Melville 1932; Melville 1941). Here, an adaptive reviser's attempt to bring his Italian text closer to Melville's idiom is the translator's authorial replay of his own previous adaptation. Pavese's intervening 1940 translation of the novella *Benito Cereno* (Melville 1940) – with his provocative pluralisation of Melville's dramatic use of the singular form of the previously mentioned, five-letter racial term – raises further questions about race in Pavese's implicit critique of fascism (Benedí 2021; Benedí 2022). Adaptation specialist Jaime Campomar's model project will add film materials to MEL's Archive: typescript versions of Bradbury's screen play, scribal revisions in Huston's hand, separate versions by Godley, and Grimes's storyboards. In editing these materials, we will link the textual versions to digitised visual, audio, and video images from the film itself (Campomar 2019). In addition, German scholar Martina Pfeiler's pioneering analysis of *Dämon des Meeres* (directed by Mihály Kurtesz, a.k.a. Michael Curtiz) – the lost 1931 remake of Millard Webb's 1926 adaptation *The Sea Beast* – traces the network of the revision of a revision internationally (Pfeiler 2020). As with translator Pavese, we witness film adapters from the 1920s onward revising themselves and each other as they revise Melville.

The likeliest digital solution for storing our fluid-text *Moby-Dick* edition, identifying and collating versions, and enabling revision annotation is OCHRE,²⁰ the highly atomised database platform for the University of Chicago's initiative, Critical Editions for Digital Analysis and

20. OCHRE: Online Cultural and Historical Research Environment, <https://voices.uchicago.edu/ochre/>.

Research (CEDAR).²¹ With OCHRE, any bit of revision text or slice of a visual or an audio-video file, granularised at any level, occupies a place in the database and can be retrieved for readable transformations, through application programming interfaces (API), into any format for collation, annotation, and display, including outputs in TEI.

But if editing revision materials (sites, sequences, narratives evident in texts and text objects) is to be a grounding for literary history, technological advancements in digital editing should not be siloed within single-author projects. One aim of a database like OCHRE is that it provides a framework that facilitates interoperability, that is, data sharing between projects with different ambitions. Currently, single-author or single-corpus editorial projects – devoted to, say, Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, or Frederick Douglass – cannot borrow data from MEL, and vice versa. Nor can MEL interoperate with its closest companion, *Melville's Marginalia Online* (MMO). Nor can it engage directly with digital projects of broader scope that feature genres or cultural issues, such as Christopher Ohge's editing of the networks of collaboration associated with the British abolitionist anthology *Bow in the Cloud* (Ohge 2021)²² or Nicole Aljoe's treatment of "embedded slave narratives" featured in Aljoe and Elizabeth Maddock Dillon's *Early Caribbean Digital Archive* (2014–).

In future developments, OCHRE would enable CEDAR's Shakespeare, Piers Plowman, Hebrew Bible, and MEL projects to share data as a model for interoperability in digital scholarship. By bringing diverse humanistic fields together, digital editing will surely have a transformative impact in the fields of biography and literary history. But there is no real gain technologically unless and until the technology builds interactive discourse communities on the phenomena of revision and adaptation. To achieve this goal, we must learn the art of editing revision and broaden the scope of textual fluidity to include all versions of the version.

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21. CEDAR: Critical Editions for Digital Analysis and Research, <https://voices.uchicago.edu/cedar/>.

22. For details, see <https://research.sas.ac.uk/search/research-project/221/mary-anne-lawsons-the-bow-in-the-cloud-and-the-net/>.

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