

# “A STORY OF NEW YORK AT THE PRESENT TIME”: THE HISTORICO-LITERARY CONTEXTS OF *JACK ENGLE*

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“Candidly reader we are going to tell you a true story.”  
—*Jack Engle*, 262<sup>1</sup>

IT SEEMS NATURAL to suspect foul play when the first thing one reads in a text is a double affirmation of its truthfulness. Consequently, in the admittedly short reception history of *Life and Adventures of Jack Engle* (1852)—an anonymously published novella by Walt Whitman that was rediscovered in the spring of 2017—the fictionality of the text is taken for granted.<sup>2</sup> Of course, the novella is not “autobiographical” to the extent it suggests, as even a cursory reader of Whitman knows. But what about its claims to represent “New York at the Present Time” or its tantalizing promise that we “will find some familiar characters” within?<sup>3</sup> Readers are promised “actual occurrence[s]” and “real drama” barely veiled behind the author’s “toggery” (262). The story offers itself as ripped from the headlines (a *Law & Order* for the mid-1800s, so to speak), disguising its source material just barely enough to avoid legal trouble. Still, at first glance, we get none of that. Is this, then, just another marketing ploy by Whitman or his publisher—or are we perhaps missing the point? This essay will interrogate this issue by, for a moment at least, taking *Jack Engle*’s self-conscious assertion at face value and tracing the threefold claim to validity that prefaced each installment of the story: its self-classification as “autobiography,” its suggestion of contemporaneity (“at the Present Time”), and its promise of characters “familiar” to its readership.

The first puzzle about the genesis of *Jack Engle* appears already answered: the time of its writing. Whitman’s “schoolmaster” notebook—the red booklet no. 82 from the Library of Congress’s Thomas Biggs Harned Collection—contains major plot points and character names, accompanied by two newspaper clippings dated March 12, 1852.<sup>4</sup> Initial commentary on the novella suggests that it was written shortly before, some perhaps alongside, its publication in the *New York Sunday Dispatch* in six serial installments from March 14 to April 18,

1852. That Whitman was still sketching out the “main hinge of the story,” as he phrases it in these notes, certainly speaks for such an attribution. Consequently, Zachary Turpin’s introduction to the novella is preoccupied with Whitman’s life in 1852. Much of the newspaper coverage around *Jack Engle*’s rediscovery also hinges on its timely proximity to the publication of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, which was to hit (very select) bookstands about three years later.<sup>5</sup> This even leads literary critic Wieland Freund, in his afterword to one of the German translations of the book, to speculate that *Leaves* must have been conceived much later than hitherto assumed, given the novella’s strikingly dissimilar tone to the proto-free-verse epic. Freund thus re-dates the beginnings of *Leaves*, against existing scholarship,<sup>6</sup> to “probably not before 1854.”<sup>7</sup>

While we likely would not want to follow Freund this far, the oddity of the novella’s proximity to *Leaves* remains. To ease some of the pressure, it must be noted that even if the newspaper clippings contained in the red notebook correctly date Whitman’s *Jack Engle*-sketches (and were not pasted in much later), they do not constitute the beginnings of the novella. Even with Whitman’s often breakneck pace, he could have not finished a 36,000-word tale begun just two days prior to its print publication: the first installment of *Jack Engle* appeared on March 14, 1852.<sup>8</sup> So while these notes might contain the “basis of a novel,” as Turpin puts it, they certainly do not mark its *beginning*.<sup>9</sup>

If we take a closer look at the “schoolmaster”-notebook and Whitman’s sketches toward a draft of *Jack Engle*, we find a slightly different picture. Instead of planning out a new tale from scratch, they constitute a sort of revision draft—notes made by Whitman over the course of several sittings (given the different pens used), aimed at seeing to the end a story he had already begun. Tracing the plot developments Whitman recorded in his notes back through the entirety of *Jack Engle*, it is evident that the elements that would eventually make it into the final product appear exclusively in the novella’s later parts. Apart from the Covert backstory in which readers learn that he defrauded an honest carpenter (a self-contained part of chapter seven), the notes describe much of the plot as it develops in chapters eleven to fifteen, as well as in the last two chapters. Those notes that deal with events at the end of the novella function mostly as reminders—a set of vague hints about tying up loose ends for the characters: “Don’t forget Seligny / . . . / Smytthe / Pepperich Ferris.”

On the other hand, these notes presuppose elements of *Jack Engle* that make up the beginning of the story as it appears in print. When Whitman began drafting, he apparently had already established characters named Covert, Jack Engle, Martha, Wigglesworth, Tom and Calvin Peterson, Mrs. Seligny,

Smytthe, and Pepperich Ferris. He also presupposes an unnamed “Old Quaker lady,” who is not yet Mrs. Covert, but instead a relative of Martha. Whitman plans to build on all of these characters; his notes do not introduce them or provide even cursory biographies, but rather sketch out what to do with them and what backstories they might have. At the same time, the novella was, at the point Whitman composed these notes, obviously still lacking a “main hinge”: while Covert is already established as the villain and Jack as his apprentice and the hero of the tale, the rest of the story is yet unclear, and Whitman’s notes contain some attempts to come up with a solution for carrying the characters through to a logical finale that ties up any of the narrative’s lingering loose ends.

Thus, if one takes the newspaper clippings from March 12, 1852, as a means of accurately dating the handwritten comments that follow them in the notebook, they suggest that *Jack Engle*, at least up to chapter seven (perhaps even chapter eleven), already existed *sans* “main hinge” when Whitman got the story accepted by the *Dispatch*, with the remainder of the novella written while it appeared in print. This timeline would also explain at least some of the wild plot-changes that occur at the beginning of each installment after the second (ending with chapter nine), in which Whitman drops or confuses major plot points (such as a possible Seligny conspiracy hinted at in chapter four), sends characters into the narrative nirvana of Hoboken (his ‘farm upstate’ when it comes to disposing of no-longer-wanted friends), or all-too-briefly concludes storylines without any narrative pay-off. Thus, if we want to be critical of assertions of truthfulness, we ought to focus on the claim by the editors of the *Dispatch* that the author had already put “the manuscript complete in [their] hands” (*JE* 262) by the time the first installment came out: it appears to be blatantly false.

A hasty installment-by-installment approach to fixing the narrative might also explain why Whitman abandoned an arguably much better idea for the main plotline: instead of having Wigglesworth conveniently morph into a super-detective to hand Jack all necessary information to bring down Covert, Jack was originally intended to, as Whitman puts it, “appl[y] himself with zeal to study law,” ultimately “discover[ing] [Covert’s] intention” and become “pervaded by a determination th[is] to foil him.” An orphan-turned-apprentice bringing down an evil master by using his own (il)legal tricks against him and effectively beating him at his own game, eventually standing victorious with the law on his side, would certainly have made for a better and more engaging conclusion than having the villain flee for good at the first sign of trouble. We get some hints of this original plotline in the second installment, when Jack is “determined to find out something of the particulars of the affair” of Pepperich Ferris’s busi-

ness dealings with Covert and Inez (*JE* 283).<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, there is no follow-through on this “determination”—and the story later treats this first glimpse of a different plot progression as a mere hunch to be confirmed by a narrative aside in chapter sixteen.<sup>11</sup> Of course, keeping with his original plot ideas would have required actual research into legal matters on Whitman’s end that he simply no longer had time for when the *Dispatch* accepted the novella for publication. By then, he was writing to catch up to the printing press, which meant hastily concluding a tale that he had begun with grander aspirations for a much more carefully crafted, ambitious plot.

If this thesis is true, it should both be traceable on a level of content/context and style. While most of this essay focuses on the former, a statistical glimpse of the latter might provide some helpful guidance. To shed some more light on the composition history of *Jack Engle*, a so-called “rolling delta” approach was used, comparing the roughly 36,000 words of the novella to Whitman’s 1842 novel *Franklin Evans* and a set of his later short fiction (“The Shadow and the Light of a Young Man’s Soul” [1848] and “Arrow-Tip” [1845])—though the composition of the latter corpus is especially problematic but, given the seeming dearth of later Whitman fiction, ultimately unavoidable.<sup>12</sup>

The following graph<sup>13</sup> should be read in terms of proximity to the horizontal axis, which represents *Jack Engle*. The closer each line (grey: late fiction; black: *Franklin Evans*) is to said axis at a given point, the more similar its corpus is, stylistically, to *Jack Engle* is at that point. For instance, at the 20,000 word-mark, the black line is much closer (at a distance value of ~7.2) to the *Engle*-axis than the grey line (distance value of ~7.9), suggesting this particular portion of the novella was likely written earlier, rather than later, in the 1840s:

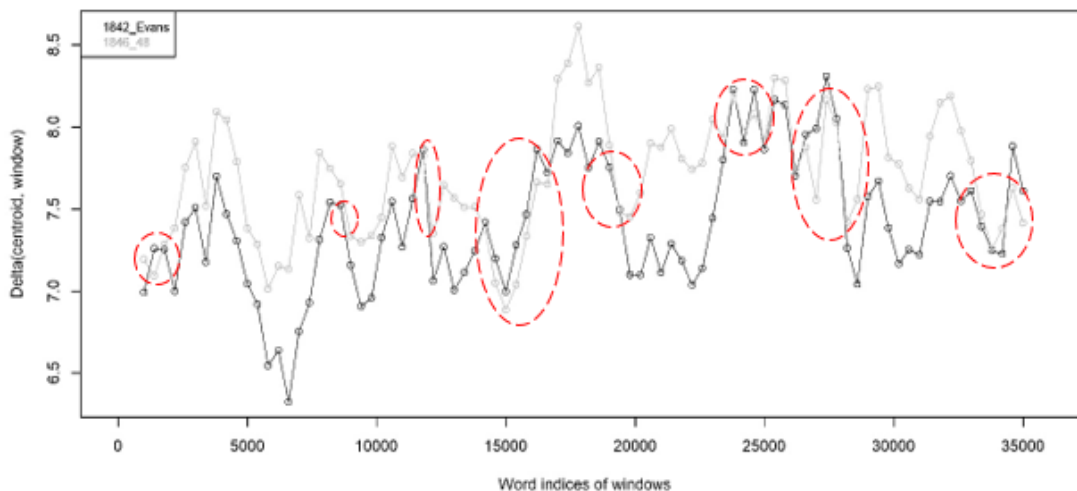


Figure 1:  
Rolling delta  
attribution of  
*Jack Engle*.

This assessment provides some indication that a) the overall voice of *Jack Engle* is closer, stylometrically, to Whitman's 1842 writings (by example of *Franklin Evans*) than to his latest recorded short fiction, and b) that there are distinct dips that show Whitman's late-1840s voice rise to prominence, mostly in the latter two-thirds of the book. Roughly, this figure seems to point toward significant revisions and additions to an original, early 1840s text. Whitman's later voice stands out especially clearly at the very beginning of the text ("PREFATORY"), around chapters twelve (revival scene) and thirteen, the end of chapter fourteen (Martha's letter) and the beginning of chapter fifteen, chapters seventeen and eighteen (escape plot), as well as the last chapter. Most of these chapters are sketched out in the revision draft in Whitman's red notebook.

This supports our thesis that the first two installments appear to have been composed earlier than the rest and that the latter installments were largely written as the piece appeared in print, with perhaps some recycled earlier texts to lean on. In the latter parts, the passages suggesting such recycling are Tom and Jack's visit to Madame Seligny, the Trinity Churchyard scene, and the lawyer's panic. There is also some indication of minor, later revision to the second installment, namely in brief moments during the characterization of Inez (at the beginning of chapter eight), and the backstory of Jack (earring passage). The short "honest carpenter" passage, around the 7,000-word mark, also shows a close proximity between the two voices.

### *Context 1: The Theatrics of a "Real Drama"*

If the first two installments were, then, Whitman's acceptance letter into the *Dispatch*, when were they composed? Luckily, both contain a number of references that allow us to rather clearly narrow down the time of composition, beginning with Jack Engle's odd nickname:

[Nat] saluted me with gravity as "Don Cesar de Bazan;" from a resemblance he assumed to discover between myself and the player of that part at the theatre which Nathaniel was in the habit of honoring with an occasional shilling, and his presence. And Don Cesar he persisted in calling me from that time. (*JE* 273)

Whitman is drawing from personal knowledge here. The play *Don Cesar de Bazan* is, after all, exactly what the young journalist loved to watch: a vaudeville, comedic opera based on Victor Hugo's *Ruy Blas*.<sup>14</sup> By all accounts, it was a big success, when it had its American stage premier at Mitchell's Olympic Theatre on Broadway on December 9, 1844, and also premiered at the larger



Park Theatre a few nights later.<sup>15</sup>

In 1844, the figure of Don Cesar might thus have been familiar enough to Whitman's readers to have him sneak in some characterization for his protagonist without having to spell it out. A later stage edition of the play describes Don Cesar in a manner that makes clear why Whitman would have felt attracted to him:

The character of *Don Cesar* is sustained with unwavering spirit. Generous, sanguinary, reckless and audacious, his is a strange mixture of the gentleman and the ruffian—not an altogether unnatural picture, we should imagine, of an outcast nobleman of Spain.<sup>16</sup>

Certainly, we can hear Jack in these lines: a street kid with a heart of gold; a bold youth with a secret that comes perhaps closest to nobility in an American context: a rich inheritance.

Although *Don Cesar* was performed again later in town (1846, 1847), no other locale fits the description in *Jack Engle* quite as well as Mitchell's. Indeed, during this time, Mitchell's was notorious for its rowdy crowd and had shortly before the premiere of *Don Cesar* even seen a "b'hoy" attempting to single-handedly fight a packed house over his heckling of an actress.<sup>17</sup> We can hear echoes of this in wannabe-"b'hoy" Nat and his friends' act of "pl[ying] vigorously upon all the wooden work" around them with "wooden sticks" during the performance of the dancing-girl (*JE* 278). When *Don Cesar* began its run at the Park Theatre after a few nights,<sup>18</sup> Mitchell's Olympic promptly replaced it with *Telemachus; or, the Island of Calypso*, a "burlesque" based on Homer<sup>19</sup> that has the eponymous "youthful adventurer" hunt for his unknown father.<sup>20</sup> When the first chapter of *Jack Engle* promises its readers the "entrance of Telemachus and Ulysses" (263), we seem to find yet another hint that Whitman discovered most of the high cultural allusions he would later attach to his work through bawdy, working-class theater adaptations.

Whitman himself was a frequent guest at the Olympic in the 1840s, during the height of his infatuation with the New York stage. He even saw Charles Dickens there—whose shadow looms large over much of *Jack Engle*—in the spring of 1842<sup>21</sup> and was probably present for at least a few of the many Shakespeare burlesques performed in that house. Indeed, Whitman fondly remembered, into the last decade of his life, the owner of the stage, British actor-manager and Dickens-friend William Mitchell,<sup>22</sup> and his "English burlesque company."<sup>23</sup> When Jack in his "autobiography" lets the reader know of his having "incurred an expense of some five dollars" for admission of himself and his friends (277), he even seems to provide the exact price for a "private box" at Mitchell's in 1843.<sup>24</sup>



Figure 2: Broadway Circus and Olympic Theatre, Broadway between Howard and Grand Streets, New York," 1821, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City (Accession Number:21.36.236)

Given the strong echoes of Mitchell's playbill of late December 1844, it seems unlikely that the first installment of *Jack Engle* would have been written at any other time. That Whitman's love for *Don Cesar* was rather short-lived is underscored by the fact that the author never again mentions the play—if it were truly special enough to Whitman for it to remain on his mind for eight years (from 1844 to 1852), he would have almost certainly brought it up again at some point. In 1852, Mitchell's had just closed its doors—the last play Whitman could have seen there was likely 1848's *A Glance at New York In 1848*, featuring the character of the charismatic bowery b'hoy "Mose."

An early 1840s composition date for the first installment is also suggested by echoes in Whitman's journalism from this time. Whitman's description of the tasty meats offered

by Ephraim Foster at his market stand near Grand Street (265-266) is mirrored in Whitman's 1842 "Life in a New York Market" (which also features a sickly clerk),<sup>25</sup> and his "Peep at the Israelites" from that same spring, which includes descriptions of "dark-eyed Jewesses" that echo language used to describe the novel's Rebecca (see *JE* 274).<sup>26</sup> It is possible to see in these moments perhaps the earliest beginnings of *Jack Engle*.

### *Context 2: The Narrative Incongruences and the Red Notebook*

If the first installment of *Jack Engle* was indeed composed sometime in early to mid-1845 (perhaps even in the last week of 1844), at the time the Olympic played *Don Caesar* and *Telemachus*, this also means that the 1845 story "Revenge and Requit," featuring another demonic lawyer named Covert attempting to defraud an innocent young woman, would have been written around the same time. Perhaps much of this first installment of *Jack Engle* is an outtake of sorts

from “Revenge and Requitall”—with Whitman, for whatever reason, feeling unable to turn the piece into a longer novella at the time and instead cutting it down to a short story, which he then promptly got published in the *Democratic Review* (and either simultaneously or shortly thereafter saw it in print in *Lloyd’s Weekly Volume of Amusing and Instructive Literature* in London).<sup>27</sup> “Revenge and Requitall” came out in July; the first installment of *Jack Engle* is set in early summer. “Revenge and Requitall” is also one of the few works of short fiction that Whitman divides into numbered sections. Although he does not designate the four parts of the tale as “Chapters,” the presence of these divisions may indicate that he was already thinking about the potential to serialize a tale about a lawyer attempting to use (il)legal tactics to gain control of his wards’ inheritance.<sup>28</sup>

Even the very language of some of *Jack Engle*’s first chapters seems closer to “Revenge and Requitall” than to the rest of the novella. Indeed, the book begins by breaking with its own proclamation to be “written in the first person” (262)—chapters one and two are instead composed in the third person (like the short story), only switching to a sort of confessional, faux first person (“*his* name is Jack Engle” followed by “said *my* companion,” [264]) in brief moments, likely added later.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, the scene at the opening of the novella—the introduction of Nat and Covert and their brief exchange—would have been completely inaccessible to a true first-person narrator, and confusingly seems to suggest Nat, not Jack, as the main character for a moment until Jack is introduced as the reader’s “humble servant,” a brown-eyed and red-cheeked twenty-year-old who is supposed to be “narrating his adventures” for the “entertainment” of a good friend (264).

The initial installment of *Jack Engle* also includes a first mention of Martha and the old “Quaker lady” that strongly suggests a disconnect between the time of writing this chapter (chapter three) and chapters fourteen and fifteen, which add to and substantially change their backstory. Chapter 3 presents us with a “Quaker family” (271) consisting only of the two, living in the rather simple abode of a windowless basement apartment. From these two, young Jack receives hints of a “happy, peaceful, honest, well-ordered life.” According to later chapters of the story (“later” in terms of writing and plot time), Covert should already have been married to the “Quaker lady” during the happenings in chapter three in order to get his hands on the elderly woman’s alleged ample wealth of real estate (here wholly invisible) as well as to put himself in a position to eventually acquire Martha’s inherited assets. *And*, for good measure, to make the latter “a victim to his licentious passions” (314). In the final product, Covert



has a triple motive that is internally inconsistent—disclosing more than a hint of narrative overkill.

If the “old Quaker lady” was already intended to be Mrs. Covert in chapter three, why would Jack meet them in such humble surroundings? And are we meant to understand that Covert might have already set his eyes on Martha at this point (when she is still a child, perhaps his ward, and potentially, his adopted daughter)—suggesting an even darker note to his character? In Whitman’s red notebook, these contradictions become clearer. Whitman here calls the older woman Martha’s “~~mother~~, aunt” and describes her as traumatized by her husband’s murder of Jack’s father in a fit of passion:

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>relations</sup> and former friends, (she was extra sensitive) and lived with Martha, shut out from the world.

Here, we find a much clearer plot of a tragic murder that drives the killer’s wife—who has a daughter or takes care of her orphaned niece—into isolation. This is the situation that young Jack first meets them in (chapter three) and that was composed with this outlook in mind. Only once the mother has died would Covert have set in motion plans—moved either by lust and greed, or just by greed—to become Martha’s ward and ultimately marry her. The picture of the quakeress on the wall would have been Martha’s memento to her dead mother/aunt, not a portrait of “Mrs. Covert.”

The final version of the story of Martha and Covert’s relationship is convoluted and was obviously composed in haste. Covert has now been the “guardian of [the murderer’s] *infant* daughter” (318, italics ours) all along—even while the father was still alive in prison—and the old quakeress has morphed from close relation to random friend of the family. This, though, has made her character essentially irrelevant to the embezzlement-plotline *and* the Martha backstory. But since she had already been established in print, Whitman has to add another, conflicting layer of embezzlement (this time, the victim is the basement-dwelling quakeress herself).

Whitman could also not simply go back and adjust these discordant moments from earlier in the story, since even the “infant daughter” comment was made in the installment previous to the confession of Martha’s father. At this point, Whitman also already had Wigglesworth spout exposition (and subsequently die) and established Martha as reluctant to talk about her past—and since her father in his confession could not have commented on any aspect

of her life past his own death, Whitman had simply run out of ways to include the original plot, without adding new characters in the penultimate installment of the narrative. The backstory of Martha and Covert is thus another example of Whitman writing an evocative, carefully crafted scene (the Billjiggs basement scene) for what would morph into the first installment of *Jack Engle*—and later even drafting a somewhat coherent plotline to see it to its logical conclusion—but abandoning it, when he was pressed for time and had written himself into a corner.

### *Context 3: Some “familiar characters”*

These elements all point us back to Whitman’s most prolific years of writing periodical fiction: the early 1840s, the years when he produced his most successful and most frequently reprinted pieces. Whitman added most of his new fiction works in 1842, branching out from just short fiction to his first novel, *Franklin Evans*, a potboiler temperance work that sold 20,000 copies (totals that were no doubt achieved in part because of the popular appeal of temperance reform at the time). At this time in his career, only *Franklin Evans* was arranged in chapters, but it had been printed in its entirety as a supplement to Park Benjamin’s *New World* newspaper in Whitman’s native New York. In 1843 and 1844, Whitman seemingly returns to the genre of the novel, writing two unfinished pieces of fiction, one each year, that were clearly intended to be longer works, even though neither continued beyond two chapters, at least in print. In these works, Whitman experiments with chapter divisions: both “The Madman” (1843) and “The Fireman’s Dream” (1844) have numbered sections designated as “Chapters,” epigraphs that preface them, and the words “to be continued” after the surviving chapters, indicating that for the first time Whitman was imagining longer works not just as novels, but as serialized works intended to be published in installments. Whitman’s new-found interest in these years for producing fiction in installments as a way of creating a novel in parts for New York newspapers supports the idea that *Jack Engle* first began to emerge at a time when he aspired to serial publication.

There are multiple barely begun serial writings and short stories from 1843 to 1845 that stand out when attempting to establish a date of composition for *Jack Engle*, apparently first published a full decade after *Franklin Evans*. One of these, “The Fireman’s Dream,” printed in the March 31, 1844, issue of the *New York Sunday Times and Noah’s Weekly Messenger*, has the strongest ties to *Jack Engle*.<sup>30</sup> “The Fireman’s Dream” first introduces the story’s “hero,”

a young New York fireman named George Willis, who was also apprenticed to a “respectable and industrious cabinet maker.”<sup>31</sup> While attempting to stop an intense fire, George suffers a severe head wound when he is struck by a portion of the collapsing roof of a burning building; later, he is taken to his home, where the wife of the cabinet maker and her daughter (“a good looking girl”), as well as a physician, tend to his wounds. It is hard not to see George Willis as a character that prefigures at once both Jack Engle and his childhood companion Billjiggs. Although Jack Engle is neither a cabinet maker’s apprentice nor a fireman, he is similarly situated insofar as his earliest encounter with Ephraim Foster—a milkman and purveyor of pork—involves the young Jack taking over some of Foster’s tasks in exchange for food, and later, of course, Jack apprentices to Mr. Covert to study the legal profession. At the same time, the scene Whitman describes in which Willis’s gaping head wound is treated by a woman and her beautiful daughter seems to anticipate Jack Engle’s first encounter with Martha, during which the young girl and “Mrs. Covert” bind up the wounds of Billjiggs.

But the most definitive link between Whitman’s novella and “The Fireman’s Dream” is evident in the characterization of Violet Foster in chapter four.<sup>32</sup> Ephraim’s wife and the adoptive mother of Jack Engle, is clearly related to, if not borrowed from, the character of Violet Boane, as described in the second chapter of the earlier tale. Compare these two passages:

Far in the outskirts of one of the Western States, lived a hardy pioneer, and his quite as hardy wife. Of the two, she possessed much the more bold and masculine disposition. She hunted with him in the forest—caught fish in the stream—and felled trees to clear the land, with her own arms. The name of this couple was Boane—hers, Violet—his, Sampson. She was tall and large-limbed, with brawny hands, and coarse features; but good nature and kindness dwelt upon those features, and she had a merry and gentle heart in that huge wall of flesh. Her husband might have been about half her size and weight—he was a little, abject, obedient creature, and never entertained much opinion of his own. He had one son, a youth of twenty, who partook more of the mother than the father—being mighty in size, like her, and also merry in soul. In the east, where they lived previous to their emigration, Harry Boane sailed in a coasting vessel as a mariner. He was fond of the water and always retained the garb of the craft. (“The Fireman’s Dream”)

This woman with the name of a frail and humble flower, had the bodily height and breadth, of a good sized [sic] man. She was a country girl, when Ephraim married her, and loved to work out-doors. Her features were coarse; only her complexion was clean and healthy; and her eyes beamed with perpetual cheerfulness, and willingness to oblige. She had little education and what is called in the hot-house taste of the present day, intellect. She had no more idea of what are now called Woman’s Rights, than of the sublimest wonders of geology. But

she had a beautiful soul; and her coarse big features were lighted up with more sweetness, to me, than any Madonna of Italian masters. With the strength of a horse, Violet possessed the gentleness of a dove. How sweetly tasted the first food she prepared for me; how fresh and fragrant the homely clothes, I was given to put on that morning, after a bath in a big tub in the woodhouse; and how kindly the tone in which I was reminded of observances about the place, that day. For Violet was a critical housekeeper, and dirt was an abomination in her eyes. (*JE* 272)

Several sentences here read like paraphrases of the other—and the big bathtub moment in *Jack Engle* feels almost like a punning reference to the other Violet’s seafaring ways. In these tales, Violet is hardly a shrinking flower; Whitman develops her from a frontierswoman in the vein of Davy Crockett to a still-masculine, domestic goddess with rural roots in *Jack Engle*. In both texts, Whitman emphasizes her manly qualities, her large and coarse features, as well as her kindness, at times using virtually identical phrasing and expressions.<sup>33</sup>

The plot of “The Fireman’s Dream” also has some key events in common with *Jack Engle*, namely the fact that Violet and Harry Boane of “The Fireman’s Dream,” like the Fosters in Whitman’s novella, end up adopting and raising an orphaned child as their own son (Jack Engle is the same age as the Boane’s son Harry for most of the novella). In the two chapters of the “The Fireman’s Dream” that Whitman did complete, he establishes this much of the plot, introducing George Willis and the two adoptive parents (the Boanes), in addition to explaining how they took in a seemingly abandoned infant. The tale leaves off before readers have a chance to learn more about the strange dreams that plague George Willis following his head injury or the full life story of the infant, who is in his twenties by the time he begins to relate his experiences with the Boane family. Whitman undoubtedly intended this narrative to continue, but no further installments have been discovered—meaning they either do not exist or were completed and published elsewhere and remain undiscovered.

Yet the fact that Whitman began—and then seemingly abruptly aborted—a serial novel during this period that shares character descriptions, language, and even plot events with *Jack Engle*, offers the tantalizing possibility that while “The Fireman’s Dream” might have been unfinished, it can also be read as a kind of false start or a step on the way to creating a complete serial novel: *Jack Engle*. It should also be noted at this point that one of the 1852 clippings in Whitman’s red notebook concerns “a late fire in Cambridge,”<sup>34</sup> underscoring that he might have been still thinking about firemen while sketching out ways to conclude *Jack Engle*. This idea and the similarities between *Jack Engle* and “The Fireman’s Dream” also lends support to Whitman’s assertion that *Jack*



*Engle* would contain some “familiar characters,” in the sense of those he had used before, such as the coarse-yet-kind Violet. It is also intriguing that this tale is the only other work of Whitman’s—prose fiction or poetry—to mention the city of Hoboken, New Jersey. In “The Fireman’s Dream,” Hoboken is the site of George Willis’s Sunday excursion; in *Jack Engle*, both Barney Fox and Inez reside there, and Jack and Martha’s escape takes them to the city. Whitman’s exploration of the serial structure and the presence of characters and a reference to a city that he would reuse lends support to the notion that at least a part of *Jack Engle* was composed soon after “The Fireman’s Dream” (1844).

Another subtle but nonetheless intriguing connection to *Jack Engle* is the 1843 Whitman tale “The Love of the Four Students.”<sup>35</sup> The short story revolves around three young men, students of the law, toiling under the watchful eye of “an eminent practitioner, a rigid man” for whom they were “to study and drudge,” and a fourth young man, the narrator’s brother, who is characterized as a “pale and delicate creature.” The three students share an apprenticeship of the law and the drudgery of the profession with Jack Engle; and, much like Jack, the first-person narrator of this tale is also not particularly enthused about becoming a limb of the law.

But the similarities do not end there. At the beginning of the story, a woman—a “fat,” husbandless, European immigrant owning a somewhat dishonorable business—visits the law office to see the student’s master, the lawyer, about a legal matter, in a scene reminiscent of Ms. Seligny’s arrival at Covert’s. Of course, in the case of “The Love of the Four Students,” the woman is Swiss and owns an ale-house rather than being a Jewish casino-owner assuming a French aura; still, in the name “Seligny” these two tales seem to combine: the only real-world context for the name appears to be the French-speaking municipality of Céligny—americanized by Whitman to “Seligny”<sup>36</sup>—in the canton of Geneva.<sup>37</sup> Thus, *Jack Engle* is not the first time Whitman wrote about students studying with the intent to become lawyers, students who found the work tiresome and seemingly dull. The students in the short story—subtitled “A Chronicle of New York”—may well have been precursors for the law clerks in Covert’s office as well as for Jack Engle himself.

#### *Context 4: A Real-Life “COVERT, Attorney at Law”*

The law office also leads us to another moment that seems highly datable: Covert’s backstory about taking advantage of an honest, dedicated laborer, which has been used to suggest that “Covert” might actually have been based

on a real person.<sup>38</sup> As mentioned above, a lawyer with the surname Covert also appears in “Revenge and Requitall” and promptly gets murdered there. Since he is not a Quaker in that story, this specific aspect of his identity might be an embellishment in *Jack Engle*. Turpin rightly argues that the episode about Covert and his house-building father defrauding an “honest carpenter” (*JE* 280-281) “may go some way toward explaining what happened to the Whitman family in 1825,”<sup>39</sup> since both the *Jack Engle*-draft in the red notebook, as well as another of Whitman’s notebooks,<sup>40</sup> mention a “Covert” and connect him to a “swindle” that must have taken place at the Whitman family’s house on “Johnson Street” in Brooklyn. The notebook not explicitly linked to *Jack Engle* is especially telling, since it contains autobiographical notes, not a plot draft, suggesting that “Covert, the villain”—as he is called there—was an actual person by that very name. Who was the inspiration for Jack Engle’s nemesis, Mr. Covert? Edward Grier suggests the origin of “Adam Covert” might be Brooklyn’s “Richard Covert,” listed in local documents as a lawyer.<sup>41</sup> Grier seems to be correct—and the short biographical sketch of Covert’s life which follows, gleaned from local papers, shows him to be an ideal candidate for Whitman’s wrath that would later be channeled into the ruthless Mr. Covert in *Jack Engle*.

Richard Dikeman Covert, born September 13, 1802, in Brooklyn, was not only one of the few local lawyers (admitted to the bar in 1826), but also a notary for the Brooklyn Bank.<sup>42</sup> His mother Anne’s side of the family was a staple of Brooklyn society and well-known to Whitman,<sup>43</sup> who discussed the goings-on of the Dikeman family with his mother<sup>44</sup> and who lists, in his “Brooklyniana” no. 17, judge John Dikeman (1794-1879)—Richard D. Covert’s uncle—as one of the village’s “citizens of integrity and general worth.”<sup>45</sup> Covert worked for Judge Dikeman in the 1820s<sup>46</sup> and, in 1839, became one of the co-directors of the Fulton Ferry Company alongside said uncle. Perhaps this is another reason why Whitman ended up having his “Covert” marry into the wholesome family of the “old Quakeress”—he had long considered the Coverts to be corrupters of good family names.

Covert, who shared a first name with his father (perhaps explaining the odd switching between “Covert” and “Lawyer Covert” in the carpenter passage; *JE* 281), appears to have been a rather ambitious person, branching out as a young man into a variety of side-businesses. In 1823, while still living with his father (a mason),<sup>47</sup> he opened an “auction and commission store” with another uncle named Henry Dikeman<sup>48</sup> at 33 Fulton Street<sup>49</sup>—and less than a year later joined Henry at his dry-goods store on the same street (see figure 3). Whitman’s effeminate dry-goods seller Smytthe, part of a class of men known as

**CHEAP DRY GOODS.**  
**HENRY DIKEMAN,**  
*No. 45 Fulton-street, Brooklyn.*

**R**ETURNS his thanks to his friends, and the public in general, for past favours, and hopes for a continuance of their patronage. He respectfully informs them he has taken *Richard D. Covert* into partnership, and the business will in future be conducted under the firm of  
**DIKEMAN & COVERT.**

The Subscribers respectfully inform their friends and the public, that they have on hand, a choice assortment of fashionable Dry Goods, purchased at the New-York auctions, on the most advantageous terms for cash; and are daily receiving their stock of Fancy and Staple Goods, which they offer for sale, for a small advance, for cash only. Among which are, superfine Chintz Calicos, together with a general assortment of low priced Calicos, two blue, and black, and white, fancy prints; corded and check'd printed Jaconets; plain and twill'd black Bombazines; black, brown, drab, and cinnamon colour'd Bombazines; plaid and stripe cotton and linen check Gingham; Angola and cotton Casimers, Washington stripes; Satinets, superfine black and blue Cloths, linen and cotton Bedticks, Russia Sheeting, Irish Linens, brown and bleached Shirts and Sheatings, Swiss Jackonet, Cambric, Mul Mul, and book Muslin, plain and figured, together with a general assortment of ladies, gentlemen, and childrens hosiery and gloves.

**HENRY DIKEMAN.**  
**RICHARD D. COVERT.**

Those persons whose accounts have been standing for three months, are requested to call and settle the same without delay.

June 17.

Figure 3: Ad for the Dikeman & Covert Dry Goods Store

counter-jumpers,<sup>50</sup> could then be read as an extension of Covert—perhaps one that Whitman elected to split off into a separate character in *Jack Engle* because this rather comical side seemed incompatible with the lawyer-character’s diabolical villainy.

When Richard Covert turned counter-jumper, the Whitman family lived first on Front Street and then “Moved to Cranberry st. (opposite the church,)”<sup>51</sup>—both streets crossed Fulton and Whitman would only have had to walk a few minutes to get to “Dikeman & Covert.” Thus the store had opened quite literally just around the corner from Whitman and would certainly have been considered “in the neighborhood of [his] house,” as *Jack Engle* puts it (*JE* 278). Indeed, one should consider that Smytthe is described as “the assistant of a small dry-goods store,” a fitting description

for a junior co-owner—and perhaps less so for “but a boy” (*JE* 278). In early 1825, Henry Dikeman severed his business ties with Covert and ran the store alone again;<sup>52</sup> still Whitman would have had ample opportunity to stumble into the store between the ages of four and six to behold Covert eloquently touting his “choice assortment of fashionable Dry Goods, purchased at the New-York auctions”—a claim that rings true, given Henry’s other business, and that resonates forcefully with Smytthe’s peddling of “real French goods” (*JE* 279).

Whatever was the case, it should be noted that it would have been highly unlikely for the Whitmans not to have been aware of Covert, who lived and worked in such close proximity to them. Brooklyn in the 1820s was a rather small village: only around 7000 people lived there in 1820,<sup>53</sup> and most houses clustered in a six-block radius around the ferry stop to Manhattan (near today’s Brooklyn Bridge).<sup>54</sup> It is as likely that the Whitman family would have known their neighbor, the local lawyer and dry-goods salesman, just as the average citizen of any such village would have known the main street grocer. As Figure





Figure 4: Francis Guy, "Summer View of Brooklyn," 1820, American Art Gallery (painted at 11 Front Street).

4 illustrates, a view of Brooklyn from (roughly) the Whitmans' house on Front Street underscores the rural closeness of Brooklyn in these years.

While there seems to be no exact record of what "Covert, the villain" might have done to the Whitman family when they moved to "Johnson st. [on] May 1st 1825,"<sup>55</sup> such an event would have taken place around three months after Covert's dismissal from the world of "Fancy and Staple goods" and thus have coincided with the lawyer's subsequent endeavors in real estate. In 1832, the lawyer lived at 87 Cranberry Street,<sup>56</sup> while Whitman stayed at "Henry st. (near Cranberry),"<sup>57</sup> and rented out as well as sold property from that location: from large swaths of land at the Canadian border in 1832,<sup>58</sup> to farmhouses in Brooklyn (Clinton Street) and Long Island in 1841,<sup>59</sup> to plots of land in southern Brooklyn in 1842.<sup>60</sup>

Apparently, Richard Covert was not the ideal landlord and was seemingly more interested in flipping properties than maintaining them: in 1843 he initiated a replevin suit against two of his renters, but lost and was forced to return \$313 to them.<sup>61</sup> During these years, Covert becomes politically active and is listed as a member of the "Whig Young Men" in the early 1840s.<sup>62</sup> He was also not above advertising obvious quack medicine to his neighbors by publicly swearing that "Meeker's Blood Tea" had healed his son's debilitating skin disease.<sup>63</sup> He served as a trustee for the creditors of at least one "absconding debtor," and attempted to collect the money that was owed on their behalf.<sup>64</sup> At the same time, Covert was an active church-goer and lobbied for the erection of a "Brooklyn Union



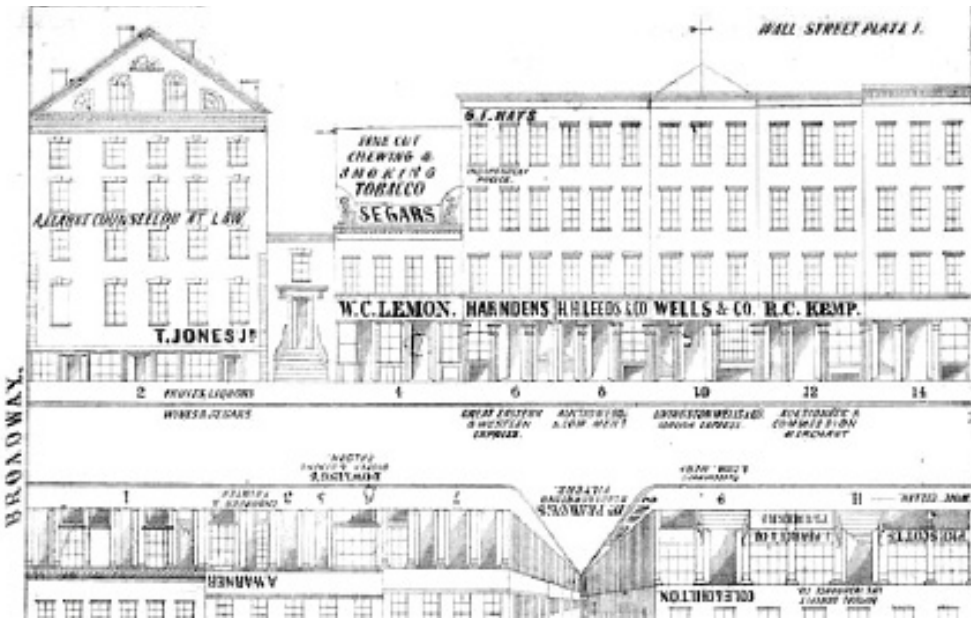


Figure 5: Wall Street in 1849. Richard Covert’s office was above the store labelled “H. H. Leeds” (“Wall Street plate I” by Francis Michelin, Rare Book Division, The New York Public Library).

Bethel”<sup>65</sup>; “sanctimonious” seems to be an apt description of his character (*JE* 263). Covert later moved to Wall Street and opened an office that nicely fits the description in *Jack Engle*. Beginning in 1843, local directories list Covert as practicing on 8 Wall Street, an upstairs law office, a stone’s throw away from Trinity Church (see figure 5).<sup>66</sup> By 1848, Covert had already moved on to a new office at 74 Broadway,<sup>67</sup> so, if the description Jack Engle’s first encounter with Covert’s place of business is actually based on a real event—one could imagine Whitman perhaps stumbling into Covert in Manhattan or maybe even receiving a letter from home, informing him of the family’s nemesis moving up in the world—it strongly suggests the early, rather than late, 1840s (or even 1852) date of composition.

For a description Covert’s “villainy” against the Whitmans, it appears we must rely on Walt’s fictional rendition. Whatever happened, the *Evening Post* of July 22, 1825, announced that several Brooklyn lots and houses would be up for auction at the business of William R. Dean. The listing includes “a House and lot, 25 by 100 feet, on the north side of Johnson-street, 77 feet west from the northwest corner or Adams and Johnson st,”<sup>68</sup> which seems to fit the bill of Walter Whitman’s house-building debacle on “Johnson Street north of Adams” rather well.<sup>69</sup> Whitman’s “revenge and requital” for Covert’s mysterious misdeed was apparently reserved for the world of fiction: while Richard Covert does leave New York City sometime between 1846 and 1850 to go north(east)wards, the move was for a semi-retirement rather than in an escape. Census records show him (now “farmer” as well as a lawyer), his wife, Caroline, and his five children living in Morristown, NJ—the value of his property is assessed at ca. \$25,000,<sup>70</sup>

or around \$800,000 today.

### *Context 5: An English Inez*

While the “honest carpenter” passage offers insight into the character of Covert—narratively and perhaps biographically<sup>71</sup>—it is still only a minor aspect of the second installment. As in the beginning of *Jack Engle*, it is theater life on Broadway that remains at the forefront of this part of the novella, before disappearing for good in subsequent passages. In this part of *Jack Engle*, the narrator introduces the other female main character as “Inez.” While we have met her already in an earlier chapter, it is only here that she is given a name, which at this point of the story, could either be a stage name or a stock name that would evoke an exotic Spanish dancer. She is simply referred to as “this Inez” (278)—and only chapter eight assures us that this is actually her official, legal name (a statement that seems at odds with the use of “this” here).

For “Inez,” there appear to be two figures Whitman could have drawn from. The first is Victor Hugo’s eponymous character from his play *Inez de Castro*, performed on numerous occasions in New York—with a July 1843 Italian opera rendition of passages from the piece by Giuseppe Persiani at the Tabernacle being the most likely performance Whitman might have attended.<sup>72</sup> Whitman had been familiar with the plot of the play at least since 1840, when he published his poem “The Spanish Lady,” wherein he turns Hugo’s Portuguese protagonist into a Spanish woman.<sup>73</sup> If this character was indeed the partial blueprint for *Jack Engle*’s Inez, one would expect a tale of betrayal and death to follow—in his poem, Inez dies by snake-bite, lounging on her sofa; in Hugo’s play, she drinks from a poison cup.

Another, perhaps more likely, candidate can again be found at Mitchell’s Olympic Theatre. In November of 1843, the Olympic staged a burlesque take on Defoe’s *Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*—a book Whitman adored<sup>74</sup>—that was directed by William Mitchell himself. Judging by the names of some of its characters (especially “Nipcheese”), it appears to have been an adaptation of Isaac Pocock’s *Robinson Crusoe; or The Bold Buccaneer* and prominently featured the wife of Crusoe, here simply named “Inez,” who is stranded with her child on her husband’s island during her search for him.<sup>75</sup> The original musical play was subtitled “a Romantic Melo-Drama” and revolved around defending the island homestead against mutineers, out to steal the Crusoe’s box of jewels.<sup>76</sup>

Whitman, as we have seen, loved Mitchell’s theater at this time, but what really points to this particular performance is this puzzling description of *Jack*

*Engle's Inez:*

She was Spanish by birth, but must have been, from early life in England; at any rate, she talked the language without any foreign tone (279-280).

Her character in the novella has no connection whatsoever to England—and this initial, lone reference to a British accent (or as Whitman puts it: “without any foreign tone”) seems to make little sense, especially as subsequent chapters exotify her again, having Inez perform Spanish songs with “deep feeling” while playing the guitar and serving Spanish coffee (285). This might, then, be another case of a real-life observation sneaking into the narrative: at Mitchell’s, “Inez” was played by a British actress named Mrs. Watts (also known as Mrs. John Sefton)—and given that Mitchell’s tended not to attract the first class of theater actors, it seems likely that the opera-lover Whitman would have noticed the distinctly un-Spanish pronunciation of her Inez Crusoe.<sup>77</sup>

There is also some indication here—stylometrically (see above) as well as on a level of content—that Whitman did revise some aspects of his description of Inez (beginning of chapter eight) at a later time. By then perhaps assuming she would take on a more prominent role in the final novella, Whitman decided to give her some psychological depth—and did so through the most cutting-edge psychology available to him: phrenology. The source material for this was certainly dear to the novelist; he appears to be referencing his own, 1849 phrenological assessment by L. N. Fowler:

You were blessed by nature with a good constitution and power to live to a good old age. You were undoubtedly descended from a long-lived family. You were not (*like many*) *prematurely developed*—did not get ripe *like a hot house-plant* but you can last long and *grow* better as you *grow* older if you are careful to obey the laws of health, of life and of mental and physical development. [italics added]<sup>78</sup>

Compare this to Whitman’s efforts to characterize Inez:

Inez belonged to that class of professional people, including a *majority* of those . . . who are *prematurely developed*. These unfortunates have the experience of men and women while yet in early youth. Under feverish stimulants, they come forward, *like hot-house plants*, and sometimes their *growth* is unwholesome, and as fragile. [italics added] (*JE* 283)

These beginning two paragraphs of chapter eight are obvious additions from a later point in time. While Inez was ‘an Inez’—a symbol of holy purity or a stage name—when this installment was first written (and just moments earlier in plot

time), Whitman had apparently decided to morph her into a more significant character. So he tacks-on this psychological sketch and informs his readership “she never went by any other name, except in legal documents, when the term, ‘a Spanish dancing girl,’ was added” (283).

### *Context 6: The Politics of Street Sweeping*

Whichever theater-figure might have served as a guidepost for Inez (perhaps both did), each suggests the year 1843 as the time of initial composition. Another self-contained part of this second installment confirms this dating: chapter nine, the oddly out-of-place, singular passage dealing with electioneering and local politics.<sup>79</sup> Luckily, Whitman is *very* specific here and what seems at first glance like a generalized satire of the two-party system, can actually be dated quite precisely.

Given the reactions of the Democrat Alderman Rye<sup>80</sup> and the Whig Isaac Leech, we can deduce that the political contest Whitman describes in chapter nine was a New York city council election that saw a surprise Whig victory after long Loco-Foco rule.<sup>81</sup> The contest best fitting this description is the Board of Aldermen election of April 1842. Whitman’s joke here is as on point as it is biting. Leonard P. Curry summarizes the local elections of this decade thusly:

[In 1838, the Democrats] carried twelve wards to give them a twenty-four-to-ten edge in the city council. There then followed a number of successive Democratic victories. Except for the Whig capture of twenty aldermanic and assistant aldermanic seats and control of the city council in 1842, the next four years were times of Democratic triumph.<sup>82</sup>

Covert’s “safe bet” election-bit literally falls on the *only* city council contest that saw his Loco-Focos in New York defeated during these years. The humorous punch that comes with this allusion was likely lost even on many New York-readers ten years after the fact; by the time *Jack Engle* was printed, the Whigs had—after a last hurrah in the presidential contest of 1848—descended into irrelevance.

As a journalist for the New York *Aurora*, Whitman had taken on an outspoken but quite conflicted stance in this election, a position that is mirrored in *Jack Engle*. Whitman and his Democrat-leaning paper had opposed the Democratic Mayor Morris without endorsing the Whigs. While Morris, in Whitman’s estimation, was a “good officer and a worthy man,” the *Aurora* “did not hesitate in opposing him and his whole ticket” and would “do the same thing



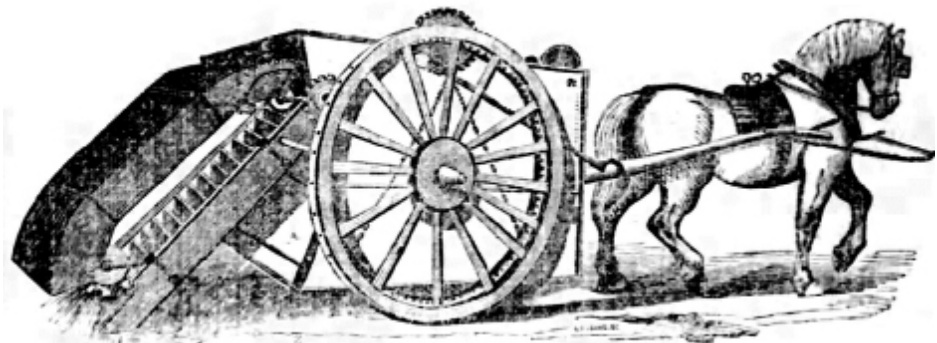
in like circumstances, again”—the reason being the party’s strategy of “gaining success through base truckling to a conglomeration of foreign vagabonds and rowdies,” especially the Irish.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, the “discontent among the regulars” (*JE* 288) of both parties that Covert hopes to exploit in *Jack Engle* appears to be anti-Irish nativism (espoused by Whitman in his election coverage) that led to the creation of the short-lived, anti-immigrant “American Republican Party” in these years, when even another Democrat challenged the incumbent Morris for a brief time.<sup>84</sup>

The issues discussed in *Jack Engle*’s satirical aside here are also a specificum in all their seeming absurdity. Much of the debate during the 1842 city council contest revolved around street sanitation, sweeping contracts, and the threat of automation rendering human sweeps obsolete. It could even be argued that street sweeping *decided* the election, much as Jack jokingly acknowledges: “Whether from the unsatisfactory nature of my answer to [Irishman] Barney Fox’s questions [about street-sweeps], or some other cause, Covert lost his election” (290). Covert outsources to his apprentice his response to a seemingly unimportant letter, riddled with spelling errors—and the apprentice’s jesting reply causes one of the most surprising upsets in local elections in the 1840s.

Indeed, the connection between voting and street-sweeping was so common that it became a frequent target of newspaper puns in the time between the trial run of a “Street-Sweeping Machine and Self-Loading Cart” in June of 1843 (on Chambers Street, five blocks north from Trinity Church) and the first prototype of the “street-sweepin masheens” (*JE* 289) that would begin their regular duty in October of 1845 (on Wall Street).<sup>85</sup> The *New-York Daily Tribune*, for instance, remarked in 1843:

That its use would save annually many thousands of dollars to our citizens, and be of inestimable benefit to the health and cleanliness of the city, we cannot doubt. But, as has been suggested by others, ‘*it cannot vote*,’ and lacking this ability it may seem to the ruling powers to lack the only essential qualification.<sup>86</sup>

Figure 6: Prototype of the first American street-sweeping machine, based on an English patent (“New Street Cleaning Machine,” *Brooklyn Evening Star*, [June 6, 1843], 2).



Like most sanitation issues in the city, street-sweeping machines became immediately politicized—and manual sweeping continued for another two years, even though, as the *Tribune* article notes, the machines had already been showing excellent results in Britain, where they had been used in select cities for months.

The political conflict around street sweeping was certainly long in the making. Until late in the century, disease outbreaks were so common in the city that Whitman himself used descriptors like “first cholera summer” as a memory aid in his notebooks.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, while the causes for the spread of cholera (contaminated drinking water) remained unclear until 1854 (and were even then hotly debated), the connection between sanitation and cholera was already deeply engrained in the public mind. As John Duffy’s excellent historical study of sanitation in New York City has shown, increased street sweeping was generally the first political response to threats of cholera.<sup>88</sup> While *Jack Engle*, with its lighter humorous tone, is silent on the disease, its sentimental companion piece, “Revenge and Requitel,” is not:

After desolating the cities of the eastern world, the dreaded Cholera made its appearance on our American shores. In New York, hardly had the first few cases occurred, when thousands of the inhabitants precipitately left town, and sought safety in the neighboring country districts. For various reasons, however, large numbers still remained. While fear drove away so many—poverty, quite as stern a force, also compelled many to stay where they were.<sup>89</sup>

Whitman here describes the outbreak of the Asiatic cholera in New York of 1831-32, which was remembered both as a tragedy as well as a crisis of street sweeping. The Board of Aldermen tried to combat it by increasing sweeping to twice a week and beginning to pave streets (for more efficient sweeping). While collection and transport of manure and filth from the streets had already been in city hands for about a decade, even the onus of sweeping in front of residences and businesses was then moved from the owners of said properties to the local government. All sweeping from then on was to be performed by city-appointed street inspectors, who directly reported to the Alderman of each local ward.<sup>90</sup>

While this public sweeping system, put in place by Democratic politicians, appeared to work well for a short while, it soon came to be seen as an extension of party politics and as early as 1839, newspapers were complaining that streets were only being cleaned when elections came around.<sup>91</sup> Sweeping budgets were ballooning and Whig papers like the *New-York Daily Tribune* began to suspect corruption: “the Sweeping of the Streets of our City has for the last seven years cost the Tax-payers an average of \$100,000 per annum over and above the salaries of Street Inspectors and all receipts for the material collected by such

Sweeping.”<sup>92</sup> It is certainly not far-fetched to assume that the city’s powerful Democratic ward bosses, with their street gangs and racketeering operations, saw street cleaning as another good way to pad their wallets, given that the only political oversight was performed by the very people they were in the business of getting elected. What was a life-saving measure in the eyes of Whitman and many of his (working-class) contemporaries had turned into a money-making scheme for professional politicians and the seedy underworld bosses associated with them.

One of these bosses (and New York’s most powerful Locofoco electioneer), was Captain Isaiah Rynders (pronounced “Ryen-derz”), a German-Irish son of immigrants, the future head of the Democratic Empire Club, and a likely blueprint for Alderman Rye. While Rynders (1804-1885) was never actually an Alderman himself (though he would try to run for office in 1850 and failed),<sup>93</sup> many Locofocos owed their political life to him and his “b’hoys.”<sup>94</sup> Whitman, naturally, was well-aware of Rynders and had seen him crash many of the political reform assemblies the journalist attended at the Tabernacle in the 1840s (be they abolitionist, Quaker, suffragist, etc.) and later in life remembered him as “a fierce politician of those days, with a band of robust supporters, [who] would attempt to contradict the speakers and break up the meetings.”<sup>95</sup> That puts it mildly. Like Alderman Rye in the novella, Rynders was a “grocer” (*JE* 288)—“grocer” in the New York slang of his day translating to “bar owner,” in this case “a few bowery saloons, and a tavern.”<sup>96</sup> Rynders and his gang, prone to fist- and knife-fights and relied-on by Tammany for voter intimidation and election fraud,<sup>97</sup> were notorious around the city for “smell[ing] like a whiskey barrel.”<sup>98</sup> Indeed, people can still order an “Isaiah Rynders” in New York City bars today.<sup>99</sup> If Captain Rynders, this most famous of all Tammany electioneers and a well-known drunk,<sup>100</sup> is indeed who Whitman is parodying with “Alderman Rye,” the family name he distilled for him<sup>101</sup> and the character’s subsequent “depression of *spirits*” (*JE* 290) certainly resonates.

As the unofficial boss of the sixth ward (the notorious Five Points), Rynders de-facto controlled and profited from street cleaning in his district—and the Democratic Alderman representing it would certainly do very little to combat the man who elected him. When Rynders was finally dropped by Tammany in the 1850s, it is no coincidence that his ward’s own street inspector, Con Donoho, a fellow “grocer” who had been in charge of overseeing the sweeping of Five Points since 1839, took his place.<sup>102</sup>

What started as an earnest measure to combat Cholera epidemics in the 1830s, then, had a decade later turned into a political tool for the ruling Locofocos

and a highly profitable endeavor for the underworld figures supporting them. The effects were felt daily by New Yorkers—John Duffy’s account of these years is appropriately titled “the lucrative business of not cleaning the streets.” Still, Democrats staunchly defended the system, even though their ostensibly bloated and impotent public works program was ideologically highly at odds with the laissez-faire politics of the party in the 1840s.<sup>103</sup> These incongruities were certainly not lost on the idealistic Locofoco-sympathizer Whitman, leading him to turn his main villain into a proponent of the corrupt status quo, which allowed Whitman to gleefully observe a Democratic loss—when understood as a loss for the idea of valuing party politics over “doing what’s right.” Politicians like Covert and Rye might have forgotten about the Asiatic cholera, but Whitman—as the apparently contemporaneous “Revenge and Requitall” emphasizes—certainly had not. “There is never any thing lost in spending money liberally in behalf of a cleanly city,” he later writes; “it has such an intimate connection with the citizens’ health . . . [that] no outlay is too great to make.”<sup>104</sup>

Still, this does not mean that Whitman, all of a sudden, adopted Whig politics. Indeed, his harshest criticism in *Jack Engle* is reserved for them. And for good reasons. For years, the Whigs had proposed privatizing street sweeping in order to deflate the budget and streamline cleaning and 1842 gave them their chance. Under the term “contract system,” the Whig-dominated Board of Aldermen (strong enough to overrule mayoral vetoes) began giving out five-year contracts to private companies to sweep the streets. Whitman, like many Locofocos of his day, suspected decidedly less laudable motives than reducing the budget, and he appears to have been right; as Ira M. Leonard observes of the Whig win of April 1842:

Campaigning on the issue of reform in the local election of 1842, the Whigs narrowly captured the Common Council. . . . [A] bitter struggle for power erupted between the Whig dominated Council and Democratic Mayor, which underscored how completely the local government had been subordinated to partisan politics. The Whigs created several joint committees of the Council with extensive executive powers designed to exclude mayoral supervision and centralize control over the police, the Croton Water System, and street sanitation. In each case [the Mayor] vetoed the measure because, as he insisted, the Council exceeded its authority. . . . The Council adopted a five-year street cleaning contract of doubtful legality and handed the individual contracts to party stalwarts, who in the end failed utterly to fulfill their responsibilities.<sup>105</sup>

The Whigs had created a loophole in the “contract system”: the five-year contracts were to go to the lowest bid *made in good faith*. This meant that incumbent Whig politicians could easily disregard bids and award contracts to people



of their choosing, arguing that lower offers were *not* made in good faith. It was a move to wrestle street-sweeping away from the Locofocos and their ward bosses and bring it under firm, long-term Whig control.

Outrage came swiftly, with the Democratic mayor fighting them every step of the way and much of the newspaper-coverage of municipal politics in 1843 preoccupied with sweeping contracts and the question of how to punish companies for not upholding their contractual duties. Democrats quickly argued that if a company failed to clean on time, the city could step in to perform the labor and charge said company for it—a measure voted down by the Whig-dominated Council, which declared it unlawful. They instead passed a revised ordinance obligating the city to supply dumping grounds and cleaning supplies to the contractors free of charge—a notion that speaks to a character like Barney Fox, who inquired about Covert’s position on “a law furnishin sweepers wid a new broom, gratis, for nothin” (*JE* 289). In the following years, the city would switch back almost annually between versions of the private contract system and publicly enforced sweeping, with little improvement in the cleanliness of the city’s streets.<sup>106</sup>

Barney Fox is thus a biting caricature of one of these corrupt pro-Whig contractors.<sup>107</sup> He is, as Whitman emphasizes, an Irish freeloader even before the election, wanting supplies “gratis, for nothin” and asking about “rasin sweeper’s wages to ten shillings a day”—which equaled the exorbitant amount of roughly \$2.50, or a raise of about 400%.<sup>108</sup> Apparently knowing about the city’s urgent need for manure dumping grounds, Barney “secure[s himself] a really nice little contract for digging out and filling up certain public grounds” (*JE* 290). Once he has obtained such a sweeping contract from his fellow Whigs, he promptly moves into a nice country house, and becomes “totally oblivious toward street-sweeping,” showing no more “interest in ‘masheens’ that might interfere with the manual performance of that avocation” (291). To Barney, his clever influencing of the 1842 election has turned what was then believed to be a crucial measure to combat cholera into a mere “avocation,” to be performed only when politically convenient.

What makes dating this passage especially interesting is that it was clearly written before Whitman could ever have seen *Don Cesar de Bazan*—and thus before he composed (at least much of) the first installment of *Jack Engle*. While *Don Cesar* premiered in December of 1844, the contract system had again been abolished in August of 1843 and would not see the light of day again before street sweeping machines were a reality in New York.<sup>109</sup> At the same time, the *national* politics debated by Rye and Leech also suggest a time before the first

results of the 1844 presidential election came out (which happened weeks prior to the premier of *Don Cesar*). In 1844, New York (and with it the whole election) went to the Democrat James K. Polk, loudly supported by Andrew Jackson. Not only was the victory allegedly engineered by Isaiah Rynders, but it was a harsh blow to New York Whigs and their candidate Henry Clay—and it seems hardly believable that Whitman would still have presented the “Hon. [Whig] Isaac Leech . . . in colors of resplendent glory” without at least hinting at the electoral comeuppance in the works for him—unless, of course, this part of *Jack Engle* was authored prior to the 1844 election and thus prior to the first installment.

*Jack Engle*'s second installment, then, would have been written between the summer of 1842 and the summer of 1843, whereas the first installment was more likely composed between Christmas of 1844 and summer of 1845. Looking at the second installment with regards to plot, one has to wonder if it was originally intended even to be a part of the *Jack Engle*-storyline. Indeed, it reads more like disjointed elements from a completely different story: one about electioneering and fraud, also containing a love-triangle between Smytthe, Inez, and the protagonist. In part two, a whole new main and supporting cast is established only to quickly become irrelevant to the overarching story in subsequent installments: Inez, Alderman Rye, Isaac Leech, Pepperich Ferris, and J. Fitzmore Smytthe. *Jack Engle* would read just fine without the second installment: all plot-points and characters that begin here either also end here or are returned to only as hastily dropped-in asides later in the novella. Jack is a mere on-looker to all the goings-on here, and Covert's political ambitions are never again spoken of.

### *Context 7: A Composted Cemetery Visit*

The remaining chapters of *Jack Engle* lack much of the historic specificity that would have made the story's subtitle about a “Story of New York at the Present Day” ring true in the 1840s (though not in 1852)—except for one passage toward the end of the novella. This already much-debated moment is chapter nineteen's Trinity Church scene, a narrative aside in which the main character muses upon the continuities between life and death, New York history, and the nature of republican patriotism. This is an especially fascinating piece, since stylometrics suggest an earlier year of composition, while some content dates it (or revisions of it) to, at the very least, the year 1849. Whitman here mentions the “the varied and wooded slopes of the cemetery of the Evergreens” (332), which was founded that year. Still, we already know that the “patriotic” elements of this chapter can

be traced to a journalistic text by Whitman from November 18, 1846, about the Lawrence grave, parts of which are quoted verbatim:

His remains lie in the south-western corner of the churchyard—and the old monument, lately covered with a *rough pine shed*.<sup>110</sup>

. . . *What a day must that have been when he drew out of Boston Harbor, and the hearts of his countrymen beat high with the confidence of victory! What a moment, when struck down by the enemy's fire—enveloped in smoke and blood—the sounds and sights of carnage around him on every side—he was borne from the deck, overcome but not conquered—his last thought, his last grasp, given for this country!—Taken by the generous victors to Halifax, he was buried with those testimonials of illustrious merit, which became his exalted courage, and the character of a people never niggard in their admiration of true patriotism. But not long could his beloved Republic spare the remains of a child so dear to her, and so fit to be a copy for his brethren. His body was disinterred and removed to Salem, (N. E.) whence it was brought to New York and deposited in Trinity churchyard . . . Sleep gently! Bold and True.*<sup>111</sup>

*Jack Engle* reads:

In the farther corner of the yard was a ruined tomb, the bricks fallen down, and the whole partly covered by a *rough pine shed* . . . . [*W*]hat a day must that have been when he drew out of Boston harbor, and the hearts of his countrymen beat high with the confidence of victory. What a moment, when, struck down by the enemy's fire—enveloped in smoke and blood—the sounds and sights of carnage around him on every side—he was borne from the deck, overcome but not conquered—his last thought, his last gasp, given for his country! Taken by generous victors to Halifax, his corpse was treated with those testimonials of illustrious merit which became his exalted courage, and the character of a people never niggard in their admiration of true patriotism. But not long could his beloved republic spare the remains of a child so dear to her, and so fit to be a copy for her children[.] His body was brought to New York and here the people buried him. Even his nearest friends wept not. Their hearts were not sad, but joyful. The flag he died for, wrapped his coffin—and he was lowered in that native earth whose boast is that she has nurtured such brave defenders as himself. *Sleep gently, Bold Sailor!* [italics added] (*JE* 335)

The piece even cites the inscription using the same Whitmanian dashes the monument itself lacks (“Neither the fury of the battle—the anguish of a mortal wound—nor the horrors”).

In 1847 Lawrence's body was moved, the proposal of which prompted Whitman's original newspaper piece. In *Jack Engle*, Whitman inadequately accounts for that by inserting an odd aside in square brackets, mentioning the new internment but leaving unresolved how his narrator could possibly stumble upon and describe the old grave in great detail that, by then, was no longer extant.

We also find another distinct echo of Whitman's 1846 journalism in his description of Hamilton in a piece for the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* of that year. Dealing with the character of Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton,<sup>112</sup> he describes her husband as one who "sowed the seeds of some good and much evil"—a claim he re-balances when he publishes his novella in the Whig-leaning *Sunday Dispatch*,<sup>113</sup> calling him a "sower of seeds that have brought forth good and evil" (JE 334). In his novella, Whitman also describes Mrs. Hamilton as a "lady whose aged form is constantly busied in works of kindness and benevolence," while the journalistic sketch had cast her as "aged, to the extremest limit . . . yet untiring in her course of benevolence and mercy." Whitman's reference to Alexander Hamilton's wife as still "*constantly* busied" might have rung true in the mid-1840s, but it did not in 1852. By 1848, Elizabeth Hamilton had retired from her post as one of the directors of the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children and had relocated to Washington D.C.<sup>114</sup> Given that this particular moment is phrased as an authorial aside by a present-day author ("I may here add"), this minute detail also supports our thesis of a pre-1848 origin for this particular part of the chapter.

Given this content, one has to wonder how much of this chapter was, indeed, recycled from earlier materials as well, and how much truly anticipates *Leaves of Grass*. Ed Folsom, for instance, states in an interview that one "can just feel *Leaves of Grass* sort of emerging" in these moments of Engle wondering about the joyous masses flowing past the bodies of dead men.<sup>115</sup> That is certainly true—but does this underscore a timely proximity of *Jack Engle* to *Leaves of Grass* or merely show the long genesis of the latter in Whitman's writings from the 1840s? Indeed, cemetery meditations were a frequent genre of Whitman's and often followed the same trajectory as this chapter.<sup>116</sup>

His 1844 "A Visit to Greenwood Cemetery," for instance,<sup>117</sup> has the same structure as *Jack Engle*'s cemetery scene: it begins with an entrance by horse, then describes a solitary wandering around the premises with comments on vegetation and scenery as well as detailed looks at graves, including quotes from tombstones, accompanied by authorial speculation over what motivated these inscriptions. These smaller musings then come together to suggest broader truths about life, urbanity, and death, when compared to the busy New York atmosphere:

There is a beautiful hill in Greenwood, the summit of which overlooks the bay and a portion of the city of New York. A very animating prospect, bespeaking life, and bustle, and activity, and contrasting strangely enough, with the quiet of the cemetery.



But as in *Jack Engle*, these “sentimental meditations” (*JE* 337) have to be brushed aside and left for the reader to ponder: “Bless us, how sentimental we are getting.”

*“In which we all get to the end of the journey”*

Of course, shortly after this passage, Whitman’s readers learn that they were *not* reading a story of “New York at the Present Time.” Instead of a “story,” Whitman now calls *Jack Engle* a “history” (353) and retroactively dates it back to at least six years before the narrative present.<sup>118</sup> Apparently, Whitman had noticed that political debates from the early 1840s and analyses of no-longer existing graves dated *Jack Engle* quite noticeably. Indeed, while his “prefatory” teases that his readers surely still “happen to know” many of the “facts” contained in the tale (262), the content clearly did not live up to this claim. Who would, more than ten years after the fact, remember the specific details of a municipal election? Or recall a fashionable play that enraptured Manhattan for a season? Or who would, even after six years, still recall sailor Lawrence’s old grave? There were certainly other events Whitman would have picked, had he intended this narrative structure from the outset: Dickens’ 1842 visit to New York, perhaps, or the tense presidential election of 1844 and its extremely close outcome, decided by electioneers in New York City.

Turpin has rightly mentioned the odd genre-mix that is *Jack Engle*: from “sentimentalism, sensationalism, adventure fiction, reform literature, parables, the picaresque, autobiography” to “suspense fiction, place painting, revenge narrative, didactic moralism, detective fiction, early realist fiction, the essay, [and] journalistic reportage,” the novella seems to contain it all.<sup>119</sup> Having teased out some of the various historic, biographical, and bibliographical contexts absorbed by *Jack Engle*, there seems to be a clear reason for this: the novella is a mix of styles because it is a mix of distinct texts. *Jack Engle* is one of Whitman’s most ambitious projects in literary compositing, repurposing a plethora of his writings into a somewhat coherent whole—from brief moments of his journalism from 1842 to 1846, to recycled characters and plot points from various pieces of his short fiction and aborted novellas, to autobiographical sketches that truly could have made Brooklyn newspaper-readers of 1845 (at the very least one Mr. Richard D. Covert) wonder “how the deuce such facts . . . ever got into print” (*JE* 262).

It appears, then, that the earliest part of the novella was a satire of the City Council election of April 1842 (and written between then and summer

of 1843). This passage was then combined with a tale-fragment about a young law clerk defeating his evil master, composed around 1845, and a love triangle involving the narrator, an effeminate salesman, and an exotic dancing-girl and fraud victim (also written in 1844-45). In the backstory of *Jack*, we also find clear echoes of sentimental tales Whitman began and dropped around the same time: Violet Foster now has a strange early life as a still more burly man-mother in “The Fireman’s Dream”-fragment (1844), and Madame Seligny appears to have Swiss ancestry, if we believe “The Love of the Four Students” (1843). The first two installments of *Jack Engle* are thus a jumble of elements from Whitman’s most prolific time as a short-story writer—well-crafted but ultimately tonally and narratively at odds. Even the latter, more hastily written, parts of the story still draw from his mid-1840s writings, especially the Trinity Church-passage that drops hints about being at least partially composed or revised around 1846.

What does this composition history mean for Whitman-scholars? Is *Jack Engle* evidence of Whitman returning in earnest to his abandoned 1843 plans of composing a second novel or novella? Or did he merely paste together a number of half-finished manuscripts for a quick buck? Whatever might be the case, the foundation of *Jack Engle* is deeply rooted in Whitman’s authorial practices between 1842 and 1846, underscoring both the richness of his prose fiction in these years as well as the relative dearth of known narratives in the years to follow; an 1852 date of publication does not change that fact. While this might cast some doubt on the potential existence of a hidden reservoir of 1850s Whitman fiction, it does suggest that there could be more tales with “familiar characters” out there somewhere—though likely from the early 1840s.<sup>120</sup> Indeed, Whitman seems to have his own “Expanded Universe” of sorts: hosts of characters (some possibly based on real people) that he keeps returning to, keeps revising, and keeps working into all kinds of plots and genres. While the post-2000s have several takes on Batman and Spiderman, Whitman’s fictional world has several takes on Covert and Violet—sometimes over-the-top and humorous, sometimes dark and brooding.

What Whitman does with these characters is to play with essences; he morphs and reinterprets a figure but retains what makes him or her special. It is a deeply theatrical practice of reinterpretation Whitman would have been very familiar with, but it is also a hint at his later style of composition, in terms of his perpetual editing and ruthless rearrangement of passages and his practice of distilling complex characters into single catalogue-lines. But what works so brilliantly in *Leaves of Grass*, in *Jack Engle* scrapes against the narrow confines of a somewhat Dickensian rags-to-riches plot—a plot the narrator himself seems

to have less and less interest in pursuing. Still, even with all of his borrowings from “real life,” true characterization and psychological depth is reserved to one character only: Walt. He is Jack, he is Inez, he is Nat, he is New York. Whitman certainly loved characters, but he was more interested in creating them and arranging them into constellations than in staying with them. Or perhaps “creating” is the wrong word, and “finding” is the more appropriate term.

It is, then, also somewhat ironic that in a narrative that promises to give the “performers” within the “real drama” of Jack Engle’s life “unreal names,” it is still possible to hazard a guess that “COVERT, Attorney at Law” may be a rather thinly veiled reference (very little toggery indeed) to a “Mr. Richard D. Covert” of Brooklyn. Even more striking is that Whitman publishes his second novella, a story obsessed with the precise origins of Jack and Martha and endlessly preoccupied with documents and documentation—legal and otherwise—anonymously. Despite Whitman’s best efforts to direct this drama—moving characters, scenes, and plot lines at will (sometimes adeptly, at others fairly clumsily)—he himself stays behind the curtain, refusing to attach his real name to this piece of fiction, whether for his own protection or that of others. This may have potentially cost him the high sales figures he achieved with his first novel, as well as the extensive reprinting that might have followed if there had been a byline to identify the creator of *Jack Engle* as the author of such frequently reprinted tales as “Death in the School-Room. A Fact” (1841) and “A Legend of Life and Love” (1842).<sup>121</sup> In fact, Whitman seems to have remained uncharacteristically silent about *Jack Engle* throughout his life, never revealing the real story of its composition or identifying himself as the author of the novella. These past few years, for the first time in over one-and-a-half centuries, the real life of *Jack Engle* is beginning to take center stage in Whitman Studies, and this essay hopes to have offered some first hints to the pressing question of how “the deuce such facts . . . ever got into print” (262).

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## Notes

1 [Walt Whitman], *Life and Adventures of Jack Engle: An Auto-Biography*, ed. Zachary Turpin, *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 34 (Winter/Spring 2017), 262-357. Hereafter: *JE*.

2 Zachary Turpin discovered *Life and Adventures of Jack Engle*, a previously unknown novella by Whitman, in 2016, and the text was republished both in the online, open access *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review*, and by the University of Iowa Press, for the first time since 1852, when it was published in the *New York Sunday Dispatch* newspaper.

3 This “true-story”-beginning was a common trope in US literature of the time—from Hawthorne’s “The Custom-House” introduction to *The Scarlet Letter* to Poe’s *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*. This was not even the first time that Whitman himself had promised a true story to the readers of his periodical fiction. When he published his short story “Wild Frank’s Return” in the prestigious *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* in November 1841, he included a footnote claiming that both the tale and his first short story, “Death in the School-Room” (August 1841), “were of actual occurrence; and in the native town of the author,” and Whitman’s first novel *Franklin Evans; or the Inebriate*, included “A Tale of the Times” as a part of its full title, thereby promising a story that was relevant to if not representative of the era in which it was first published. All of Whitman’s short fiction, as well as his temperance novel—including images of the pages of the periodicals in which the fiction was first published—are available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* ([www.whitmanarchive.org](http://www.whitmanarchive.org)).

4 Both clippings are from the *New York Tribune* of March 12, 1852, two days before the first installment of *Jack Engle* was published in the paper. Images and transcriptions of the notebook and the clippings are available on the *Walt Whitman Archive*.

5 See, for instance, Danuta Kean, “Walt Whitman’s Lost Novel ‘The Life and Adventures of Jack Engle’ found,” *The Guardian* (February 17, 2017), or Jennifer Schuessler, “In a Walt Whitman Novel, Lost for 165 Years, Clues to ‘Leaves of Grass,’” *New York Times* (February 20, 2017)..

6 On the long genesis of the 1855 edition, see Floyd Stovall, *The Foreground of Leaves of Grass* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1974). For a study of Whitman as an early practitioner of the collage method of writing and a convincing argument that until around 1854 Whitman was still uncertain whether *Leaves of Grass* would be a work of poetry or prose, see Matt Miller, *Collage of Myself: Walt Whitman and the Making of Leaves of Grass* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2010). See also the relevant sections in *Leaves of Grass: The Sesquicentennial Essay*, ed. Susan Belasco, Kenneth M. Price, and Ed Folsom (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2008).

7 Wieland Freund, in *Jack Engles Leben und Abenteuer* (Munich: Manesse, 2017), 178. Translation is ours.

8 Whitman himself is the source of some of the exaggerated claims of his rapid literary production when it comes to his fiction. For example, in 1888, an aging Whitman, then a well-known poet, told his disciple Horace Traubel that he had written *Franklin Evans* in three days’ time, with the “help of a bottle of port.” Whitman’s claim most likely reflects his desire to distance himself from a novel he wrote at the age of twenty-three about a then-popular social reform movement rather than offering an accurate assessment of the time he actually spent writing the novel. For additional commentary by Whitman on writing the novel, see Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden* (Boston: Small, Maynard, 1906), 1:93 (available on the *Whitman Archive*). For more on the publication history of *Franklin Evans* and the place of the novel in Whitman’s fiction-writing career, see Stephanie M. Blalock and Nicole



Gray, "Introduction to Franklin Evans," *Walt Whitman Archive*.

9 Zachary Turpin, "Introduction to Walt Whitman's 'Life and Adventures of Jack Engle,'" *WWQR* 34 (Spring/Winter 2017), 225-261.

10 This subplot is also the most obvious reference to Charles Dickens's *The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit*, which features two characters named Chevy Slyme and Montague Tigg involved in an insurance scam. The novel was serialized in the *New-York Tribune* in spring of 1843 and began appearing as a multiple-volume book edition by Harper & Brothers in the summer of 1843 ("Books," *New York Tribune* [June 20, 1843], 3). The Harpers edition was quite popular and sold around 23,000 copies in New York alone (see Robert McParland, "Charles Dickens's Readers and the Material Circulation of the Text," in *Readings on Audience and Textual Materiality*, ed. Carrie Griffin, Mary O'Connell and Graham Allen [Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2015], 101).

11 This is the full extent of payoff to the insurance-fraud plot after it was teased in the first installment: "It seemed that it was somewhat as I suspected when Inez came down to the office, many months before" (319).

12 To address this issue, the 1848 story was "bootstapped"—meaning it was contained several times in the comparison corpus to boost its statistical prominence and allow it to be used in the assessment, even though it is a very short story.

13 This assessment, performed in *r stylo*, uses incrementally growing (+1) lists of most frequent character trigrams, moving from top 200 trigram to top 2000 at a culling value of 100. Pronouns are not deleted; as a measure of distance Eder's Delta is used. For more on rolling delta and *stylo*, see J. Rybicki, M. Kestemont and D. Hoover, "Collaborative authorship: Conrad, Ford and rolling Delta," *Digital Humanities 2013: Conference Abstracts* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska–Lincoln, 2013), as well as Stefan Schöberlein, "Poe or Not Poe? A Stylometric Analysis of Edgar Allan Poe's Disputed Writings," *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities* 32 (September 2017), 643-659.

14 As he put it in a later interview: "Victor Hugo. I, like all who are worthy of being called poets, look up to him as the small, stunted trees look upon the grand, gigantic oaks in the center of the forest. His love of comradeship, freedom and human brotherhood made him a poet per se. He seems to me to take the lead in our times" ("Walt Whitman: Has Reached the Age of 63—Discourses of Hugo, Tennyson and Himself," *New York World* [June 5, 1885]). The interview is available on the *Whitman Archive*.

15 Gilbert Abbott Beckett and Mark Lemmon, *Don Caesar de Bazan. A Drama, in Three Acts* (New York: W. Taylor, 1846), iii.

16 Abbott Beckett and Lemmon, *Don Cesar*, iii.

17 Apparently in an attempt to create buzz for a play and draw in crowds, actresses at the Olympic had created public drama between themselves and encouraged audience members to root for one or the other during their performances, leading to the following incident: "On [the benefit night of 6 December 1844], an inebriated 'b'hoy' seated, atypically, in one of the orchestra boxes, interrupted the course of the action with loud shouts of 'Three cheers for Mary Taylor.' The sophisticated patrons in the upper boxes rose up and demanded that the raucous youngster be removed from the theatre, while their counterparts in the pit brandished their fists and suggested that the offender be executed on the spot." The situation was only defused when a former cast member, Mrs. Timm, dragged the b'hoy out to the police before he could be harmed by the enraged audience—who was challenged by the youth to "come and get" him. See David L. Rinear, *The Temple of Momus: Mitchell's Olympic*

*Theatre* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1987), 123. .

18 Given the play's success in London, it was produced independently by Mitchell and the Park in an attempt to be the first theater to perform it in the US—with the manager of the Park apparently quite upset over being scooped by the less prestigious stage by a few days, and the former cancelling the play after twelve performances, in the face of competition with the Park, then reintroducing the play at the end of the season (Rinear, *The Temple*, 123-124).

19 “The Theatres Last Night,” *The New York Herald* (December 29, 1844), 2.

20 “Amusements of the week,” *Theatrical Times* (June 3, 1848), 184.

21 Whitman. *Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts* (New York: New York University Press, 1984), 3:1087. He might have also watched the stage's adaptation of Charles Dickens's *Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* (“The Savage and The Maiden”)—another likely blueprint for *Jack Engle*—there in 1840 (Rinear, 19). The play was a huge success and made Mitchell “the envy of every other theatrical manager in New York during the season” (Rinear, 22). Rinear's *Temple of Momus* features a description of the play's plot (20). Dickens himself described Mitchell's theater as “a tiny show-box for vaudevilles and burlesques . . . singularly well conducted by Mr. Mitchell” (Rinear, 75). Mitchell had apparently been a friend of Dickens in London, before the author had risen to fame (Rinear 75).

22 Whitman's 1842 *Franklin Evans* even features a minor character named “Mitchell,” who makes a short appearance in the novel—in a theater box (“Franklin Evans; or, the Inebriate. A Tale of the Times,” *The New World* [November 23, 1842], 9; available on the *Whitman Archive*).

23 Letter of Edward S. Mawson to Walt Whitman, August 17, 1885. Available on the *Whitman Archive* (ID: loc.03259).

24 “Mitchell's Olympic Theatre” [advertisement], *The New-York Herald* (October 7, 1843), 2.

25 Whitman, “Life in a New York Market,” in *Walt Whitman's Selected Journalism*, ed. Douglas A. Noverr and Jason Stacy (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2015), 189-192.

26 “Doings at the Synagogue” [Peep at the Israelites, part 2], *New York Aurora* (March 29, 1842), 2. Available on the *Whitman Archive*.

27 “Revenge and Requitall” was reprinted in London in 1845 in *Lloyd's Weekly Volume of Amusing and Instructive Literature*. Trefor Thomas, a former lecturer at Manchester Metropolitan University, brought this reprint to our attention. We have provided an estimated date of publication based on email correspondence about the now rare *Lloyd's* volume, but we have not yet been able to examine the full volume that includes Whitman's story.

28 The fact that Whitman divided “Revenge and Requitall” in sections may have motivated the editor of the *Cincinnati Enquirer* (Cincinnati, OH) to reprint “Revenge and Requitall” as a work of serial fiction extending over five days and five issues of the newspaper in October 1845. For more on the publication history of “Revenge and Requitall,” see Blalock, “About ‘Revenge and Requitall; A Tale of a Murderer Escaped,’” *Walt Whitman Archive*. For more information about the known reprints of the story, see Blalock, “Whitman's Fiction: A Bibliography,” *Walt Whitman Archive*.

29 One moment in which this confessional style is especially important is Jack Engle's early encounter with his adoptive father Ephraim, as Jack explains their meeting: “I was myself that forsaken young vagabond, who found a friend in that pearl of a milkman” (*JE* 268). This line clearly echoes

two earlier pieces of fiction. In *Franklin Evans*, the eponymous protagonist, first introduces himself by describing a young man carry a valise with his name on it as he prepares to leave for New York City. He then addresses readers directly, proclaiming, “Reader, I was that youth.” See *Franklin Evans*, *Walt Whitman Archive*. In “The Fireman’s Dream,” when Violet Boane and her son encounter an abandoned Native American child and proceed to adopt him, it turns out that the narrator relating part of the tale is the adopted son, and he takes on a confessional tone, confiding to readers, “That Indian boy was myself.” See “The Fireman’s Dream,” *Walt Whitman Archive*.

30 Blalock has discussed the connections between *Jack Engle* and “The Fireman’s Dream” in a different context. See “Periodical Fiction,” in *Walt Whitman in Context*, ed. Joanna Levin and Edward Whitley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 83.

31 A married “poor journeyman cabinet maker” also makes a brief appearance in *Jack Engle*. He is one of the customers initially indebted to Ephraim Foster, but later he returns to pay his debt to Foster.

32 Blalock, “Periodical Fiction,” 83-84.

33 Blalock, “Periodical Fiction,” 83-84.

34 Image and transcript of the clipping are available on the *Whitman Archive* (“a schoolmaster”).

35 Blalock, “Periodical Fiction,” 83-84.

36 Indeed, it appears that Séligny is a valid alternative spelling, so Whitman is pretty close. The etymological root of the name is the Latin “siligo,” for the winter wheat grown around the town (Albert Samuel Gatschet, *Ortsetymologische Forschungen als Beiträge zu einer Toponomastik der Schweiz* [Haller, 1867], 114). Many tour guides for Americans visiting Switzerland at the time listed the scenic Céligny as a worthwhile stop.

37 Whitman had done some research in the 1840s on Calvin in Geneva and might have stumbled onto the name in this context (“Autobiographical Data” notebook [Notebook LC #87], ca. 1848-1856. Available on the *Whitman Archive* [ID: loc.05935]).

38 See, for instance, Freund; or Joshua Rothman’s “The Claustrophobic Paranoia of Walt Whitman’s Lost Novel,” *The New Yorker* (March 23, 2017), [newyorker.com](http://newyorker.com).

39 Turpin, “Introduction,” 238.

40 Whitman, “Nehemiah Whitman” notebook, c. 1845-1861, Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, New York Public Library. Available on the *Whitman Archive*.

41 Whitman, *Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts*. ed. Edward Grier (New York: New York University Press, 1984), 3:1087.

42 In 1800, there were only fifteen lawyers in Kings County, and even ten years after Covert was admitted to the bar, he was only one of twenty-one in the profession. See “Stories of Old Brooklyn: First County Court Was Held in Flatbush,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (January 5, 1931), 19.

43 Marjorie Dikeman Chamberlain, *Josiah Dikeman, ca. 1753-1819 and his Descendants* (East Poland, ME: M.D. Chamberlain, 1984), 9.

44 Louisa Van Velsor Whitman to Walt Whitman, [25–27?] April 1869. Available on the *Whitman*

Archive (ID: duk.00580).

45 *Brooklyn Standard* (April 5, 1862), [1]. Available on the *Whitman Archive*.

46 “TO THE PUBLIC,” *The Long-Island Star* (March 29, 1827), 3

47 *Spooner’s Brooklyn Directory, for the Year 1823* (Brooklyn: Alden Spooner, 1823), 11.

48 Dikeman Chamberlain, 42.

49 “Brooklyn Auction and Commission Store,” *The Long-Island Star* (March 13, 1823), 3.

50 For more on the figure of the counter-jumper in connection to Whitman, see Ruth Bohan, “Vanity Fair, Whitman, and the Counter Jumper,” *Word and Image: A Journal of Verbal/Visual Inquiry* 33 (2017), 57-69; Robert J. Scholnick, “An Unusually Active Market for Calamus: Whitman and Vanity Fair,” in *Whitman Among the Bohemians*, ed. Joanna Levin and Edward Whitley (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2014), 114-131. For counter-jumpers and clerks in general, see Brian P. Luskey, *On the Make: Clerks and the Question for Capital in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 2010).

51 Whitman, “Nehemiah Whitman.”

52 “Dissolution,” *The Long-Island Star* (March 10, 1825), 3.

53 Ira Rosenwaike, *Population History of New York City* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1972), 31.

54 *Hooker’s New Pocket Plan of the Village of Brooklyn* (New-York: William Hooker, 1827).

55 Whitman, “Nehemiah Whitman.”

56 Valuable Real Estate for Sale, in Clinton County,” *The Long-Island Star* (February 8, 1832), 4.

57 Whitman, “Nehemiah Whitman.”

58 “Valuable Real Estate for Sale, in Clinton County.”

59 “FOR SALE,” *Brooklyn Daily Evening Star* (March 1, 1841), 4.

60 “For Sale, A Bargain,” *Brooklyn Evening Star* (July 22, 1842), 4.

61 *Brooklyn Evening Star* (May 24, 1843), 2.

62 “Whig Young Men !!,” *Brooklyn Evening Star* (October 2, 1842), 2.

63 “Blood Tea!,” *The Long-Island Star* (May 8, 1834), 4; and “Meeker’s Blood Purifier,” *Brooklyn Evening Star* (June 5, 1849), 4.

64 Notice from the Trustees for the Creditors of James Barr, *The Albany Argus and Daily City Gazette* 1.32? [illegible] (November 24, 1825), [1].

65 *Brooklyn Evening Star* (January 20, 1842), 2.

66 Orville L. Holley, *The New York State Register, for 1843* (Albany: J. Disturnell, 1843), 41.

67 *Doggett’s New York City Directory* (New York: John Doggett, 1848), 104.



- 68 “Houses & Lots in Brooklyn,” *Evening Post* (July 22, 1825), 4.
- 69 Charles M. Oliver, *Critical Companion to Walt Whitman: A Literary Reference to his Life and Work* (New York: Facts on File, 2006), 383.
- 70 *Ancestry.com*, “1850 United States Federal Census” (Provo, UT).
- 71 For the role of carpentry in Whitman’s life, see also Peter J. L. Riley, “*Leaves of Grass and Real Estate*,” *WWQR* 28 (Spring 2011), 163-187.
- 72 “Castellan’s Magnificent Concert,” *The New-York Herald* (July 8, 1843), 2. Whitman was a frequent guest at the Tabernacle in these years (see David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman’s America: A Cultural Biography* [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995], 171, 178).
- 73 *The Long Island Democrat* (August 4, 1840), 2. Available on the *Whitman Archive*.
- 74 Indeed, later in life he described it as a formative reading experience during his own time as a lawyer’s errand boy (see Jerome M. Loving, *Walt Whitman: The Song of Himself* [Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999], 32-33).
- 75 Alvin H. Marill, *More Theatre: Stage to Screen to Television* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1993), 2:1041.
- 76 Isaac Pocock, *Robinson Crusoe; or The Bold Buccaneers: A Romantic Melo-Drama* (London: John Miller, 1817). When the play was first performed, English critic William Hazlitt commented with more than a hint of snark: “The new melo-drama . . . is *not* the old favourite with the public. It has not the striking incident of the notched post, nor the print of a human footstep in the sand; but there is a poodle dog in it, and innumerable savages, English and Caribbee” (*A View of the English Stage, or a Series of Dramatic Criticisms* [London: George Bell and Sons, 1906], 304).
- 77 Indeed, Marty Gould has shown that—at least in British performances of the play—the character of Inez in *The Bold Buccaneers* tended to be purposefully performed as a proper English subject, downplaying her Spanish origins (*Nineteenth-Century Theatre and the Imperial Encounter* [London: Routledge, 2011], 57-58).
- 78 “Phrenological Description of W. Whitman by L.N. Fowler N. York July 16—1849.” The document is available on the *Whitman Archive*. We can see other parallels between Whitman’s assessment and his description of Inez, though more on a level of content than wording: Whitman is described as “independent” and “little inclined to the spiritual or devotional,” while Inez has “common sense”—and both seem to be “very sympathetic and easily moved by suffering” (Fowler).
- 79 As a whole, this chapter (nine) serves no purpose for the overarching plot—even the introduction of Martha, yet unrecognized by Jack, as Covert’s maid, could have taken place at the same time as Jack’s discovery of the portrait of the old quakeress (chapter fourteen), which would probably have made for a more impactful revelation.
- 80 Their party affiliation can be gleaned from his passage: “‘Why, sir,’ I heard Alderman Rye’s voice above the rest, ‘is not this evidence enough of the poisonous consequences of Whig misrule? Is’nt [sic] the country already almost ruined—ruined, sir?’” (*JE* 288). After the election, Loco-Foco Rye “labored under deep depression of spirits” (*JE* 290), so clearly his party had lost.
- 81 As Jack Engle observes: “our city members being then elected by general ticket, and [Covert] expected to be carried on the tide with the rest, for his party had shown a handsome working majority,

as it is called, at the preceding contest” (JE 281).

82 Leonard P. Curry, *The Corporate City: The American City as a Political Entity, 1800-1850* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), 117.

83 “Results of the Election” (April 13, 1842), in Whitman, *The Journalism*, ed. Herbert Bergman, Douglas A. Noverr, and Edward J. Recchia (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 1:112-113.

84 See Whitman’s “Tomorrow” (April 11, 1842), *The Journalism*, 1:108.

85 “City Intelligence,” *New-York Daily Tribune* (October 25, 1845), 2. The article also includes a voting pun (“It can do every thing after a fashion that the human sweeper can do but *vote*”).

86 “The Street-Sweeping Machine,” *New-York Daily Tribune* (June 7, 1843), 2.

87 Whitman, “Nehemiah Whitman.”

88 John Duffy, *History of Public Health in New York City* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1968), 359.

89 Walter Whitman, “Revenge and Requit; A Tale of a Murderer Escaped,” *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 17 (July and August 1845), 109. Available on the *Whitman Archive*.

90 Duffy, *History*, 359.

91 Duffy, *History*, 360.

92 “The Sweeping of our Streets,” *New-York Daily Tribune* (January 20, 1843), 2.

93 Manisha Sinha and Penny von Eschen. *Contested Democracy Freedom, Race, and Power in American History*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 45.

94 Stephens, Alexander Hamilton, *Recollections of Alexander H. Stephens*, ed. Myrta Lockett (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1910), 23.

95 Whitman, *Prose Works 1892*, ed. Floyd Stovall (New York: New York University Press, 1964), 2:697.

96 Christine Sismondo, *America Walks Into a Bar: A Spirited History of Taverns and Saloons, Speakeasies, and Grog Shops* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 126-127.

97 T. J. English, *Paddy Whacked: The Untold Story of the Irish American Gangster* (New York: HarperCollins, 2013), 13-42.

98 John Strausbaugh, *City of Sedition: The History of New York City during the Civil War* (New York: Twelve, 2017).

99 The drink consists of two different Whiskeys mixed with various bitters and sours (lime juice, ginger, etc.). The writer for liquor.com describes it as “dark and stormy [and with] quite a punch—just like its namesake” ([www.liquor.com/video/how-to-make-the-isaiah-rynders-cocktail](http://www.liquor.com/video/how-to-make-the-isaiah-rynders-cocktail)).

100 If one were to hunt for a real-life candidate for Alderman Rye’s opponent (the hon. Isaac Leech) the Whig electioneer and New York’s “Lucifer of the Lobby,” the hon. Thurlow Weed (1797-1882) would seem the most likely candidate (see Kathryn Allamong Jacob, *King of the Lobby* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010], 16). To turn “Weed” into another unpleasant parasite with

a doubled “e” in the center, could result in “Leech.” Still, Weed’s connection to Whitman and *Jack Engle* is more tenuous (Whitman knew Weed later in life at the very least for his work for Lincoln). Still Isaiah Rynders’ personality seems large enough to serve as a blueprint for Leech and Rye (especially given Leech’s similar first name).

101 Most whiskeys in the US were made from rye at that time.

102 Tyler Anbinder, *Five Points: The Nineteenth-Century New York City Neighborhood that Invented Tap Dance, Stole Elections, and Became the World’s Most Notorious Shum* (New York: Free Press, 2010), 149.

103 Ralph Waldo Emerson famously summarized the position of the Locofoco as follows: “stiff, heady, and rebellious; they are fanatics in freedom; they hate tolls, taxes, turnpikes, banks, hierarchies, governors, yea, almost all laws” (in Perry Miller, *The Transcendentalists. An Anthology* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971], 494).

104 “Clean the Streets” (March 18, 1846), in Whitman, *Journalism*, 1:291.

105 Ira M. Leonard, “The Rise and Fall of the American Republican Party in New York City, 1843-1845,” *The New York Historical Society Quarterly* 50 (April 1966), 155.

106 Duffy, *History*, 364-367.

107 There are also some faint hints that Barney Fox might have been based on a real person of the same name. A “Barney Fox” is listed as a “peddler” in 1844 (*The New York City Directory for 1844 & 1845* [New York: John Doggett, 1844], 130), who then applied to the Common Council in 1848 to be named a “lamplighter” (“Common Council,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* [May 2, 1848], 2) and in 1850 to become a watchman (“Common Council,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* [February 5, 1850], 2). He was born in the “United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland” and became a US citizen in 1846 (*Ancestry.com*, “U.S. Naturalization Record Indexes, 1791-1992” [Indexed in *World Archives Project*], 2010). Census records show him still settled in New York City in 1855 at the age of 50, with a wife named “Betty” and two teenage daughters living in the same apartment (*Ancestry.com*, “New York, State Census, 1855,” Provo, UT, 2013). Barney was apparently a bit of a famous drunk, well-known around Manhattan. The *Brooklyn Evening Star*, for example, covered one of his late-life escapades under the headline “Saturday Night Amusements”: “Barney Fox, a somewhat noted character, on Saturday night, entered [a saloon near the Hamilton Ave. ferry] and after eating and drinking what he desired, was about starting off without remunerating the proprietor.—When remonstrated with for such conduct, he became frantic, pitched into the proprietor and broke things generally. For this, officer Johnson of the 3d Precinct, arrested him and this morning Justice Blachley gave him a furlough of 30 days to rusticate at the expense of the country” (*Brooklyn Evening Star*, February 14, 1859, 3). While Barney Fox in *Jack Engle* appears as a stock caricature of a “drunken Irishman,” he might in fact be based on a real person trying his best to live up to the stereotype (he would have been around thirty-eight years old in 1843).

108 The minimum daily wage for sweeps was set at 50 Cents (“Common Council,” *New-York Daily Tribune* [January 24, 1843], 4).

109 Duffy, *History*, 361.

110 Whitman, *The Gathering of the Forces*, ed. Cleveland Rodgers and John Black (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1920), 86-89.

111 Whitman, *Journalism* 2:122-124.

112 “Old Mrs. Hamilton” (July 15, 1846), *Journalism* 1:468.

113 When one of the co-owners of the *Sunday Dispatch* died in 1846, the paper “became the property of [Armor J.] Williamson. He made it a sort of tender to the Whig and Republican parties, and its proprietor was elected to municipal offices, and died a wealthy man” (Frederic Hudson, *Journalism in the United States, from 1690-1872* [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1873], 340.).

114 Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton* [New York: Penguin Books, 2005], 728-730.

115 Jeff Charis-Carlson, “Newly discovered novel shows Walt Whitman finding his way to ‘Leaves of Grass’” *Iowa City Press-Citizen* (February 20, 2017)..

116 See also, for example, “Greenwood Cemetery,” “[McDonald Clarke],” or “City Intelligence: An Afternoon at Greenwood,” *Journalism* 1:9-10, 51-52, 421-422.

117 Whitman, *Selected Journalism*, 212-214.

118 At least this much is suggested by Violet now having a six-year old son (*JE* 355).

119 Turpin, “Introduction,” 242.

120 It is also tempting to speculate that an imbedded tale—a self-contained story—like the one revealed through the manuscript composed by Martha’s father may have had its own beginnings elsewhere. After all, Whitman’s novel *Franklin Evans* includes two imbedded tales—self-contained narratives in their own right—that were published and reprinted after, and, in at least one case, before the novel itself. The narrative of Martha’s father, then, might have its own precursors and might have been reprinted as a stand-alone story, if we are to be guided by the complex publication history of Whitman’s first novel. We might, then, even hear hints of what could be a fragment of an anti-capital punishment piece in said confession or wonder about the similarities of the Eliza-escape in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* to Martha’s escape across the river (especially considering that the other clipping in Whitman’s red notebook deals with the slave trade).

121 For an updated listing of all known reprints of these stories, see Blalock, “Whitman’s Fiction: A Bibliography,” *Walt Whitman Archive*.