



## Graham Thompson, *Herman Melville Among the Magazines*

Graham Thompson. *Herman Melville Among the Magazines*. Amherst & Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2018. 272p. ISBN 978-1-62534-324-6. US\$ 32.95 (Paper). ISBN 978-1-62534-323-9. US\$ 90 (Cloth).

In an 1851 letter to Evert Duyckinck, Herman Melville describes taking a sleigh ride to the town of Dalton, Massachusetts to purchase fine paper from one of the five mills in operation there. He points to the watermark in the letter paper as proof of the journey, remarking “about 5 miles from here, North East. I went there and got a sleigh-load of this paper. A great neighborhood for authors, you see, is Pittsfield, (2).” Graham Thompson refers to this anecdote several times in his new book, *Herman Melville Among the Magazines* (2018). For Thompson, the vignette helps justify the project of his book, assuring readers that his attention to the original magazine context for Melville’s short stories is not one critic’s imposition upon a writer’s catalog but a scrutiny born out of the author’s own predilections.

The book details the practices and priorities of an evolving US periodical culture by elaborating Melville’s “embeddedness” (8–13) within it. The method foregrounds Thompson’s expert command of the author’s correspondence, publishing relationships, and bibliography. The book takes a “writer’s eye” (7) view with accounts of Harper’s *New Monthly Magazine* and Putnam’s *Monthly* focalized through Melville’s transactions with the attendant circle of publishers, editors, and printers. Readers may be disappointed that through this lens, the magazine format appears interesting thanks to Melville’s engagement with it, rather than inherently so. Granted, there is a strong record of work on nineteenth-century US periodicals already, which Thompson makes generous use of in his account. Hester Blum, David Dowling, Jared Gardner, Trish Loughran, Meredith McGill, and Sheila Post-Lauria are just a few of his interlocutors.

The book is at its best when analyzing Melville's writing through themes of materiality. Chapter One recovers the author's pleasure in paper and first-hand knowledge of the papermaking industry. Thompson describes the machines and manufacturing processes Melville would have observed while touring Massachusetts's factories. Drawing on these details, Thompson argues we must decouple paper from print culture to understand "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids." He reads the diptych as a "paean to the possibilities of paper before it enters an economy of print" (53), challenging previous interpretations of the pairing as an allegorical reproach to the new industrialized conditions for authorship.

Chapter Two argues Melville remixed existing genres to suit magazine conventions and the tastes of editors through readings of "Cock-a-Doodle-Do!", "The Encantadas," and "Bartleby, the Scrivener." Chapter Three addresses the formation of Putnam's, Melville's relationships with the magazine's owners and editors, and the power struggles within those ranks during the magazine's January 1853–September 1857 run. Chapter Five refigures Melville's process of composing Israel Potter and "Benito Cereno" as a mode of editorship, based in the author's revisions to and arrangements of diverse source materials for these texts.

The fourth chapter most directly fulfills the book's promise to return Melville's stories to their original magazine contexts. The August 1853 issue of Putnam's printed an essay by Thomas Mayo Brewer on the priorities of the Smithsonian, Melville's "The Lightning Rod Man," and an excerpt from Israel Potter in sequence. By highlighting the vision of science in society that each piece presents, Thompson routes analysis of Melville's contributions through Brewer's essay to extol the author's engagement with mid-century debates about scientific knowledge.

*Herman Melville Among the Magazines* will be of interest to scholars of Melville and anyone curious about the possibilities of a biographical approach to book history. Thompson's study succeeds in returning priority to "the imaginative acts of authorial creation that bring texts into existence in the first place" (19).

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**Date Created**

03/06/2019