“THE ULTRAISM OF THE DAY”: GREENE’S
BOSTON POST, HAWTHORNE, FULLER,
MELVILLE, STOWE, AND LITERARY
JOURNALISM IN ANTEBELLUM AMERICA

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“I am truly interested in this great field which opens before me and it is pleasant to be sure of a chance at half a hundred thousand readers,” Margaret Fuller, the newly-appointed literary editor of the New-York Tribune, the Whig organ established by Horace Greeley in November, 1841, wrote on March 9, 1845 to her brother Eugene, a lawyer associated with a New Orleans newspaper. Eugene had written to report that he had seen a review of Fuller’s recently-published Woman in the Nineteenth Century during a visit to an Arkansas town. The “great field” opening before Fuller was a new form of literary journalism, one devoted at once to social critique and extended discussions of books and ideas and aimed at the widest possible readership. Recognizing the power of the daily press both to sell books and to promote the discussion of important social questions, Fuller asked Eugene to place a notice of Woman in the Nineteenth Century “in a N.O. newspaper.” She then shared with him the immense pleasure she took in the reception of a book that “was sold off in a week to the booksellers and $85 handed to me as my share. Not that my object was in any wise money, but I consider this the signet of success. If one can be heard, that is enough!” However, after claiming that “respect is expressed for me personally” she had to admit that “abuse public and private is lavished upon its views.”

To help us understand the sort of “abuse” that was “lavished upon” the book’s views, I reproduce below a previously unknown review of Woman in the Nineteenth Century from the Boston Post, which, as the narrator of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “The Ghost of Dr. Harris” asserts, was “the leading journal of the Democratic Party, in the northern States.” Published on February 28, 1845, the review, which most likely was written, I will show below, by the paper’s influential founding editor, Charles Gordon Greene (1804-1886), articulates the
skepticism about the cause of women’s rights held by a significant segment of the Boston community and beyond. To generalize, Democrats were far more resistant to social reforms than were the Whigs, and so the Post’s treatment of Fuller may be seen as part of the pitched culture wars of the 1840s. Both Greene and Hawthorne, also a Democrat and a devoted reader of the Post, were outspoken in their skepticism about the wide variety of utopian schemes for the reform of social institutions and the perfection of human beings of the sort famously being promoted by Greeley’s Tribune. In his campaign biography of Franklin Pierce, Hawthorne praised his subject for not being swept up by “the mistiness of a philanthropic theory.” Further, Hawthorne asserted, “There is no instance, in all history, of the human will and intellect having perfected any great moral reform by methods which it adapted to that end.”

Differing as they did on the rights of women, abolition, and many other questions before the public, Greene and Greeley were both leaders in expanding the scope and reach of the daily newspaper to give new prominence to discussions of books and ideas. On September 24, 1845 Fuller wrote in the Tribune that “The Newspaper promises to become daily of more importance, and if the increase of size be managed with equal discretion, to draw within itself the [audience] of all other literature of the day.” In 1831, a decade before Greeley established the Tribune, Greene had launched the Post, achieving great success in no small measure by making the daily newspaper also a daily literary paper. In addition to critical discussions of books and the arts, the Post published original poetry, comic sketches, familiar essays, and creative works in other forms. Envisioning the potential of a great urban newspaper to reach a national audience, Greene in 1843 created semi-weekly and weekly editions and established a semi-monthly California edition as well. Two years later, on May 17, 1845, the Tribune followed by issuing its semi-weekly edition, with a weekly edition a year later.

Few if any daily papers in antebellum America devoted the space and editorial resources for the kind of substantive discussions of literature and the other arts that one finds in Greene’s Post and Greeley’s Tribune. These editors were born in New Hampshire within seven years of each other: Greene in Boscowen in July, 1804 and Greeley in Amherst in February, 1811. The brilliant achievements of Margaret Fuller and then George Ripley as the Tribune’s literary editors, as well as Greeley’s well-known support for Transcendentalism, associationism, antislavery, and other reforms, have alerted scholars to the important work of the Tribune in fostering reading and promoting progressive causes. Little attention, however, has been paid to Greene’s Post, which was also notable for championing the cause of the workingman. Beginning with an analysis of the paper’s conflicted response to Fuller, I will initiate an exploration of the Post as a neg-
lected resource for American literary, political, and cultural scholarship in the antebellum period. I consider the paper's engagement with the three novelists now generally regarded as the most important of the period—Stowe, Melville, and Hawthorne—and sample the poetry that it published just about daily. Both Greeley and Greene understood that the competition for readers and for political and cultural influence would be played out in the arts and features sections of the papers as well as in the editorial and news columns.

In an earlier article for this journal, “Extermination and Democracy: O’Sullivan, the Democratic Review, and Empire, 1837–1840,” I explored some of the ways that the emerging ideological conflict between Whigs and Democrats in the late 1830s and into the 1840s dramatized the need for the creation of periodicals that would also give philosophical and literary depth to the policies and positions of the political parties and engage the larger question of the meaning of America. Like the Democratic Review’s O’Sullivan, Charles Gordon Greene was a Jacksonian to the core, and he sought to create a paper that would articulate a compelling vision of the Democratic Party. Yet many of the same contradictions on race and equality that I explored in that essay are to be found in the Post.

A Philadelphia paper that Greene co-edited, the National Palladium, became the “first journal in Pennsylvania to advocate the election of Andrew Jackson to the presidency,” as we learn from an 1855 sketch of Greene in Ballou’s Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion. Then, after a short stint in Washington on the National Telegraph, which was edited by Duff Green (1791–1875), he came to Boston to start the Post as a paper that would bring the principles of the Democratic party to Boston, New England, and the nation. In its sketch of Greene, Ballou’s reported that the circulation of the Post is “equal to that of any of the large daily papers of the city, while the extent of its business patronage is very great.” Further, the paper, which “bears the unmistakable impress of the mind, taste, and feeling of the projector,” now “enjoys a very extensive circulation. Travel in any direction in New England and you will find the Boston Post, and in the Southern States it is met with in all the principal places. No paper is more eagerly sought for in the public reading-rooms and hotels.” The Post’s popularity in the South was based in no small measure on its adherence to Jacksonian principles, particularly its resistance to Abolition, which it attacked as a threat to the Union.

In “The Ghost of Dr. Harris,” a sketch written in 1856 that he did not publish during his lifetime, Hawthorne suggests just how powerful a hold the Post could exert on its readers. After his retirement from the Unitarian ministry, the protagonist, Dr. Harris, “a noted democrat during his more active life,” spends a good portion of each morning reading the Post and other periodicals in the comfortable confines of the Boston Athenaeum. What could be more enjoyable? So satisfying
is Dr. Harris’s routine that the morning after his death, when he “ought then to have been lying in his coffin, dressed out for the grave,” he “felt such interest in the Boston Post as to come back from the other world to read it. . . . One might have supposed that he would have cared more about the novelties of the sphere to which he had just been introduced, than about the politics he had left behind him!” But how could the monotony of heavenly perfection possibly compete with the rich spectacle of the human comedy presented to readers of the Post each day? Like many others, Dr. Harris found his political faith renewed and strengthened by reading the Post six days a week; only on Sunday, when the Post rested, did he look to a higher authority. Having passed on to his heavenly reward, he realized how empty such an existence without the Post would be. 7 Since Hawthorne wrote the sketch while abroad, one might assume that there is not a little bit of the author himself in his protagonist’s experience. In a letter of March 11, 1840 to his fiancée, Sophia Peabody, written to explain his daily routine, Hawthorne, employed as a weigher of salt and coal in the Boston Custom House, reported that, after mailing the letter, he would “proceed,” as he did each morning, “to the Custom House, and finding that there is no call for him at the wharves, he will sit down by the Measurer’s fire, and read the Morning Post. Next, at about half-past nine o’clock, he will go to the Athenaeum, and turn over the Magazines and Reviews till eleven or twelve.” 8 One can well imagine that his reading of the Post’s regular surveys of domestic and foreign magazines alerted him to pieces for close scrutiny during visits to the Athenaeum.

I. Fuller in the Post

On June 8, 1844, the Post included a friendly paragraph on Fuller’s Summer on the Lakes, in 1843, published by Little, Brown: “This pretty volume contains an account of the pleasant summer rambles of one amongst us. Niagara, the Lakes, the Indians, etc, etc, are described interestingly, and the book will be found a very readable one.” 9 A local writer published by a Boston house, Fuller is greeted warmly enough, but that tone does not extend to the paper’s extended paragraph, published the next February, on Woman in the Nineteenth Century:

Literary Notices.
Woman in the Nineteenth Century. By S. Margaret Fuller. New York: Greeley & McElrath. Boston: Redding & Co.—If one might judge of the views of this authoress, by certain of her extracts from other writers, he would be apt to agree with her in her ideas of what a woman ought to be. But in other places, and in
her own language, she is certainly an ultraist in the matter, in our poor opinion. We have looked quite carefully through the volume, and appreciate a considerable portion of the speech of a noble and thinking mind, earnest in the cause of her sex. But we have also come to the settled conclusion that, as a whole, it is a crude and ill-digested affair, tinctured strongly with the ultraism of the day, deformed by many extravagances intended for originalities, and, in a word, of little real value. The substance of the volume first appeared in the “Dial,” and the highest commendation that can be bestowed upon it is, that it answered well enough for a small and isolated class of readers, whose hankering after new things leads them to applaud all that is new, be it as ridiculous as it may, when weighed by common sense as regards matter, and good taste as regards style and tone, as both common sense and good taste are understood by people in general. We hear a good deal about “the rights of woman,” and doubtless our laws as regards the sex might be somewhat improved. Moreover, the “education of woman” may not be all that it ought to be. But so it is with the “education of man.” We would have woman, as much as any one living, raised as high as possible in the moral and mental scale, but if any writer, male or female, says that, in substance, woman does not now occupy her natural and proper place in the world, we charge them with being foul aspersers of all that is lovely, modest, devoted and womanly in our mothers, sisters and wives. We have little patience with these “women’s rights” people, so called, and can but think that the galled jade winces at something in his or her own individual life, which may have been either a fault or a misfortune, when he or she makes so much ado about what most people know to be nothing.10

The review has all the hallmarks of the slashing style of Charles Gordon Greene, who cast himself in the role of self-assured cultural arbiter. Now, Fuller had attacked coverture, the laws holding that after marriage women lost control of property, and Greene might well have been supportive of some straightforward, incremental reforms in this and other areas. He does concede that “our laws as regards the sex might be somewhat improved.” Fuller points to an article in the Democratic Review in support of equal rights, and she also mentions actions by the Rhode Island legislature. But after castigating the United States for slavery and the mistreatment of Indians, Fuller demanded that “every arbitrary barrier [be] thrown down. We would have every path laid open to woman as freely as to man.” She went so far as to assert that there is “no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman.”11 Greene was in the habit of rejecting out of hand all such proposals for
fundamental social change, and so he pounced on Fuller as he had denounced Horace Greeley just six months before.

Writing in the Post on December 3, 1844, he castigated the Tribune’s editor for propounding visionary reforms for social transformation that ignored the sad realities of human fallibility. As reflected in their Utopian proposals and enthusiasms, Greeley and other reformers lack “sound, practical knowledge of human nature.” Yet, “it is upon this last named knowledge that every thing of good which is yet done for man is founded. . . . Ideally, and for himself, Mr. Greeley may have all the energy, sincerity, patriotism and philanthropy ever concentrated in one individual—practically, and for others, his theories, in our opinion, are worth little more than the mad ravings of the Millerite, or the pretended phantasies of the Mormon.” Greene comes close to using the language of original sin in asserting that “A theory that was made for angels could never be carried out in hell. . . . Were Horace Greeley a thousand times the man he is, he could never change human nature one jot or tittle.” In this regard, Greene’s skepticism about reform is consistent with the views that Hawthorne was expressing in his fiction at just this time. As Hawthorne warned in “Earth’s Holocaust,” for instance, published in Graham’s in May, 1844, all philanthropic schemes for social transformation will be counterproductive unless first human beings find a way to “purify” the “Heart—the Heart . . . the little, yet boundless sphere, wherein existed the original wrong, of which the crime and misery of this outward world were merely types.” Furthermore, Hawthorne cautioned, “if we go no deeper than the Intellect, and strive, with merely that feeble instrument, to discern and rectify what is wrong, our whole accomplishment will be a dream.”

And so, in responding to Margaret Fuller’s call for a social transformation through empowering women, Greene cleverly turns the tables by making it appear that simply to raise that question shows disrespect for “all that is lovely, modest, devoted and womanly in our mothers, sisters and wives.” By the end of the paragraph, the advocates of women’s rights stand accused of being “foul aspersers” of those whose cause they claim to champion. While such schemes might meet the needs of the elite few who read the Dial, Greene, as the guardian of social order and sanity, is simply doing his duty as social arbiter in exposing the decided limitations of such abstract theorizing. But then, to discuss Fuller’s challenging book as heatedly as does Greene is to call attention to the questions that she raises. He concedes that the subject is part of the national agenda; some readers who resisted Greene’s chauvinism might have been alerted by the review to attend to Fuller’s arguments.

With its assertion that only a maladjusted woman, a “galled jade,” would even think of campaigning for equal rights, Greene’s last sentence is particularly cruel. But then, there was nothing polite or deco-
ous about the way gender images were manipulated and deployed in contemporary political discourse, as Ronald J. Zboray and Mary S. Zboray have observed. Drawing from the cult of Andrew Jackson, the Democrats “advocated strengthening patriarchal family forms,” and so they incorporated gender slurs into their campaigns, demeaning male opponents by characterizing them in feminine terms. During the 1840 election in particular, the Post played a leading role in a campaign that “reinforced a status quo definition of citizenship as primarily a white man’s prerogative. For after great strides for white males, Democrats had envisioned that the franchise would extend no further. Citizenship would remain gender and race defined: women’s responsibilities within the polity would be relegated to the private sphere as nurturers and primary educators; for men, the world of public politics beckoned them exclusively.”

In *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* Fuller challenged just this set of assumptions.

On July 19, 1850, Fuller, her husband, Giovanni Angelo Ossoli, and young son, Angelo, died in a shipwreck off Fire Island, New York, an event reported in the Post on the 23rd and 24th of that month. Two years later, the publication of the *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli* prompted Greene to reconsider a writer whose work he had deftly dismissed back in 1845. Moved by the tragedy of her life as well as the compelling testimony of her friends, he seeks to make amends in an extended essay published in the Post on February 16, 1852:

*Literary Notices.*

*Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli. Boston: For sale by Burnham and Brothers.* —Ralph Waldo Emerson, James Freeman Clarke and William H. Channing are the authors of these volumes, long promised, and now presented, in the usual workmanlike style of their publishers.

Of their subject, we scarcely know what to say. We never saw Margaret Fuller, but from such of her writings as came under our notice, we supposed her a merely literary woman—smart, dogmatic, arrogant and over laden with book knowledge—a woman of mark, who would have made a clever second or third rate man. And such, or nearly such, we find, was the opinion of most of those who did see her and know her, but not intimately.

But to her friends, she appears to have been an angel of light. Her biographers were among her dearest companions, and all three, without concealing one jot of her eccentricities or extravagances, write as of a miracle of a woman—large brained and larger souled, overflowing with masculine strength and feminine delicacy.

Indeed, we never saw a production in which there was less tawdriness or fulsomeness of praise, and more of genuine
outpouring of a pervading belief, in the minds and hearts of the writers, as to the exceeding nobleness and grandeur of their subject. And the facts recorded, the thoughts set forth in the letters and the daily life of Margaret Fuller, attest that her biographers have not outstripped the truth, in their earnest and eloquent tribute.

In these volumes, we have the pleasure of discovering that Miss Fuller's literary ability was among the least of her merits. Her generosity, devotedness, love of truth, and practice of toleration, and her constant goodness of heart, in all the relations of real life, were her most charming characteristics, and were enough to outweigh ten times all the eccentricity, nonsense and dogmatism that formed the outworks of her soul, and that at times came near transforming a true woman into a mere blue stocking.

For a woman, and we say it with respect, Margaret Fuller wrote ably, and often most wisely. But we believe the present volumes will do more to preserve her name, and to make it sacred in public esteem, than all she ever wrote, within or without the Dial. To own the truth, and accepting the painting of her biographers, we were ashamed to think we had really known so little of so grand a heart. The moral of the volume is, to us, the unimportance of merely literary things, when brought into comparison with the trials, temptations and sufferings of life. The value of literary ability has always been grossly exaggerated by its professors, and even by the world; but these two volumes bring the truth nearer home than most books of the kind. For, as before hinted, Margaret Fuller, as a writer, was not very much, after all. Her productions, however clever, were not extraordinary when measured with those of many a masculine mind. But as the centre of a home circle, and for her many striking qualities both of the head and the heart, in all times and circumstances, she was an extraordinary character, and the literary presence of the greatest may pale its ineffectual fire before the clear effulgence of her common and inner life. Her Learning, Reading, Transcendentalism, and Women's Rights, were but the husks of a most sweet and fragrant soul-kernal [sic].

As may be supposed, the volumes under notice are remarkably interesting. The reader gets a clear, and, as he must think, a true idea of what Margaret Fuller was, in her strength and weakness; and as he pictures that last sad scene on the deck of the Elizabeth, and finally sees that “one black wave” bears Margaret to eternity, he feels he has lost a friend, has seen a friend drowned, unnecessarily and wickedly, within sight of land, by the stone hearts of
wreckers, the unpardonable indolence of officials. Poor little Angelino!

No longer treating Fuller as a “galled jade,” Greene praises her as a “grand . . . heart,” someone who occupied the “centre of a home circle.” That, however, leads him to deny the significance of her work, which “was not very much, after all.” His discussion betrays an essentialism that devalues women writers by holding that only when they write like men can they be taken seriously. But then they would not be women at all. Greene’s attention to the biographical Margaret Fuller along with his slighting of her work is consistent with the assumptions of the Memoirs, which submerge the radical, forceful writer in the reverential, sanitized biographical sketches of the editors. As Joel Myerson pointedly observed, Emerson, Channing, and Clarke “attempted to smooth away the social and political radicalism of her last years, bowdlerizing her journals and rewriting her letters. . . . In the hands of such ambivalent editors, Fuller came to be regarded as, at best, a serio-comic footnote in American literary history.”

On March 13, 1852, the Boston editor Eliakim Littell reprinted the Post’s review in his Living Age, a weekly with a national circulation. For the most part, the Living Age reprinted items from British periodicals, but from time to time it took material from American newspapers. Given the prominence of the Post, the notice may well have been copied by a number of other newspapers. In these several ways, Greene’s views reached readers throughout the country.

But there is more to the story: On May 8, 1852 Walter Savage Landor published “On the Death of M. D’Ossoli and His Wife Margaret Fuller” in the London Examiner. Less than a month later, on June 3, 1852, the Post became the first American periodical to publish the poem, which would also appear in two New York weeklies, The Independent, on June 10, 1852, and Literary World, on June 12, 1852. Here is the first American reprinting, as it was published in the Post:

On the Death of M. D’Ossoli and His Wife Margaret Fuller.

Over his millions Death has lawful power.
But over thee, brave D’Ossoli! none, none.
After a long struggle, in a fight
Worthy of Italy to youth restored,
Thou, far from home, art sunk beneath the surge
Of the Atlantic; on its shore; in reach
Of help; in trust of refuge; sunk with all
Precious on earth to thee...a child, a wife!
Proud as thou wert of her, America
Is prouder, showing to her sons how high
Swells woman’s courage in a virtuous breast.
She would not leave behind her those she loved; 
Such solitary safety might become 
Others; not her; not her who stood beside 
The pallet of the wounded, when the worst 
Of France and Perfidy assail’d the walls 
Of unsuspicious Rome. Rest, glorious soul. 
Renowned for strength of genius, Margaret! 
Rest with the twain too dear! My words are few, 
And shortly none will hear my failing voice, 
But the same language with more full appeal 
Shall hail thee. Many are the sons of song 
Whom thou hast heard upon thy native plains 
Worthy to sing of thee; the hour is come, 
Take we our seats and let the dirge begin. 

Walter Savage Landor.

Ironically, even Landor, known as a great champion of equality in marriage, places Fuller in a secondary position, identifying her in the poem’s title as Ossoli’s wife. Did he thereby reject the vision that he apparently shared with Fuller of marriage as a joining of equals? Or was Landor calling attention to Fuller’s status as a married woman as a way of guarding the reputation of a woman who was rumored to have given birth out of wedlock? Charles Gordon Greene would not have been upset by the title, even as today it rankles. And yet, as praised by Landor, Fuller gains a vital, heroic stature as a courageous fighter for freedom in far-off Italy. In the summer of 1845, the Democratic Review had republished Landor’s ode “To General Andrew Jackson,” which depicts the soldier-president as the very embodiment of the masculine hero: “How rare the sight, how grand! / Behold the scales of Justice stand / Self-balanced in a mailed hand!” Given the recognition of Landor as a great champion of equality, democracy, and the United States, his memorial poem lifts Margaret Fuller out of the domestic circle and places her on the international stage.

Both former residents of Florence, Landor and Fuller, who never met, shared a passionate commitment to the liberation of Italy. The question of title aside, the publication of Landor’s poem in a prominent Boston newspaper is appropriate, given the deep reverence for Landor that Fuller developed when she lived and taught there. As someone whose philosophy of education was built around the idea of conversation, she had been an acute reader of Landor’s Imaginary Conversations, writing in Woman in the Nineteenth Century that “I wish to see men and women capable of such relations as are depicted by Landor in his Pericles and Aspasia, where grace is the natural garb of strength, and the affections are calm, because deep.” Aware of Fuller’s great appreciation of Landor, Emerson commented on the poem in a letter to Carlyle sent sometime in May, 1852: “She had such
reverence and love for Landor that I do not know but at any moment in her natural life she would have sunk into the sea, for an ode from him; and now this most propitious cake is offered to her Manes.”

Given the tragic facts of her death by drowning, Emerson’s comments are insensitive. Further, in stating that Fuller would willingly have given her life for such praise from Landor, Emerson implies that she had, as it were, submerged her identity in his. But there is not even a trace of such infatuation or hero-worship in Fuller’s probing, tough-minded discussion of Landor in the *Tribune*. In “Writers Little Known Among Us,” published on March 28, 1845, she claimed that “Landor’s, though a fierce, and at times, a vulgar mind, is also one of the most exquisite tenderness, exalting sweetness, and capable of repose on the calmest, purest heights of life.” A genius, Landor still had his “fierce prejudices, and mean prejudices too. You cannot depend, in any case, upon his justice or his candor. If he is right, he is deeply right.... If he is wrong, he is fiercely, blindly, pedantically wrong.”

That Fuller was given the space in a great daily paper to develop her complex assessment of Landor is a tribute to Greeley’s editorial genius. Had Fuller, like Hawthorne’s Dr. Harris, been able to return to this world after her death, she would have been astonished at how complex—and frequently condescending and dismissive—were the judgments about her. The once-threatening woman, with all her “Learning, Reading, Transcendentalism, and Woman’s Rights,” had been brought safely into the “centre of the home circle,” to use Greene’s condescending words. Yet, by publishing Landor’s memorial tribute, Greene’s *Post* complicates that image.

II. Boston’s Leading Democratic Paper and the Democratization of Literature

It might seem remarkable that an American daily would place a work by Walter Savage Landor on the front page. But then, when the *Post*’s readers opened the paper each day they expected to see on the front page a poem that would capture their attention. Would it be from a British or American poet? Would the poet be well-known, as was Landor, or someone just making a name? During the 1840s, one finds works from the leading American poets, including Bryant, Longfellow, Whittier, Lowell, and Poe, as well as works by numerous poets who are now unknown to us. The paper regularly published unsigned poems, and some of these may have been written by members of the staff. Typically, beneath the “Poetry” section, readers were treated to a column or two of reviews of books, foreign and domestic periodicals, concerts of chamber and symphonic music in Boston and as far away as the Continent, and theatrical performances. The paper also included humorous sketches and whatever else might be of interest to the
cosmopolitan reader. Unlike the *Tribune*, Greene’s paper did not employ a literary editor; those duties seem to have been assumed primarily by Greene himself, who, as we will see, enjoyed keeping up with American literature and publishing his typically outspoken reviews. Consequently, he may well have been reluctant to place someone else in charge of the literary section. Of course, the *Post* published its full complement of political opinion, news of wars, crime stories, natural and man-made disasters, commerce, shipping, foreign affairs, and other items that came to the editors’ attention. What is remarkable is just how much of the paper was given over to arts and letters. Further, the comparative prosperity of the *Post* freed it from the necessity of puffing books in return for advertising revenue or direct payments to reviewers—common practices, as Ronald Zboray has found. Ballou’s claimed that “the literary, dramatic, and art criticisms were distinguished by vigor, independence, and justice.” One is willing to credit the paper with vigor, but exactly what are “independence” and “justice” in book reviewing?

In an essay published on October 11, 1838 on “Federalism and Democracy,” the *Post* wrote that the Democratic Party was composed of two main classes: first, the hard-working farmers and laborers who made up the bulk of its support, and second, the “literary class.” With but a “few exceptions,” the *Post* claimed, “our first literary men belong to the democratic party. . . . Deeper read in human nature than others, they know better the vast resources of the human soul, and have more confidence in the capacity of man for self-government. It is no small evidence of the truth of democratic principles that men of the highest order of talent so generally embrace them.” Perhaps that claim was accurate in 1838, but, as we will see below, by the time that Hawthorne published his campaign biography of Franklin Pierce in 1852, the literary community in Boston and Concord had turned decidedly against the Democrats. The inclusion of poetry and wide-ranging discussion of books and ideas, would, then, contribute to the education of the citizens upon which both democracy in America and the Democratic Party depended. Horace Greeley’s decision to hire Margaret Fuller grows out of a similar recognition that the function of the daily paper now went beyond simply bringing the “news” to the burgeoning numbers of readers, but in establishing a close, intimate relationship with them so that, like Dr. Harris, they would eagerly forsake the unvarying serenity of heaven for the multiple delights of the day’s newspaper. “The life of intellect is becoming more and more determined to the weekly and daily papers, whose light leaves fly so rapidly and profusely over the land,” Fuller wrote in an essay on “American Literature.” Further, “The means which this organ affords of diffusing knowledge and sowing the seeds of thought where they may hardly fail of an infinite harvest, cannot be too highly prized by the discerning and benevolent.” This commitment to “diffusing knowledge” appears
to have benefited both papers financially. As Christina Zwarg has written, Fuller’s “fascinating columns helped the paper achieve a respectable readership; by the end of the decade the Tribune had gone from being a competitive local newspaper to being one of national and international status.”

Greene created the Post as the “organ of a radical faction” of the Massachusetts Democratic Party. The paper’s most important political ally was David Henshaw (1791–1852), Collector of the Port of Boston during the 1830s and President Tyler’s Secretary of the Navy, 1841–43. Together, Henshaw and Greene came to control Democratic patronage in the region. With a bust of Andrew Jackson prominently displayed over its editorial offices, the Post advocated for the cause of the workingman. Its first great campaign was against imprisoning debtors. It also worked for such causes as free bridges and reduced licensing fees. In the Age of Jackson, Arthur Schlessinger, Jr. long ago remarked that from the start the Post “treated [the working class] . . . not as enemies to society but as fellow workers in the same vineyard, and Charles Greene . . . defended with vigor their right to organize.” The paper remains a rich resource for labor history.

Greene established the Post approximately two years before Benjamin Henry Day (1810–1889) created his famous penny paper, the New York Sun, thereby initiating the revolution in low-cost journalism. The penny press made it possible for those without capital to purchase one or more papers on a daily basis. Even though it was established as an exponent of the workingman, the Post was sold in the traditional way, by subscription. In the 1840s the price was $8.00 per-year, with $4.00 payable in advance. Did that place the paper beyond the reach of the hard-pressed working class whose cause it championed? It may be that Boston’s population, which in 1840 numbered only 84,000, was too small to achieve the requisite economies of scale for a penny paper. But more to the point, as Charles G. Steffen points out in “Newspapers for Free: The Economics of Newspaper Circulation in the Early Republic,” given the growing importance of advertising, the daily papers were reluctant to cut off non-paying subscribers since a drop in circulation would reduce advertising fees, which became an increasingly important revenue source. The Post published its semi-weekly edition on Tuesdays and Fridays, at $4.00 per year, and the weekly, the Boston Statesman, was available on Saturdays, for $2 a year in advance. On the paper’s masthead, The California Post is described as a “Semi-Monthly—5th and 21st of every month—expressly for those residing in California. It contains the news of the day and a large quantity of miscellaneous reading. Price six cents a copy.”

One of the great American newspaper editors of the nineteenth century, the magnetic, affable, opinionated, strong-willed Greene, as I mentioned, was the editorial force behind the Post’s extraordinary success. He was fortunate to work with a most capable business partner,
William Beals (1785-1870). Avoiding the sensationalism of, say, James Gordon Bennett’s *Herald* in New York, the paper still gave space to crime stories. The lively “court reports, prepared by Counselor [Thomas] Gill, were a feature,” as *Ballou’s* reported. As the editors explained in the masthead statement, readers could expect to find “the news of the day—foreign and domestic—agricultural, commercial, and literary intelligence—and full reports of the most interesting civil and criminal trials in the courts held (sic) in Boston, and frequently in other sections of the commonwealth.”

That Greene, who served in the Massachusetts legislature, also was an accomplished political operative is reflected in a comment from the *National Cyclopedia of American Biography* that as editor of the *Post*, he “wielded a political influence through his journal and outside of it, in organizations and conventions, not surpassed by that of any democrat of the time.” He played his most notable stint on the national stage as a leader of the Pierce campaign in 1852. How was he able to juggle these several roles, which included at various times editor, legislator, party activist, naval officer for the ports of Boston and Charlestown, book reviewer, and initiator of the popular column “All Sorts of Paragraphs”?

Insight into the way the *Post* was organized in the 1840s comes from “Experiences During Many Years,” the memoir of the humorist Benjamin Penhallow Shillaber (1812-1890), who joined the paper as a compositor in 1840. At some point Shillaber began contributing poetry and other materials, and his “Mrs. Partington” sketches, which began appearing in the paper in November, 1847, became a great hit. Shillaber recalls that it was Richard Frothingham, Jr. (1820-1880), not Greene, who on a regular basis actually “wrote the political leaders, and did the heavy editorial business.” Other staff members included Gill, “the reporter and the ship-news and general-news man,” and Ruggles Slack, the paper’s “collector, whose coming, to a debtor, was like a visit of Fate, and pocket-books were out before he had time to present a bill, to avoid what was likely to follow in the event of a refusal. He was inexorable in his claims.” I rather suspect that Slack put more effort into collecting from delinquent advertisers than dead-beat subscribers. Shillaber left the paper in 1850.

For a daily paper in the 1840s, the *Post* employed a comparatively large cast of editors and writers; since Greene was not responsible for single-handedly turning out the paper each day, he and his associates usually had time to write and solicit not only reviews and critical discussions but also poetry, humorous sketches, and other materials that made the paper so lively. And yet, since, as I mentioned, Greene did not appoint a literary editor, book reviewing, especially in the midst of a heavy political season, did suffer. As the author of the “Literary Notices” column—I assume that it is Greene—had to confess on October 14, 1844:
New Publications.—Again have politics obliged us to pile up unnoticed, upon our table, both the good and the bad publications of a fortnight; but it is with the hope of not being far behind the age that we begin our task. After the election, we shall be able to do ourselves more pleasure, and some works more justice, by giving to the latter a longer paragraph than can now be afforded.  

According to Shillaber, the Post’s editorial offices on Water Street attracted as visitors “the most distinguished people of the land: Statesmen, philosophers, actors, poets, wits, artists, scribes.” These included Franklin Pierce (1804-1869), Horace Greeley, and Judge (later Massachusetts governor) Marcus Morton (1819–1891) who regarded the paper as his “political Bible.” The offices also drew others who were not yet famous, such as Hawthorne, who was on such good terms with the editors that he was confident of his ability to place paragraphs in the paper. Gary Scharnhorst found that the paper’s editors “frequently praised his work in the early 1840s, and the reviewer of the 1842 edition of Twice-Told Tales noted explicitly that he had received a copy ‘from their esteemed author.’” I will explore the paper’s importance for Hawthorne below. It is appropriate to conclude this section with a sentence from Ballou’s article on Greene, which, even discounting the expected puff factor in such profiles of “great men,” fairly acknowledges its subject’s editorial genius: “The inexperienced may regard it as a small matter to have founded such a newspaper, with its daily, semi-weekly, and weekly press, to have remained editor and proprietor of it for nearly a quarter of a century, and to have conducted it so as to secure an uninterrupted increase of circulation and popularity from the outset, but those at all acquainted with the nature of this business, know that he has performed an Herculean task which no ordinary man ever did or could possibly accomplish.”

III. Sampling the Post

As an example of the way the Post kept its readers informed on the literary scene, on April 15, 1843 it published a paragraph discussing the most recent issue of the Dial, which begins, “This number of the Dial is rich with the choicest blossoms of transcendentalism.” Then, after favorably reviewing the issue’s contents, which included Margaret Fuller’s “Canova,” the Post concluded that “all this forms a mélange, historical, aesthetical, poetical, and critical—all written from the transcendental point of view—such as no other periodical can furnish. With all its German-fashioned words and curious, strained phraseology, there is that about the Dial which many minds will greet warmly. It is fresh, original, independent—so far it is American in
spirit. Would that its language was always as pure and simple as its thoughts are beautiful! It should eschew Carlyle-ism altogether.”\textsuperscript{42} Articulating the paper’s support for a “fresh, original, independent” American literature, the comment strikes one as a reasonable assessment of the Dial.

Just above its paragraph on the Dial, the paper published “We Weep in Vain,” by the Vermont editor and poet Charles Gamage Eastman (1816–1860), whose Poems would appear in 1848.\textsuperscript{43}

\begin{verbatim}
We weep in vain—the book is shut—
The fountain sealed—and there
The one we loved so much is but
A breath of summer air.
The eye is closed, the ear is dull,
Alas! alas! So beautiful.

We weep in vain—above her head
With all its golden wealth,
Steeped in our tears, the pall is spread,
So young, so full of health—
Ah! Who that saw her yesternoon
Had dreamed to see her thus—so soon!

We weep in vain—there!—let her sleep,
Beneath the maple tree,
The stars above her grave will keep
Their vigils. Sadly we
Return to life, with many a tear,
And one tie less to bind us here.
\end{verbatim}

In describing the sudden death of the young woman, Eastman makes no appeal to a higher power. There is no talk of the heavenly rewards awaiting her or of communication between her and those she has left behind. If, as Maria Magdelena Farland has written in an essay on Emily Dickinson’s anti-sentimentality, “Newspapers and periodicals of the time were filled with images of immortality,” this poem stands as an exception. Farland notes that “While life-after-death has continued to seem improbable to many secularized, twentieth century readers, such boundary crossing was standard fare for sentimental writers and readers.”\textsuperscript{44} Denying the possibility of such “boundary crossing,” Eastman’s “We Weep in Vain” concludes starkly, with the realization that in the face of death, we have no choice but to return to our now diminished lives.

Certainly the Post published its fair share of poems envisaging the reunion in the next world of those sundered by death, as in “A Mother’s Address to Her Dying Child,” published on May 6, 1845. The
anonymous poem concludes, “Oh! If it be thy gracious will, / We shall soon meet on high: / There’s hope, there’s blessed comfort still— / Thy spirit cannot die, / My angel boy.”45 We do not, however, have space for an extended survey of the poetry that appeared day in and day out in the Post, but such a review would tell us a great deal about contemporary poetic taste. Were American poets paid for original work? Who on the staff selected poems? How much came from staff members themselves? Readers evidently enjoyed a range of poems, from James Russell Lowell’s earnest “The Epitaph,” published on January 23, 1845, to an anonymous parody of Poe’s “The Raven,” “The Owl,” published on February 27, 1845.46

I suspect that a member of the staff was the author of the amusing poems that appeared from time to time under the heading “Ballads of Boston.” The paper also initiated a series of unsigned “Sonnets of the Sidewalks.” Since these usually were included in the “All Sorts of Paragraphs” column, a feature that Greene introduced, he may well have been the author. As implied by the title, these sonnets reflect on the changing “facts” of modern existence as they may be picked up by the alert observer walking about on the city’s sidewalks or traveling in the surrounding countryside, as in the following poem on the railroad, which appeared on Thursday, December 12, 1844:

As timid boys that walk through woods at night,
   A lonesome road, when all is dark and still,
   Except the humming sound of distant mill,
Grow deadly wide awake and quick of sight,
And, faint with dread of meeting ghostly sprite,
   To keep their spirits up and other spirits off,
Do whistle aye, not stopping save to cough,
Strange tunes unnatural, with all their might;
E’en so doth he, that boy of larger size,
The locomotive, who with lungs of iron,
   And breathing vapor hot, the rail goes by on—
He fills the darkened air with hideous cries,
As through the far off hills, for many a league,
He speeds away and never feels fatigue.47

The reader feels some of the fright that grips the “timid boys” at night. A fearsome machine with “lungs of iron” races away through the hills, but “never feels fatigue.” The reader is left to make of that new fact what he will.

The two poems I have discussed—along with Landor’s tribute to Fuller—are readily accessible, and yet each raises significant questions: how is the advent of the machine transforming our lives? How do we think about the death of a loved one in a world where we have no assurance of a life beyond? And how can we respond to the tragedy
of Margaret Fuller’s sudden death and how comprehend her exemplary achievement as writer and freedom fighter? Writing in the Tribune, Fuller herself had remarked that there are “two ways of considering Poems, or the products of literature in general. We may tolerate only what is excellent, and demand that whatever is consigned to print...should exhibit fruits perfect in shape.” Or—more to the point—we might think of literature in terms of its use or function, that is, as a system “of interpretation between all kinds and classes of men,” an “epistolary correspondence between brethren of one family, subject to many and wide separations, and anxious to remain in spiritual presence one of another. To the true man, each will have value, first, in proportion to the degree of its revelation as to the human soul; second, in proportion to the perfection of form in which that revelation is expressed.” No one would claim that the poetry that appeared in the Post day in and day out was of the first sort, but that the Post gave prominence to contemporary poetry tells us a great deal about the way the paper defined itself and its readers. Through these poems, the Post created an “epistolary correspondence” between the paper’s dispersed family of regular readers—who were “anxious to remain in spiritual presence” with one another.

I turn now to consider the Post’s treatment of the novelists now generally regarded as the most important in antebellum America, Hawthorne, Melville, and Stowe.

IV. Three Novelists

a. Hawthorne

Perhaps the most famous firing of a Custom House employee in American history took place in June 8, 1849, when the Whig administration of Zachary Taylor released Nathaniel Hawthorne from his position as surveyor in Salem. No newspaper was more vigorous in Hawthorne’s defense than the Post, which ran a story on June 11, 1849. The next day the paper printed a letter concluding that “There stands, at the guillotine, beside the headless trunk of a pure minded, faithful and well deserving officer, sacrificed to the worst of party proscription, Gen. Zachary Taylor.” It is likely that the image of the decapitated surveyor from the Post became the basis for Hawthorne’s own account of the incident in his “Custom House” essay: “The moment when a man’s head drops off is seldom or never, I am inclined to think, precisely the most agreeable of his life.” He refers to the way the press had “taken up my affair, and kept me, for a week or two, careering through the public prints, in my decapitated state, like Irving’s Headless Horseman.” The alacrity with which the Post jumped to Hawthorne’s defense—and kept the affair alive—serves as a dramatic example of the continuing importance of the paper to Hawthorne’s
career. That support grew out of a shared political and literary agenda as well as professional associations.

Might Hawthorne have been an occasional contributor to the paper? Gary Scharnhorst argues that Hawthorne is the author of a review of George Hillard’s edition of *The Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser* that appeared in the paper on November, 16, 1839.51 The editors of the *Centenary Edition* dispute the claim, but nevertheless credit Hawthorne, as I mentioned, with inserting favorable notices in the *Post* of the *Democratic Review* in 1839.52 What is not in dispute, however, is that the *Post* took advantage of virtually every possible opportunity to promote the career of their friend, commenting on his stories and sketches as they appeared in the magazines and annuals. Here is a comment from November 26, 1844, made in the course of a report on the *Democratic Review* for November: “Hawthorne gives us a most agreeable paper entitled ‘A Book of Autographs.’ He had before him as he wrote, things precious as Sibylline leaves, to wit, a volume of letters addressed to a revolutionary hero, General Palmer, by the soldiers and statesmen of the revolution. So the poet takes up, one by one, the authors such as John Adams, Washington, Hancock and others, indites a few words about their chirography, quotes extracts from their letters, makes his remarks poetic and patriotic, and thus fills out agreeably page after page of the close double columns of the Democratic. It is neatly done, and in such a way as only Hawthorne could do it. Verily there is much to be gained in handling those old letter-sheets, the realities that renowned men have stamped their thoughts upon. Life goes out of these sacred relics, and happy is he that is prepared to imbibe it and grow upon it.”53 That such positive notices appeared early in Hawthorne’s career made them all the more valuable.

Not surprisingly, the *Post* was quick to review *The Scarlet Letter*, as Benjamin Lease points out in “‘The Whole is a Prose Poem’: An Early Review of *The Scarlet Letter*,”54 In a probing discussion that appeared on March 21, 1850, just five days after the novel was published, the *Post* develops the compelling thesis that Hawthorne’s great novel “is a prose poem, and must be regarded as such, and judged by poetical standards only.”55 On April 14, 1851, the paper carried a positive, but restrained review of *The House of the Seven Gables*. Although conceding that the new novel “does not equal *Scarlet Letter* in power of interest,” still, had that novel never been written, this romance “would have almost filled the place of that grand prose-poem in American literature.”

As this discussion of *The House of the Seven Gables* suggests, when it came to extended reviews, the paper was not in the business of puffing favorite authors, but recognized the obligation to offer balanced assessments. This is reflected as well in the cool discussion of *The Blithedale Romance*, published on July 16, 1852. The review is signed W. B. S., whom I have not identified. In any event, the reviewer,
evidently a free-lance, begins with a general observation about contemporary book reviewing: that whatever a book’s faults might be, reviewers reflexively praise the new work as surpassing the author’s previous books. Arguing that *Blithedale* “falls far short” of Hawthorne’s earlier works, W. B. S. refuses to play the game. In part, the reviewer just doesn’t like the subject of Brook Farm and the idealistic reformers who populate its pages: “Hawthorne has wasted his fine powers upon a theme and personages utterly unworthy of his genius,” he states categorically. After enumerating what he sees as the limitations of the novel, W. B. S. expresses his regret that “we cannot chronicle a greater success of our favorite author. But truth must out.” W. B. S. understands that his purpose is not to sell the books of a *Post* favorite, but to give a fair and impartial assessment of the novel. Still, a more probing reading would have explored Hawthorne’s critique of reform and reformers, a subject important to the editors and readers of the *Post*.\[56\]

Just how important the *Post* was to Hawthorne—and Hawthorne was to Greene and his paper—can be seen in his 1852 campaign biography, *Life of Franklin Pierce*. Several days after learning of Pierce’s nomination on June 9, 1852, Hawthorne wrote to his old Bowdoin College friend offering to write the “necessary biography. Whatever service I can do you, I need not say, would be at your command.”\[57\] The difficulties Hawthorne faced are well-known: Pierce’s modest achievements meant that there was little in the way of dramatic subject matter to write about. Far more perplexing and complicating was the divisive, contentious subject of slavery. Nominated as a dark horse, Pierce, who had endorsed the Compromise of 1850 along with the Fugitive Slave Law, was the candidate of a political party determined to suppress any attempts to “agitate” the slavery question. Since Pierce had not held elective office after he resigned his Senate seat in 1842, it might have been possible for a biographer to play down his views. Yet Hawthorne insisted on directness and full disclosure, writing to Pierce on July 5 that “a very difficult and delicate part of my task,” is “your connection with the great subject of variance between the North and the South. There is no way, however, open to my perception—no course either of true policy, or worthy either you or your biographers—save to meet the question with perfect candor and frankness, and to state what has been your action, and what your position.”\[58\] Hawthorne faced the subject head-on—even though, as his biographer James R. Mellow has pointed out, he “held slightly different opinions” on some of these questions.\[59\] For instance, Hawthorne was not as supportive of the Fugitive Slavery Law as was Pierce. However, Hawthorne chose to focus on the fundamental questions, where he found himself in agreement with Pierce and his most important New England supporter, Charles Gordon Greene. In fact, Hawthorne praises Pierce for having the qualities of a true statesman, one who
long ago developed a set of carefully thought out principles for interpreting the Constitution, principles that continue to guide him in approaching all the great issues, including slavery. No one should expect him to deviate from those well-considered principles. By implication, Hawthorne is making the same argument for himself: that his support of Pierce is based on a well-considered interpretation about the clear meaning of the Constitution. Those principles were certainly familiar to readers of the Democratic Review and the Post. Hawthorne understood that his writing a campaign biography of a candidate such as Pierce would expose him to attack from antislavery friends in Concord and Boston. That was all the more reason to make a clear case that he was acting on principle. But he need not feel isolated, since he would be working closely with Greene and the powerful Post.

On June 24, 1852, approximately a month before Hawthorne was able to begin work on the biography in mid-July, Greene had already published in the Post a substantial biographical sketch, “General Franklin Pierce.” Shortly thereafter, the Democratic National Committee released an expanded version, Sketches of the Lives of Franklin Pierce and Wm. R. King. In his own Life of Franklin Pierce, which was not published until September 11 by Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, Hawthorne made extensive use of these materials, as he wrote in the book’s preface. Even so, the editors of the Centenary Edition observe, Hawthorne’s indebtedness suggested in the preface “goes far beyond factual detail. . . . It was the single source from which Hawthorne could draw . . . [essential] documents.” Further, in his appendix Hawthorne acknowledged drawing from another article by Greene on an important controversy in the campaign, the New Hampshire religious test. In sum, it would be hard to see how Hawthorne could have completed the biography of Pierce if he had not had at hand the extensive research of the Post. An influential advisor within the Pierce campaign, Greene actively supported Hawthorne’s work.

In “The Two Lives of Franklin Pierce: Hawthorne, Political Culture, and the Literary Market,” Scott Casper argues that Hawthorne’s Life of Franklin Pierce represents a significant departure in the genre of campaign biography: a famous and important American writer, one who is better known than his subject, takes up the challenge of writing such a work. Hawthorne’s biography should be understood, Casper comments, as a new and complex “interweaving of political and literary marketplace.” But as we have already seen, that “interweaving” of the political and literary was a process well underway in the Post.

Hawthorne portrays Pierce—and by implication himself and Greene as well—as patriots and statesmen in their unswerving commitment to high principle. Above all, they are dedicated to preserving the Union in the face of ill-considered schemes from “misty philanthropists”: 
It was while in the lower house of Congress, that Franklin Pierce took that stand on the slavery question, from which he has never since swerved a hair’s breadth. He fully recognized, by his votes and by his voice, the rights pledged to the south by the constitution. This, at the period when he so declared himself, was comparatively an easy thing to do. But when it became more difficult, when the first imperceptible movement of agitation had grown to be almost a convulsion, his course was still the same. Nor did he ever shun the obloquy that sometimes threatened to pursue the northern man, who dared to love that great and sacred reality—his whole, united, native country—better than the mistiness of a philanthropic theory.

In making the case for a candidate for the highest office in America, Hawthorne thereby articulates his own and the Post’s well-known skepticism about reform schemes. Again, he argued that “the statesman of practical sagacity—who loves his country as it is, and evolves good from things as they exist, and who demands to feel his firm grasp upon a better reality before he quits the one already gained—will be likely, here, with all the greatest statesmen of America, to stand in the attitude of Franklin Pierce.” Whatever idealistic reformers think that they will accomplish by doing away with slavery at a stroke, there is still another view. . . . It looks upon Slavery as one of those evils, which Divine Providence does not leave to be remedied by human contrivances, but which, in its own good time, by some means impossible to be anticipated, but of the simplest and easiest operation, when all its uses have been fulfilled, it causes to vanish like a dream. There is no instance, in all history, of human will and intellect having perfected any great moral reform by methods which it adapted to that end; but the progress of the world, at every step, leaves some evil or wrong on the path behind it, which the wisest of mankind, of their own set purpose, could never have found the way to rectify.  

As a reward for writing the biography, Hawthorne received from the Pierce administration the lucrative consulship at Liverpool, which provided him with the financial security that he long had desired. But beyond this, in writing about Pierce, he could provide an explicit exposition of certain ideas that were implicit in his fiction and also reaffirm his close connection to Charles Gordon Greene and the Post. In fact, Hawthorne’s biography may be seen as an expansion of what had also appeared in the Post, written, as was widely recognized, by the nation’s preeminent writer of fiction.
b. Melville

Paradoxically, just as no newspaper did as much to promote Hawthorne’s career as the Post, so too no paper did more to undermine the literary career of Herman Melville. Beginning with its notice of *Omoo* on May 5, 1847 and concluding with its notice of *Israel Potter* on March 15, 1855, the Post reviewed all of Melville’s novels—with the possible exception of *The Confidence Man*, a review of which has not been identified. There is little doubt that Greene, who knew Melville’s brother Gansevoort, also a strong Democrat, is the author of these reviews, which constitute an on-going commentary on Melville’s career. Strangely, one motivation behind Greene’s seemingly gratuitous attacks is his awareness of Melville’s immense gifts, gifts which mark him as potentially one of the greatest of American novelists. But the fact that Melville refuses to write straightforward, accessible prose infuriates Greene, and he responds vindictively, going out of his way to warn readers not to waste their money on Melville’s books. He charges that by the time he came to write *Pierre*, Melville had gone mad.

On May 5, 1847 Greene wrote of *Omoo* that “whether or not Mr Melville has actually visited the places he describes, it is unnecessary to discuss, but if he have not, his books are worthy a place with Robinson Crusoe and Gulliver. If he have, it must be owned that he has the descriptive power in greater abundance than any traveler of the age.”\(^{67}\) That high praise characterizes the entire notice. However, on April 18, 1849, Greene begins a review of *Mardi* by flatly warning that “many a nine shillings... will be wasted” on the book. Greene administers a public chastisement, telling Melville that it is better to “stick to his ‘fact’ which is received as ‘fiction,’ but which puts money in his purse and wreathes laurels round his head, than fly to ‘fiction’ which is not received at all.” In sum, “the whole book is not only tedious but unreadable.”\(^{68}\) The appearance of this review prompted Melville to write his father-in-law, Judge Lemuel Shaw of Boston, that “*Mardi*. . . has been burnt by the common hangman in the Boston *Post*.”\(^{69}\) Given Melville’s precarious financial position, Greene’s “public hanging” was particularly painful and damaging. Further, the review serves as a warning to Melville. It is as if Greene stated, “If you want to be a successful novelist before the public, you will have to play by the rules, rules which you can learn from me. But if you don’t, I’ll destroy you.”

Greene is far less damning of the accessible *Redburn*, which he reviewed on November 20, 1849.\(^{70}\) Yet, on April 10, 1850, he dams *White-Jacket* by calling it “dreadfully tedious.” Paradoxically, in this novel Melville takes up a cause dear to Greene: the mistreatment of the common seaman. But much as he had done with Greeley and Fuller, Greene lashes out, charging that “Mr. Melville goes for abstractions and perfections—nay, discharges his heaviest batteries, time and time again, against war, the navy, heroic glory, &c., &c., in the midst of argument and fine writing, for the proper government of the
marine. It is true that he has a right to his opinion, and even to the expression of it, but being ourselves a sincere and zealous advocate of naval reform, we are sorry to see any man make himself and the good cause ridiculous, by going so far into theoreticals.” Greene of course had no patience for “theoreticals.” What mattered rather was “a sound, practical knowledge of human nature,” the only basis on which to realize improvements in “government, laws, or religion.”

The fireworks over White-Jacket led to an explosive, damaging notice of Moby-Dick, published on November 20, 1851, one that, if anything, is even more unrestrained and venomous in its anger. Drawing extensively from the notorious attack on the book that had appeared in the London Athenaeum, Greene condemns the novel as a “crazy sort of affair, stuffed with conceits and oddities of all kinds, put in artificially, deliberately and affectedly, by the side of strong, terse and brilliant passages of incident and description.” Greene admits in the first sentence that he has read only one-half of the novel, but that is more than enough to convince him that the London Athenaeum is correct in its condemnation. Greene admonishes readers not to waste their money on a novel that, at $1.50, is badly overpriced: “The Whale’ is not worth the money asked for it, either as a literary work or as a mass of printed paper. Few people would read it more than once, and yet it is issued at the usual cost of a standard volume. Published at twenty five cents, it might do to buy, but at any higher price, we think it a poor speculation.”

Hershel Parker comments that Greene’s review with its use of an extract from the Athenaeum gave it “currency in ample time to influence reviews in Boston and elsewhere.” The combination of attacks from the Athenaeum and the Post proved hard to overcome. Sales of the novel fell precipitously, from 1,535 in the first two weeks to only 471 over the next two months.

Greene’s anger grew the more intense as it became clear that the writer who had made such a promising start insisted on going his own, perverse way. If Moby-Dick were not bad enough, along comes Pierre. This time, as amply demonstrated in his perceptive summary of the plot, Greene has read the novel carefully. But he cannot abide what he calls the work’s “unnatural horrors,” which are reflected, he shows, in the “ambiguous’ love between Pierre and his natural sister.” Not willing to explicate the novel’s psychological themes, Greene throws up his hands in exasperation: “What the book means, we know not.” One thing, however, can be said: it is “perhaps the craziest fiction extant.” Melville’s novel, he concludes, “might be supposed to emanate from a lunatic hospital rather than from the quiet retreats of Berkshire. We say it with grief—it is too bad for Mr Melville to abuse his really fine talents as he does.” Melville stands accused as a writer who “has produced more and sadder trash than any other man of undoubted ability among us, and the most provoking fact is, that in his bushels of chaff, the ‘two grains of wheat’ are clearly discernable.”
Significantly, Littell’s Living Age elected to reproduce this review in its edition for September 4, 1852, thus giving national circulation to the charge that Melville was crazy. Hershel Parker comments that such characterizations of Melville as insane—he quotes similar charges from the Whig Review and the Southern Quarterly—all did their damage, particularly through leaving an indelible impression in the minds of his wife’s family. With the exception of Judge Shaw, Melville’s father-in-law, the Shaw family “all believed the worst.”

Has there been a reviewer of any novelist of substance anywhere who published a more consistently destructive set of reviews than did Greene on Melville?

c. Stowe

The same critic, W. B. S., who reviewed Hawthorne’s Blithedale Romance is responsible for an extended discussion of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin, published on May 3, 1852. With the Democratic convention that would nominate Pierce scheduled to begin in about a month, the review came at a time of heightened tension. Given the role of the Post in denouncing Abolitionists in the name of preserving the Union, one might have expected an ideological onslaught. But this discussion is notable because W.B. S. writes about Uncle Tom not as a political tract, but primarily as a “brilliant” work of fiction: “Every body has read it, is reading, or is about to read it. And certainly it is one of the most remarkable literary productions of the time—an evident result of some of the highest attributes of the novel writer.”

Yes, W. B. S. does make a political claim: that the “effect” of Stowe’s depiction of the horrors of the slave system “is to grossly exaggerate the actual evils of negro slavery in this country. As a didactic work, therefore, it should be swallowed with a considerable dose of allowance.” But then he proceeds to consider the novel entirely as an imaginative work, which “reads naturally and probably.” Responding to the novel’s great imaginative power, he credit Stowe with the ability to introduce believable, rounded characters, both black and white. That in turn leads him to reconsider just what a woman writer can accomplish. The novel “proves that unlike most women and very many men, Mrs Stowe has the high ability of looking on both sides of one question. With feelings and principles equally opposed to slavery, for its unavoidable evils as well as its accidental abuses, she is yet able to paint the slaveholder as he lives and moves, with no touch of bigotry or fanaticism. No southerner need be ashamed of the noble, kind and generous St. Clare, or the angel-child, his daughter.” The statement is sexist in that men are assumed to be naturally more rational and capable of objectivity than are women. Even so, W. B. S. recognizes Stowe’s imaginative power and artistic balance: in its “management” of incidents and in “dialogue and in character,” the novel can “scarcely be excelled.” Stamped on “every page...with genius,” Uncle Tom’s Cabin
can stand comparison "with any fiction of the day, English or Ameri-
can." That leads to an explicit statement that slavery is a "terrible
evil." Reproduced in Littell’s Living Age on July 10, 1852 the review
reached a national audience.  

Conclusion  

I began my investigation of the Post when I happened to come
across its previously unnoticed review of Fuller’s Woman in the Nineteenth Century. Yes, the review was sexist, offensive, and intemperate,
and yet it was so lively and the author wrote with such assurance and
self-confidence, that I wanted to know more about him and especially
to learn about the Boston Post. That led me to Charles Gordon Greene,
who, I saw, deserves credit, along with Horace Greeley, James Gordon
Bennett (1795-1872), Henry Raymond (1820-1869), and others, for
brilliantly extending the range and scope of the daily paper in America.
In many ways Greene’s Post was the mirror image of Greeley’s Tribune:
resistant to social reform, supportive of the Mexican War, unwilling to
confront slavery, and so forth. And yet both papers came to play a
large role in antebellum America. That the Post could do so much to
promote Hawthorne’s career and so much to destroy Melville’s is evi-
dence enough that it must be taken seriously as a significant particip-
ant in the literary battles of the antebellum years, battles grounded, I
have argued, in very different visions about America itself.

Even this initial exploration of the Post has brought to the fore-
front Greene’s limitations as literary and social critic, to say nothing of
his politics. And I have not discussed in depth the paper’s consistent
opposition to Abolition, the defining issue of the antebellum period. In
a letter of August 12, 1858 to Charles Sumner, Henry Wadsworth
Longfellow provides the following telling anecdote of a conversation
that he had with the paper’s political editor, Richard Frothingham,
who at a dinner “sat next to me” and “showed a good deal of emotion
in speaking of you, and said many things pleasant for me to hear. He
said with emphasis that ‘he hated slavery!’—and I replied ‘I wish you
would come out against it in your paper’; whereat he turned all sorts
of colors.”

And yet, Greene and his talented staff created a paper that at-
ttempted to promote a “fresh, original, independent” American litera-
ture, as the Post wrote in an appreciative discussion of the Dial in
1843. Greene’s Post was edited on the assumption that to be a citizen
was to be a reader. The editors worked assiduously to produce a paper
where the two distinct components of the Democratic Party, the liter-
ary class and the working class, could meet, at least imaginatively.
With its editorials, crime stories, poetry, humor, discussions of the
string quartets of Beethoven and Mozart, summaries of the great
foreign and domestic reviews and monthlies, its discussions of books and ideas, and surveys of the sorts of interesting items that found their way into “All Sorts of Paragraphs,” the Post exerted such force as to bring Hawthorne’s good Dr. Harris back to the Athenaeum, where he could read it in comfort. He couldn’t “live” without it.

NOTES


3 Hawthorne, *Miscellaneous Prose and Verse*, 292; 352.


9 *Boston Post*, June 8, 1844, 1.


12 [Charles Gordon Greene], *Boston Post*, December 3, 1845, 1.


16 Littell’s *Living Age* 32 (March 13, 1852): 509.


18 *Boston Post*, June 3, 1852, 1; *The Independent* 4 (June 10, 1852): 96; *The Literary World* (June 12, 1852): 414.


20 Fuller, *Portable Margaret Fuller*, 330.


33 *Boston Post*, Masthead, July 7, 1845.
35 *Boston Post*, Masthead, July 7, 1845.
39 Shillaber, “Experiences During Many Years,” 626.
41 “Charles Gordon Greene, Editor of the Boston Post,” *Ballou’s Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion* 8 (March 17, 1855) 172.
42 *Boston Post*, April 15, 1843, 1.
45 “A Mother’s Address to Her Dying Child,” *Boston Post*, May 6, 1845, 1.
47 “The Raven,” *Boston Post*, February 27, 1845, 1.
48 *Boston Post*, December 12, 1844, 2.
53 *Boston Post*, November 26, 1844, 1.
55 *Boston Post*, March 21, 1850, 1.

60 “General Franklin Pierce,” *Boston Post*, June 24, 1852, 1–2.


62 Hawthorne wrote that he had “derived much assistance from an able and accurate sketch, that originally appeared in the Boston Post, and was drawn up, as he believes, by the junior Editor of that Journal” (*Miscellaneous Prose and Verse*, 274).


64 Hawthorne, *Miscellaneous Prose and Verse*, 372–76


67 [Charles Gordon Greene], *Boston Post*, May 5, 1847, 1

68 [Charles Gordon Greene], *Boston Post*, April 18, 1849, 1.


70 [Charles Gordon Greene], *Boston Post*, November 20, 1849, 1.

71 [Charles Gordon Greene], *Boston Post*, April 10, 1850, 1.


74 [Charles Gordon Greene], *Boston Post*, August 4, 1852, 1.


77 *Littell’s Living Age* 34 (July 10, 1852): 61–62.