



PROJECT MUSE®

The Historical and Literary Sources of Redburn's "Mysterious Night in London"

Jonathan A. Cook

Leviathan, Volume 6, Issue 1, March 2004, pp. 9-33 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

The
Johns
Hopkins
University
Press



PROJECT MUSE®

→ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/492722/summary>

The Historical and Literary Sources of Redburn's "Mysterious Night in London"

JONATHAN A. COOK
Notre Dame Academy

Chapter 46 of *Redburn*, "A Mysterious Night in London," has long remained a sticking point in a number of critical evaluations of the novel. The story of young Redburn's traumatic overnight experience with his new friend Harry Bolton at Aladdin's Palace, a fashionable London gambling "hell," is, in the opinion of some commentators, a melodramatic excrescence in an otherwise compelling account of a teenage boy's initiation into the evils and injustices of the world. Hershel Parker, for example, argues that the scene is "lurid" and "unconvincing," an exercise in literary padding. Robert K. Martin similarly suggests the inadequacy of the same episode, adducing the author's attempt to depict an upper-class London gambling club and ostensible "male brothel" without actually having patronized these establishments.¹ Although the scene has defenders who point to its garish intensity and its revelation of the character of Harry Bolton, others agree with Parker and Martin that the events at Aladdin's Palace are too factitious and overdrawn to serve as an authentic picture of fashionable vice in what was intended as an upper-class counterpart to the depiction of lower-class misery in the port of Liverpool.² Moreover, despite its alleged artificiality, several critics assume, like Martin, that Aladdin's Palace hints at a male brothel as well as a gambling hell;

¹ Hershel Parker, *Herman Melville: A Biography: Volume I, 1819-1850* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 642; Robert K. Martin, *Hero, Captain, and Stranger: Male Friendship, Social Critique, and Literary Form in the Sea Novels of Herman Melville* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 50-51.

² Among earlier critics, Newton Arvin noted that the scene at Aladdin's Palace was "the one chapter of *Redburn* in which Melville seems to be indulging in deliberate mystification. . . . For the rest, though the chapter is not without a genuine vein of dreamlike intensity, it is vitiated as a whole by the kind of unnaturalness into which Melville so easily fell with such themes"; see *Herman Melville* (William Sloane Associates, 1950), 105, 106. So, too, for Ronald Mason, "The fanciful and unconvincing London episode belongs to the early stages of Redburn's acquaintanceship with Harry - a melodramatic and rather confused picture of what Melville presumably thought was a typical scene of night-life among the well-to-do"; see *The Spirit Above the Dust: A Study of Herman Melville* (London: John Lehmann, 1951), 76. In a more positive evaluation of the scene, William B. Dillingham observes: "The description of Aladdin's Palace constitutes a highly imaginative and elaborate metaphor for Harry Bolton. . . . He does not know what it is, but Redburn is sure that there is something badly wrong with Harry much as there seems to be some secret evil lying below the surface of Aladdin's Palace"; see *An Artist in the Rigging: The Early Work of Herman Melville* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1972), 43, 44.

but no one so far has attempted to substantiate this claim with relevant literary or historical evidence.³

In his informative study of *Redburn*, William H. Gilman first demonstrated that the experience described in "A Mysterious Night in London" could not have been based on the author's firsthand experience since during his stay in Liverpool in August 1839 Melville apparently had no time for a trip to London. As a result, Melville presumably relied on literary and historical sources for the conception and details of this chapter. Gilman notes the similarities in imagery between the luxurious furnishings in Aladdin's Palace and the lush setting of the second of Melville's 1839 "Fragments from a Writing Desk," both of them bearing the stamp of the popular Romantic Orientalism of the day, as found in Byron ("The Bride of Abydos," *Don Juan*), Moore (*Lalla Rookh*), and *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments*. In addition to these influences, Parker has also identified a melodramatic story, "The Gambler's Fate," published in the July 1837 *Albany Microscope*, as a revealing analogue. The unsigned story, which Melville may have read, tells of a young man named "Melvil" who accompanies a friend, Russell, to a London gambling hell, with disastrous consequences. Parker makes no claim for "The Gambler's Fate" as a source for the scene at Aladdin's Palace (or for Melville as the unacknowledged author of the story), but he effectively demonstrates that Melville's chapter might have a more varied literary ancestry than Gilman suggests.⁴

Given that Melville had no firsthand experience of a fashionable London gambling club at the time he wrote *Redburn*, the question remains, what other literary or historical sources could he have used for the creation of Chapter 46? In fact, the description of Redburn's and Harry Bolton's visit to Aladdin's Palace

³ James H. Justice gives a favorable judgment of the episode of *Redburn* while asserting that Aladdin's Palace is a male brothel: "Nominally a gentlemen's gambling club, the quarters are described in terms that make gambling one of the lesser iniquities. The club's exteriors glow with a purple light, and its interiors, a triumph of stylistic indirection, suggest that 'No. 40' is a male bordello as well as a gambling den"; see "Redburn and *White-Jacket*: Society and Sexuality in the Narratives of 1849," in *Herman Melville: Reassessments*, ed. A. Robert Lee (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1984), 51. Other critics who allude, in passing, to Aladdin's Palace as a male brothel include Michael Paul Rogin, *Subversive Genealogy: The Politics and Art of Herman Melville* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 70; Nicholas K. Bromell, *By the Sweat of the Brow: Literature and Labor in Antebellum America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 76; Christopher Sten, *The Weaver God, He Weaves: Melville and the Poetics of the Novel* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1996), 108; and Elizabeth Hardwick, *Herman Melville* (New York: Viking, 2000), 29.

⁴ On the impossibility of Melville traveling to London in August 1839, see William H. Gilman, *Melville's Early Life and Redburn* (New York: New York University Press, 1951), 196-97; on the resemblances between Aladdin's Palace and the second of the two "Fragments," see 194-96; on the influence of Romantic Orientalism evident in the latter, see 112-20. On "The Gambler's Fate," see Parker, 643.

was almost certainly inspired by the most famous London gambling club of the era, Crockford's on St. James's Street, opened in 1828 and closed in 1845, membership to which was *de rigueur* for the contemporary man of fashion. By combining an examination of the visit to Aladdin's Palace in *Redburn* with the many evocations of the famous club in both fact and fiction, we can identify Melville's likely sources for Chapter 46 of *Redburn* and also make better sense of what actually happens at the luridly elegant "hell" depicted therein. We will also discover that the scene enacted at Aladdin's Palace bears a generic resemblance to scenes found in some of the fashionable "silver fork" novels of the era, while the character of Harry Bolton conforms to the type of elegantly dressed "dandy" who flourished in the early decades of the nineteenth century and often played a conspicuous role in silver fork fiction. This historical and literary evidence should allow us to appreciate the dramatic function of *Redburn's* mysterious night in London and to gain added insight into the role of Harry Bolton.

Crockford and His Gambling "Hell"

Various forms of gambling had long been a regular feature of eighteenth-century London life, often hand-in-glove with prostitution; but though widely perceived as a moral blight at the time, as in Hogarth's *Rake's Progress* (1735), only a relatively limited number of clubs, or "hells," were devoted to the pastime. ("Hell" for gambling club dates to the late eighteenth century.) Gambling gained a wider popularity during the last two decades of the century, however, especially with the arrival of French emigrés fleeing the Revolution; and it was given additional impetus with the cessation of hostilities in Europe in 1815. By 1820 there were about fifty gambling clubs in London, many of which featured games brought over from the Continent such as the card games of *écarté*, *faro*, *loo*, *macao*, *piquet*, *rouge-et-noir*, and *vingt-et-un*; or the roulette wheel; or the dice-based game of *hazard*. The center of London gambling in the early nineteenth century was in the fashionable West End, where clubs such as Roubel's, Fielder's, Taylor's, Holdsworth's, and Davis's clustered in the vicinity of Picadilly and Pall Mall. As a writer for *Bentley's Miscellany* in 1845 wryly noted in a retrospective survey of London gambling, "The regal, episcopal, and aristocratic parish of St. James's has ever been, as it still is, the favoured locality of the speculative and enterprising gaming-house keeper." At the heart of this district was St. James's Street, running the short distance between Picadilly to the north and Pall Mall to the south. By the late 1820s the street was the site of the city's four leading gentlemen's clubs – White's, Brooks's, Boodle's, and Crockford's – where gambling was pursued

in varying degrees. Yet it was only Crockford's that offered a combination of luxurious accommodations, aristocratic clientele, and extraordinary opportunities for deep – and often ruinous – play.⁵

The undisputed king of London gambling from the late 1820s to the early 1840s was William Crockford (1775-1844), the founder and proprietor of the establishment bearing his name situated at 50 St. James's Street, across from White's. The son of a fishmonger doing business at Temple Bar in the working-class East End of London, Crockford was an avid and astute gambler who saw an opportunity to reap great rewards from the pockets of Regency dandies, bucks, aristocrats, and men-about-town. Crockford's club was the consummation of its proprietor's career as a gambling club operator and book-maker originally connected to the Newmarket Heath racecourse. In the early 1820s, Crockford and a partner ran Watier's, a club founded in 1807 by the Prince of Wales and named after its chef, where superior cuisine and high-stakes gambling were combined; a decade before Crockford assumed control, Watier's, located on Picadilly at Bolton Street, had been patronized by the likes of Byron and Beau Brummell. In the mid-1820s, Crockford obtained the lease to a building on the west side of St. James's Street, where he set up a gambling hell; but after obtaining the leases to three adjacent buildings, he razed all four and set about building a palatial and opulently furnished gentlemen's club devoted to gambling that contemporary wits were quick to dub "Pandemonium." Another interested observer called it "the leviathan hell." After over a year's construction, "Crockford's" opened in January 1828.⁶

⁵ For an informative contemporary overview of London gambling, see the three-part article, "Gaming, Gaming-Houses, and Gamblers," in *Bentley's Miscellany* XVIII (1845): 333-40, 489-97, 593-600 (quote on p. 491); see also the continuation of the series in XIX (1846): 44-51, 127-33, 276-81, 399-403. For a wide-ranging anecdotal survey of the history of gambling through the mid-nineteenth century, see Andrew Steinmetz, *The Gaming Table: Its Votaries and Victims, in all Times and Countries, Especially in England and France*, 2 vols. (1870; rpt., Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith, 1969), <http://www.etext.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng>; see especially Vol. 1, Ch. 6, "The Rise and Progress of Modern Gambling in England," and Vol. 2, Ch. 6, "The Gaming Clubs." For background information on contemporary London clubs, see John Timbs, *Club Life of London*, 2 vols. (London: Richard Bentley, 1866). A useful recent survey of upper-class English social life in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is Venetia Murray, *High Society: A Social History of the Regency Period, 1788-1830* (New York: Viking, 1998). (Murray [66] notes that the British pound has appreciated about fifty times since the early nineteenth century.)

⁶ "Crockford and Crockford's," in *Bentley's Miscellany* XVII (1845): 142-55, 251-64; hereafter cited as "Crockford and Crockford's." See also [James Grant], *The Great Metropolis*, 2 vols. (New York: Sanders and Otley, 1837), 1:159-91 (hereafter cited as Grant); John Raymond, ed., *The Reminiscences and Recollections of Captain Gronow* (New York: Viking, 1964), 255-59; and John L. Bradley, ed., *Rogue's Progress: The Autobiography of "Lord Chief Baron" Nicholson* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), Ch. 7. (The reference to Crockford's as "leviathan hell" is on p. 45.) For twentieth-century studies of Crockford and his club, see Arthur Lee Humphreys, *Crockford's; or the Goddess of Chance in St. James's Street, 1828-1844* (London: Hutchinson, 1953); and Henry Blyth, *Hell and Hazard; or William Crockford versus the Gentlemen of England* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1970).

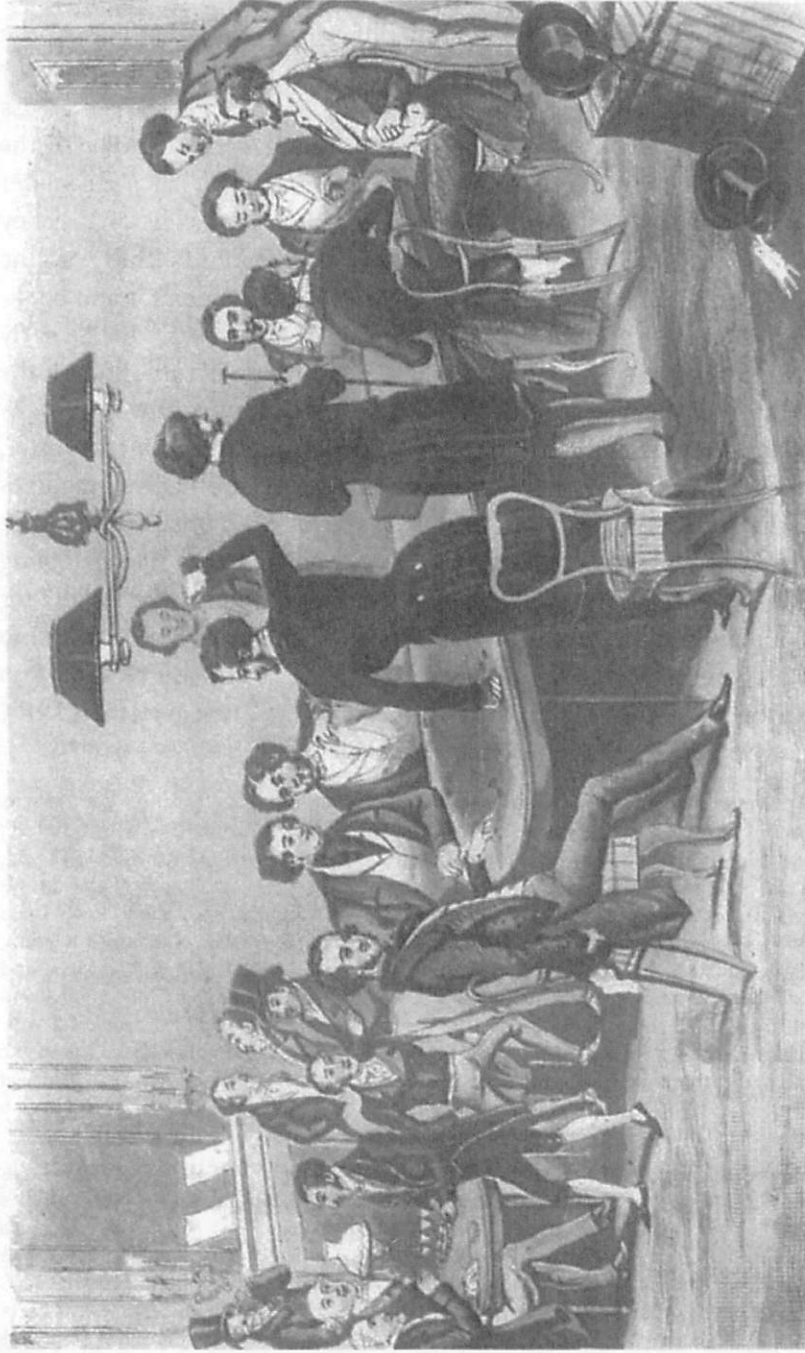


Figure 1 Count d'Orsay calling a main at Crockfords. Couloured Lithograph by Grego, c 1843. (Mary Evans Picture Library). Michael Sadleir. *Blessington-d'Orsay: A Masquerade*. London, The Folio Society, 1983.

Society architect Benjamin Wyatt modeled the club's neoclassical design and décor on Louis XIV's Versailles. Construction costs amounted to £60,000 and furnishings another £35,000. With its privileged clientele paying £25 annually for membership and a roster of over a thousand members, Crockford's fulfilled all contemporary notions of ease and elegance. Among its members, many of whom served in Parliament, was the acknowledged leader of English society, the Duke of Wellington, as well as a host of other aristocrats such as the Lords Alvanley, Bentinck, Chesterfield, Lennox, Raglan, Rivers, and Sefton; men-about-town such as Colonel Armstrong, Edward Hughes Ball ("Ball" Hughes), Sir Joseph Copley, John Wilson Crocker, Thomas Slingsby Duncombe, Captain Gronow, and George Payne; distinguished foreigners like the Count d'Orsay, Prince Paul Esterhazy, Prince Lieven, Louis Napoleon, and Tallyrand; and a few fashionable authors such as Bulwer, Disraeli, Theodore Hook, and Henry Luttrell.⁷ (see Figure 1) Crockford's was famous for the quality of its cuisine, prepared by the French chef, Eustache Ude. Food and wine were served to players "on the house" and to others at a reasonable rate in the club dining room. While low-stakes gambling at Crockford's might involve a variety of card games, the dice-based game of French hazard was the center of the proprietor's high-stakes gambling operations. The hazard room opened at 11 p.m. for an all-night session, with the bank set at £5,000. Neither servants nor smoking was allowed in the room, while three new pairs of dice, each pair costing a guinea, were provided every night for play. During the time that Parliament was in session, from February to August, a special hazard room upstairs was available; otherwise, hazard was played downstairs adjacent to the public rooms.

The law of the day formally forbade gambling hells, but Crockford's escaped closing, despite the enormous amounts of money that changed hands there, because of laxity of legal enforcement and the prestige of the club's members. Crockford's was ostensibly operated by an aristocratic management committee, but Crockford himself was its principal manager, assisted by an underling named Gye. With his cockney accent and undistinguished appearance, the corpulent Crockford always presented himself as a humble servant of the club's privileged clientele. After a dozen years of personal enrichment estimated at over a million pounds (partially depleted by his continuing career as a racecourse "leg," horse owner, and speculator in mining and real estate), Crockford announced his retirement in 1840. By 1844 there were at least twenty other gambling hells in the vicinity of Pall Mall and Picadilly seeking to emulate Crockford's success. Despite Crockford's official dissociation from the club bearing his name, it was widely believed that he still had a hand in its

⁷ For more on Crockford's clientele, see Humphreys, Chs. 4-14, and Blyth, Ch. 5.

operations until his death in May 1844, at which time a parliamentary committee was beginning to crack down on gambling after a notoriously fixed Derby race.⁸

Crockford's finally closed its doors at the end of 1845. During its years of operation, the club was known to cater to the most select London society and was never implicated in any cheating or scandal. For all Crockford's elegant food and furnishings, however, the club's ultimate purpose was to lure the contemporary man of fashion into squandering his money. Among the biggest losers, Lords Sefton and Chesterfield each lost about £200,000 there, while Lord Rivers (dubbed in France "*le Wellington des joueurs*") lost £23,000 at hazard in a single sitting. To keep such a lucrative system operating efficiently, Crockford's allegedly had a regular system for luring in prospective candidates for "plucking," as the journalist James Grant noted in *The Great Metropolis*, a two-volume account of London in the mid-1830s:

In Crockford's, very large sums are played for with the cards; but it is at the hazard table, when the game is French hazard, that the work of plunder is carried on on the most extensive scale. There, to use gambling phraseology, the "pigeon is plucked." And to get the flat [dupe] prevailed on to throw down the cards, and repair to the hazard room, is the great, though concealed object of those in the interest of the house. A few hours, most probably, will do the work in the latter place. The stakes are usually high: he loses, perhaps, a fourth part of his fortune in less than an hour: he "tables" another fourth—he loses again. He becomes desperate: in the delirium, or madness (for that is the proper word) of the moment, he determines on risking his all at one throw. The dice turn up—his all is lost: he who a few hours before was a rich man, is now a beggar. The sums which young thoughtless noblemen lose at Crockford's in one night, are sometimes incredibly large. Seven years ago one pigeon was plucked, in a few hours, to the tune of 60,000*l.*—the stakes were 10,000*l.* . . . Losses of 5,000*l.*, 7,000*l.*, and 10,000*l.*, in one night, are by no means uncommon when a rich flat is caught. (Grant 1:170-71)

Crockford already had a European reputation as England's premier gambling proprietor even before he opened his newly constructed club on St. James's Street. Symptomatic of the influential reputation that the club had quickly obtained even in America was the fact that the anonymously authored *Crockford's, or Life in the West*, a monitory fictionalized report on the new

⁸ On the latter stages of Crockford's career, see Blyth, Chs. 6 and 7.

London gambling sensation, was immediately reprinted in New York by Harper Brothers in 1828. Near the end of this didactic narrative, the author notes of a young "flat" named Rosefield who is lured into deep play at hazard: "There was nothing wanting to give this magnificent palace of knavery and ruin, (it was Crockford's club where this mere youth was allured,) every charm that splendour can convey, beneath which lurks unseen, but not unfelt, robbery and wretchedness."⁹

The republication of James Grant's *Great Metropolis* in New York in 1837 enhanced Crockford's notoriety in America. The author opens his chapter on "The Gambling Houses" in London by noting: "Who has not heard of Crockford's? Everybody has heard of it, and everyone knows that it is a great gambling establishment; but that is the extent of the public's knowledge on the subject" (Grant 1:159). In the following decade, an extensive account of William Crockford's career, as well as the cultural significance of his club, appeared in 1845 in *Bentley's Miscellany*, followed by a wide-ranging survey of London gambling in several installments over the next year. Finally, Crockford's was later mentioned in the memoirs of some of its former frequenters such as Captain Gronow, who summarized the economic impact of the fashionable club: "One may safely say, without exaggeration, that Crockford won the whole of the ready money of the then existing generation."¹⁰

Crockford's Club and Aladdin's Palace

To what extent might Melville have relied on Crockford's as a model for "Aladdin's Palace" in *Redburn*? Traveling by train from Liverpool, Redburn and Harry Bolton arrive in London at Euston Station near Regents Park, on the edge of the West End. From there they would have traveled a relatively short distance south to St. James's Street, the center of fashionable gentlemen's clubs. Disguised to prevent recognition by his former associates in the fashionable world, Bolton stops the cab in which he and Redburn are riding at "no. 40" of an unnamed street, a building having "high steps" and illuminated by a "purple light."¹¹ Crockford's club at 50 St. James's Street had a short flight of stone steps leading to the main entrance, and a well-lit classical facade. While the exterior of the club at which Bolton and Redburn stop is not as conspicuous as the historical Crockford's, the general appearance and

⁹ [Anonymous], *Crockford's, or Life in the West*, 2 vols. (New York: J.&J. Harper, 1828), 2:181.

¹⁰ Raymond, 256. For the articles on London gambling in *Bentley's Miscellany*, see the references in notes 5 and 6 above. For mention of Crockford's in Victorian diarists, see Humphreys, *passim*.

¹¹ *Redburn: His First Voyage*, ed. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and The Newberry Library, 1969), 227; hereafter cited as NN *Redburn*.

décor inside the famous club clearly suggest a source for much of the brilliant appearance and questionable activities taking place at “Aladdin’s Palace.”

Thus, when the parliamentarian John Wilson Crocker visited the lavish new club on St. James’s Street shortly after its opening in 1828, he noted in his diary: “I went to Crockford’s to look at his fairy palace, which certainly beats the drop-scene of a pantomime. The lamp in the staircase cost £1200, and so in proportion. The whole house is as splendid as marble, scagliola, gilding, and glasses [mirrors] can make it.”¹² James Grant also noted the stunning effect of walking into Crockford’s club for the first time: “No one, I believe, not even those accustomed to visit the mansions of the aristocracy, ever entered the saloon for the first time, without being dazzled with the splendour which surrounded him. A friend and myself lately went throughout the whole of it; and for some moments, on entering the saloon, we stood confounded by the scene” (Grant 1:160). The article on “Crockford and Crockford’s” in *Bentley’s Miscellany* in 1845 described the details of the same scene:

On entering from the street, a magnificent vestibule and staircase break upon the view; to the right and left of the hall are reading and dining-rooms. The staircase is of a sinuous form, sustained in its landing by four columns of the Doric order, above which are a series of examples of the Ionic order, forming a quadrangle with apertures to the chief apartments. Above the pillars is a covered ceiling perforated with luminous panels of stained glass, from which springs a dome of surpassing beauty; from the dome depends a lantern containing a magnificent chandelier.

The State Drawing Room next attracts attention,—a most noble apartment, baffling perfect description of its beauty, but decorated in the most florid style of the school of Louis Quatorze. The room presents a series of panels containing subjects, in the style of *Watteau*, from the pencil of Mr. Martin, a relative of the celebrated historical painter of that name: these panels are alternated with splendid mirrors. A chandelier of exquisite workmanship hangs from the centre of the ceiling, and three large tables, beautifully carved and gilded, and covered with rich blue and crimson velvet, are placed in different parts of the room. The upholstery and decorative adjuncts are imitative of the gorgeous taste of George the Fourth. Royalty can scarcely be conceived to vie with the style and consummate splendour of this magnificent chamber. (“Crockford and Crockford’s,” 253)

According to a mid-Victorian historian of London clubs, the entrance hall at

¹² Louis J. Jennings, ed., *The Crocker Papers: The Correspondence and Diaries of the Late Right Honourable John Wilson Crocker, L.L.D., F.R.S.*, 3 vols. (2nd ed., rev., London: John Murray, 1885), I:404.

Crockford's featured "a screen of Roman-Ionic scagliola columns with gilt capitals, and a cupola of gilding and stained glass. The library has Sienna columns and antae of the Ionic order, from the Temple of Minerva Polias; the staircase is panelled with scagliola, and enriched with Corinthian columns."¹³ William Crockford's twentieth-century biographer has described the interior of the club in similar terms, noting its "capacious cellars suitable for later development as a cockpit, and providing also a secret exit from the Club in case of a police raid"; conspicuous, too, was "the latest form of gas lighting" used in the club's central chandelier.¹⁴

Upon entering Aladdin's Palace with Harry Bolton, Redburn describes the scene that first meets his eye:

It was some semi-public place of opulent entertainment; and far surpassed any thing of the kind I had ever seen before.

The floor was tessellated with snow-white, and russet-hued marbles; and echoed to the tread, as if all the Paris catacombs were underneath. I started with misgivings at that hollow, boding sound, which seemed sighing with a subterranean despair, through all the magnificent spectacle around me; mocking it, where most it glared.

The walls were painted so as to deceive the eye with interminable colonnades; and groups of columns of the finest Scagliola work of variegated marbles—emerald-green and gold, St. Pons veined with silver, Sienna with porphyry—supported a resplendent fresco ceiling, arched like a bower, and thickly clustering with mimic grapes. Through all the East of this foliage, you spied in a crimson dawn, Guido's ever youthful Apollo, driving forth the horses of the sun. From the sculptured stalactites of vine-boughs, here and there pendent hung galaxies of gas lights, whose vivid glare was softened by pale, cream-colored, porcelain spheres, shedding over the place a serene, silver flood; as if every porcelain sphere were a moon; and this superb apartment was the moon-lit garden of Portia at Belmont; and the gentle lovers, Lorenzo and Jessica, lurked somewhere among the vines. (NN Redburn 228)

In Redburn's description of the club, we find many of the same architectural and decorative elements found at Crockford's. First, Redburn's observation of how hollow their steps sounded on entering hints at the extensive underground cellars beneath Crockford's club. Second, the classical columns in both clubs exhibit "scagliola" marble surfaces. (The term denotes a stone-like plaster veneer consisting of a matrix of gypsum and glue, to which marble or granite chips were added and then polished to a high gloss.) Third, both

¹³ Timbs, 1:283.

¹⁴ Blyth, 106-7.

Crockford's and Aladdin's Palace feature Baroque neoclassical paintings: those at Crockford's, in keeping with the Louis XIV décor, were in the style of the French Rococo painter Antoine Watteau (1684-1721), who specialized in pleasure excursions, or *fêtes galantes*, set off by mythological backgrounds; at Aladdin's Palace the ceiling fresco is a copy of the Italian Baroque painter Guido Reni's *Aurora* (1613), which featured the sun god driving his chariot while being led forward by the goddess of the dawn. Finally, the elaborate gas lighting fixtures at both Crockford's and Aladdin's Palace lend an air of enchantment to the opulent scene, and help create an ineffable, dazzling effect on the individual seeing such luminous and gilded splendor for the first time.

Redburn and Harry enter the brilliantly lit room, in which sit "knots of gentlemanly men," and seating themselves, Harry calls for wine. After drinking, Harry talks to an elderly man who appears to be the steward of the premises, "a very handsome florid old man, with snow-white hair and whiskers, and in a snow-white jacket—he looked like an almond tree in blossom" (NN *Redburn* 228). Characterized by an ambiguous whiteness, the old man is associated with the almond tree, which in the form of a "rod" (i.e., branch) of almond was a sign of God's blessing in the Old Testament (Num. 17:8; Jer. 1:11), an ironic association, needless to say, for a gambling club employee. Harry Bolton confers with the old man, we may assume, about the accommodations to be made for Redburn overnight while Harry is busy gambling. Harry then disappears with the steward while Redburn is left alone to fantasize a moment about the aristocratic personages he might meet through Harry, in the meantime self-consciously assuming a "careless and lordly air . . . like a young Prince Esterhazy" (NN *Redburn* 229). Reference to this wealthy scion of the Austrian Empire, who served as its ambassador to Britain in the 1830s, is relevant in this context since he was a well-known member of Crockford's.¹⁵ Redburn's attempt to assume a pose of studied nonchalance is, of course, unsuccessful; as he continues waiting, he sees groups of gentlemen retiring together "as if going to a private apartment" and then overhears "one of them drop the word *Rouge*; but he could not have used rouge, for his face was exceedingly pale. Another said something about *Loo*" (NN *Redburn* 229-30). The exact nature of the establishment, and its various forms of play at cards and dice, are still unknown to the inexperienced young American, thrust into a foreign social world.

¹⁵ Prince Paul Anton Esterhazy von Galantha (1786-1866) first arrived in England as Austrian ambassador in 1815, and finally departed in 1842. On Prince Esterhazy's membership at Crockford's, see Raymond, 258. Redburn's attempt to appear "like a young Prince Esterhazy" does not imply that the prince was young at this time but that Redburn wants to look like a younger version of the elegant prince.

Redburn and Harry subsequently ascend “the long winding slope of those aristocratic stairs” and enter a luxuriously furnished room on the second floor:

As we entered the room, methought I was slowly sinking in some reluctant, sedgy sea; so thick and elastic the Persian carpeting, mimicking parterres of tulips, and roses, and jonquils, like a bower in Babylon.

Long lounges lay carelessly disposed, whose fine damask was interwoven, like the Gobelin tapestry, with pictorial tales of tilt and tourney. And oriental ottomans, whose cunning warp and woof were wrought into plaited serpents, undulating beneath beds of leaves, from which, here and there, they flashed out sudden splendors of green scales and gold.

In the broad bay windows, as the hollows of King Charles’ oaks, were Laocoon-like chairs, in the antique taste, draped with heavy fringes of bullion and silk.

The walls, covered with a sort of tartan-French paper, variegated with bars of velvet, were hung round with mythological oil-paintings, suspended by tasseled cords of twisted silver and blue.
(NN *Redburn* 230)

The luxurious room is a kind of modern Spenserian Bower of Bliss or House of Busirane, with seductive flowers on the floor into which Redburn sinks; moreover, a dominant image pattern here is of *twisted* décor, casting doubt on the moral tenor of the club’s activities. The imagery of the room in which Redburn finds himself thus suggests an inextricable union of sensuality and sin, as in the arabesque-style “plaited serpents” visible in the “oriental ottomans” or the serpent-like “Laocoon-like chairs,” both of which are symbolically appropriate for the furnishings of a high-class “hell.” All of the décor, moreover, suggests a morally dangerous confusion between the natural and the artificial.¹⁶

While no contemporary description of a room at Crockford’s exactly matches the furnishings of this upstairs lounge, *Bentley’s Miscellany* describes the principal drawing room as “decorated in the most florid style of the school of Louis Quatorze,” with its tables “beautifully carved and gilded, and covered with rich blue and crimson velvet.” Another description in a nineteenth-century history of gambling represents the rooms at Crockford’s as “panelled in

¹⁶ See Harold Beaver’s remarks in his “Introduction” to *Redburn*, ed. Harold Beaver (New York: Penguin, 1976), 25. On the scene’s twisted décor, see also Justus, 51. On the parallels with Spenser’s Bower of Bliss, see Mina Herman Maltz, “Aladdin’s Palace and the Bower of Bliss: Melville and Spenser,” *Theoria* (University of Natal, South Africa) 63 (1984): 55-66.

the most gorgeous manner; spaces are left to be filled up with mirrors and silk, or gold enrichments; while the ceilings are as superb as the walls." In addition, "A billiard-room on the upper floor completes the number of apartments professedly dedicated to the use of the members. Whenever any secret manoeuvre is to be carried on, there are smaller and more retired places, both under this roof and the next, whose walls will tell no tales."¹⁷

Redburn's subsequent description of the "mythological" (i.e., erotic) paintings in the upstairs room at Aladdin's Palace is not directly evocative of any known décor at Crockford's (although the Watteau-like paintings there may have been mildly lubricious); but the paintings do suggest the visual presentation of sexuality as yet another aspect of the club's luxurious furnishings, and an appetitive stimulus to "deep play":

They were such pictures as the high-priests, for a bribe, showed to Alexander in the innermost shrine of the white temple in the Libyan oasis: such pictures as the pontiff of the sun strove to hide from Cortez, when, sword in hand, he burst open the sanctorum of the pyramid-fane at Cholula: such pictures as you may still see, perhaps, in the central alcove of the excavated mansion of Pansa, in Pompeii—in that part of it called by Varro *the hollow of the house*: such pictures as Martial and Suetonius mention as being found in the private cabinet of the Emperor Tiberius: such pictures as are delineated on the bronze metals, to this day dug up on the ancient island of Capreae: such pictures as you might have beheld in an arched recess, leading from the left hand of the secret side-gallery of the temple of Aphrodite in Corinth. (NN Redburn 230-31)

The décor of the room in which Redburn spends the evening hints at a world of sexual as well as financial profligacy among the upper classes. But we see no explicit signs of prostitution in this chapter and can only assume that the lewd pictures at Aladdin's Palace are simply there as pornographic entertainment. The contemporary literature on gambling says almost nothing about sex being available at clubs in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, and it is clear that this was not a regular feature of current gambling culture (unlike the previous century). The normally outspoken James Grant, for example, only briefly mentions that the proprietors of some clubs "have always on hand a sufficient quantity of flash apparel in which to deck out any unfortunate girl who engages to pamper to their avarice, by her own prostitution" (Grant 1:212).

The "mythological" paintings on the wall at Aladdin's Palace are never-

¹⁷ Steinmetz, 2:187.

theless appropriate for the taste and educational level of the patrons of an upper-class gambling club with a neoclassical design scheme. In this regard we may look to the equally suggestive classical décor at another well-known contemporary hell for the better class of players, as described by the writer on "Gaming, Gaming-Houses, and Gamesters" in *Bentley's Miscellany*:

The rouge et noir department at Taylor's was somewhat remarkable from the walls of the room being adorned with a handsome paper of French manufacture and design, illustrative of the story of the descent of Aeneas with the sybil [sic] into the infernal regions, as related by Virgil—and what was most singularly appropriate in the arrangement of the panels descriptive of the subject was, that at the immediate opening or doorway to the play-room, was the very apposite representation of Cerberus guarding the entrance to hell, and the sybil in the act of throwing the sop, which was to be effective in lulling the monster to a comfortable nap, so that the "facilis descensus Averni" [easy descent to hell] might be safely accomplished. Whether this arrangement was attributable to the classic taste of the gaming-house proprietor, or to the wit and waggery of some intelligent paper-hanger, is not known; but it was a frequent subject of jocose observation amongst the visitors.¹⁸

Unlike this amusing visual pun on the nature of the establishment it is decorating, the images in the upstairs lounge at Aladdin's Palace convey a disquieting message to Redburn of a debased mixture of the sacred and the profane, thereby repeating a motif found elsewhere in the décor of the club and in its most conspicuous employee, the white-haired steward. Significantly, *Bentley's Miscellany* attributed a mock-sacramental aura to the gambling operation at Crockford's, describing its modest-sized hazard room as the "Sanctum Sanctorum" and its supervisor (Crockford himself) the presiding "Pluto."

Redburn's description of the quasi-pornographic art at Aladdin's Palace seems to be a mixture of fact and fantasy.¹⁹ His allusion to ancient temples evokes a traditional association between pagan religions and ritualized sexual representation, here attributed to the temple of the Egyptian supreme god Amen-Ra (also known as Zeus or Jupiter Ammon) in the Libyan desert, the temple of the Aztec Quetzalcoatl at Cholula, and the temple of Aphrodite at Corinth. But contrary to Redburn's overheated imagination, none of the afore-

¹⁸ "Gaming, Gaming-Houses, and Gamesters," *Bentley's Miscellany*, XVIII, 593.

¹⁹ For an informed distinction of fact from fantasy in these erotic images, see Gilman, 355 n.31. Gilman claims that the images "are further evidence that Melville could not confine himself to strict realism indefinitely" (224). For Beaver, on the other hand, they are a "hoax" (*Redburn*, ed. Beaver, 437).

mentioned temples would seem to have actually featured erotic imagery. On the other hand, the references to the “excavated mansion” ascribed to the aedile Gaius Cuspius Pansa at Pompeii and the “private cabinet” of the Emperor Tiberius on the island of Capri are more authentically evocative of the decadent, sexually candid culture of the first-century Roman empire. (The word “pornography” and its linguistic variants first came into the English language in the mid-nineteenth century, shortly after *Redburn* was published, in connection with the recently recovered erotic art at first-century Pompeii and Herculaneum.) But if the house of Pansa, unlike a number of other Pompeian villas, was not known for any erotic art, the allusion to the Roman historian Suetonius on Tiberius (emperor 14-37 A.D.) is a more reliable clue to the lascivious images that *Redburn* evokes. The pictures and medals that *Redburn* mentions are probably derived from the pornographic paintings and displays that formed part of Tiberius’s extensive repertoire of sexual entertainment and artwork at Capri, according to Suetonius.²⁰

After Harry and *Redburn* have entered the risqué second-floor lounge at Aladdin’s Palace, Harry speaks into the ear of a sculpted bust representing “a bald-headed old man, with a mysteriously-wicked expression, and imposing silence by one thin finger over his lips” (NN *Redburn* 231). Harry is simply ordering a servant for cigars. Significantly, in their subsequent conversation *Redburn* unknowingly pronounces the name of the gambling club, imaginatively identifying it as “this Palace of Aladdin” where Harry seems almost at home. The reference to Aladdin and the world of *The Arabian Nights* is particularly appropriate at this point in terms of the seemingly magical means of ordering in the servant, and the instantaneousness of his appearance, like a genie out of a lamp. As the astonished *Redburn* observes, “In obedience to a summons so singularly conveyed, to my amazement a servant almost instantly appeared, standing transfixed in the attitude of a bow.” In the well-known story of Aladdin and his magic lamp (often performed as a theatrical pantomime in the nineteenth century), Aladdin used his genie to create a resplendent palace for his new bride, the sultan’s daughter. The instantaneous, obsequious service that Harry obtains is also suggestive of the plethora of “amazingly polite” round-the-clock servants who waited on the clientele at Crockford’s (Grant 1:167).

²⁰ On the development of the term and concept of “pornography” in the mid-nineteenth century, see Walter Kendrick, *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture* (1987; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), Chs. 1-4. A useful survey of erotic art at Pompeii is Antonio Varone, *Eroticism in Pompeii*, trans. Maureen Fant (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2001); on p. 12, Varone notes that a bakery adjoining the House of Pansa featured an phallic bas relief. Willard Thorp traced the reference to the house of Pansa in *Redburn* to the *Penny Cyclopaedia* entries on “Atrium” and “House” (NN *Redburn* 329). On Tiberius’s sexual practices on the island of Capri, see Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, trans. Robert Graves (New York: Penguin, 1979), 135-36.

Yet if "Aladdin's Palace" is evocative of the Romantic Orientalism of the day, and also suggests the factitious splendor of the gambling establishment it describes, Melville might have actually conceived the name of his gambling club from a contemporary journalistic source relating to Crockford's. In a July 1844 article in the *Edinburgh Review* devoted to a recent biography of George Selwyn (1719-1791), a celebrated eighteenth-century wit, politician, rake, and gambler, the appearance of William Crockford's sumptuous club is described as rising "like a creation of Aladdin's lamp; and the genii themselves could hardly have surpassed the beauty of the internal decorations."²¹ Given the fact that Melville used two *Edinburgh Review* articles from the 1820s as sources for several passages in *White-Jacket*, written immediately after he completed *Redburn*, Melville may have also seen this 1844 article and gotten the idea for the name of the London gambling establishment depicted in the earlier-written novel.²² If not, the coincidence is still revealing.

After telling Redburn that he has to disappear for some time (in order to begin gambling), Harry makes reference to the "old duke here" in connection with Redburn's overnight accommodation. Redburn mistakes this as an allusion to the Duke of Wellington, whereas Harry is only referring to the elderly steward of the premises. Such a confusion of identities suggests the reduction of Redburn's hopes for his London visit, but it also may operate as an inadvertent reminder of the Duke of Wellington's membership at Crockford's, and the aristocratic cachet he gave the club. Harry thereupon makes Redburn swear to deliver a letter to Bury St. Edmunds if he hasn't reappeared by morning. The implication is that Harry is going to do away with himself if he doesn't succeed at his gambling. The mood of the scene intensifies as Harry leaves Redburn alone for the night, for it is clear that Harry is about to wager his remaining worldly resources at the hazard table. As Redburn notes while trying to understand what is happening around him, he "only heard the hum from the roomful below, scattered voices, and a hushed ivory rattling from the closed apartments adjoining" (NN *Redburn* 233). He thereupon feels a "terrible revulsion":

I shuddered at every footfall, and almost thought it must be some assassin pursuing me. The whole place seemed infected; and a strange thought came over me, that in the very damasks around, some eastern plague had been imported. And was that pale yellow wine, that I drank below, drugged? thought I. This must be some house whose foundations take hold on the pit. But these fearful

²¹ Rev. of John Heneage Jesse, *George Selwyn and his Contemporaries; with Memoirs and Notes*, in *Edinburgh Review* LXXX (July 1844): 1-42. The relevant passage is on p. 36.

²² Thomas Philbrick, "Melville's 'Best Authorities,'" *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 15 (1960): 171-79. See also Parker, 652-53.

reveries only enchanted me fast to my chair; so that, though I then wished to rush forth from the house, my limbs seemed manacled.

While thus chained to my seat, something seemed suddenly flung open; a confused sound of imprecations, mixed with the ivory rattling, louder than before, burst upon my ear, and through the partly open door of the room where I was, I caught sight of a tall, frantic man, with clenched hands, wildly darting through the passage, towards the stairs. (NN *Redburn* 233)

The scene has a nightmarish Dostoevskian quality, as the moral corruption of the establishment is imaginatively projected as both a physically tainted atmosphere and a paralyzing bondage. Underlying the boyish Redburn's growing horror is a vague awareness of the ruinous gambling at hazard at the center of the club's operations, just as it was at Crockford's. At the same time, Redburn begins to question Harry's identity and ultimate purpose in coming to the club, and thinks of looking for him; but after reconsidering the situation Redburn remains faithful to his original promise to dispose of the letter and purse that Harry has left, should his friend not return. Redburn's doubts eventuate in a climactic realization for an American youth who has habitually idealized the aristocracy of England: "But spite of these thoughts, and spite of the metropolitan magnificence around me, I was mysteriously alive to a dreadful feeling, which I had never before felt, except when penetrating into the lowest and most squalid haunts of sailor iniquity in Liverpool. All the mirrors and marbles around me seemed crawling over with lizards; and I thought to myself, that though gilded and golden, the serpent of vice is a serpent still" (NN *Redburn* 234). The low haunts in Liverpool already described in Chapter 39, "Booble-Alleys of the Town," are "putrid with vice and crime," while the "sooty and begrimed bricks of the very houses have a reeking, Sodom-like and murderous look" (NN *Redburn* 191). Though framed in evangelical terms, Redburn's insights have a legitimate sociological bearing on the condition of England at the onset of the "hungry forties," in particular, the existence of "two nations" of rich and poor that troubled leading writers and social critics such as Carlyle, Disraeli, Dickens, Gaskell, Marx, and Engels.

After a fitful sleep, Redburn awakens when Harry Bolton mysteriously returns, having lost his money and so declaring, "I am off for America. The game is up" (NN *Redburn* 234). Harry's behavior now fits the contemporary model of the desperate and suicidal gambler who has succumbed to deep play and lost. Significantly, Harry gives his "dirk" to Redburn as a protective measure, and then alludes to a nearby bell-rope as an instrument for hanging. Such behavior may seem melodramatic, but in the context of the London gambling

mania of the early nineteenth century, it suggests the social costs of gambling that many critics were decriing, and that eventually led to more strictly enforced laws against the practice. Thus, after describing the inner “Sanctum” at Crockford’s where hazard was played and “the Pluto of the place was wont to preside,” William Crockford’s biographer in *Bentley’s Miscellany* went on to note:

It is a lamentable truth, and pregnant with most serious and melancholy feeling and reflection, that, within the narrow limit of the Sanctum, or play-room, described, the ruin has been wholly or partially effected, and the doom sealed, of many noble, high-minded, and opulent men, once proud in position of rank, station, and circumstance, and happy in all the social blessings and relations of life. Many such, fallen from their elevated and envied estate, by the direful infatuation of, and indulgence in, play, unable to bear up against the ruin that has overtaken them, have died by their own hands. To such distressing cause, and the fatal influence of the hazard-table, may be ascribed the lamentable and suicidal acts of the late highly-respected nobleman, Lord R—, and the no less esteemed gentleman, the late Henry B—. Others of like grade and character have, owing to the same afflicting cause, become beggars in means, and outcasts alike from society and their country. (“Crockford and Crockford’s,” 254)

In *The Great Metropolis*, James Grant was similarly outspoken in his attack on contemporary gambling, and accordingly highlighted the addictive behavior and self-destructive end of many players:

Of all the passions of which human nature is susceptible, a passion for gambling is inconceivably the most pernicious. Once indulge it, and you are inevitably hurried forward to irretrievable ruin. There is scarcely an instance on record of a person having yielded to the temptation to a certain extent, and then breaking off from it. There is a sort of fatality in it; its victim has no free-will of his own. He sees the folly of the course he is pursuing: he sees the issues too, and yet he cannot, or will not, help himself. He acts like a man who knows his destiny, and seems resolved, frightful though it be, on fulfilling it with the least possible delay. . . . Gambling is, I believe, the source of more evils to society in the metropolis, as well as to the individuals themselves, than any other vice which exists. My own impression is, that neither our moralists nor our legislators have any conception of the share it contributes to the crimes and immoralities with which this great city abounds. I have not a doubt that the cause of half the suicides which occur in the higher and middle walks of life, is gam-

bling,—though the fact be carefully concealed by the friends of the parties. (Grant 1:97-200)

Here, too, we find a textbook analysis of what is happening behind the scenes at Aladdin's Palace, and the suicidal behavior of Harry Bolton when he returns from the hazard table. Nevertheless, after stabbing his empty purse with the "dirk" he has snatched back from Redburn, Harry calms himself with brandy, and for the rest of the night sits up with his decanter while Redburn tries to sleep.

Harry Bolton and Silver Fork Fiction

While the depiction of Aladdin's Palace strongly evokes London's most famous gentleman's club and gambling hell of the 1820s and 1830s, Melville also draws on a recognizable contemporary literary tradition. For the scene in which the dandy-like Harry Bolton gambles away his last resources is reminiscent of similar episodes in numerous novels of fashion of the "silver fork" school, most of them published by Henry Colburn. Such novels focused on manners, morals, and matrimony in the realm of genteel and aristocratic society, and were widely read among the rising middle class eager for glimpses into the privileged world of the "exclusives" or the "haut ton." "The principal ingredients in Colburn's formula," writes Ellen Moers, "were balls, gambling scenes, social climbers, political gossip, Almack's, the clubs, younger sons looking for heiresses, dowagers protecting their daughters from younger sons. Most of the novels produced on this pattern were mere handbooks of exclusive manners, pseudo-literary gossip journalism concerned with neither characterization nor plot, but with the illusion of authenticity."²³ In an 1827 review in the *Examiner*, William Hazlitt dismissively identified the new type of society novel as the "dandy school" of fiction, which drew attention to the details of fashionable life such as the use of silver forks to eat fish; as a result, the term "silver fork" has become associated with this genre.

The school began to develop in the mid-1820s in such works as Theodore Hook's *Sayings and Doings* (1824), Plumer Ward's *Tremaine, or the Man of Refinement* (1825), and Thomas H. Lister's *Granby* (1826), and continued with Disraeli's *Vivian Grey* (1826-27) and Bulwer's *Pelham* (1828), the latter two reaching wide audiences in England and America. Both Disraeli and Bulwer continued in this profitable vein — Disraeli's *The Young Duke* (1831) and *Henrietta Temple* (1837), and Bulwer's *Godolphin* (1833) being the chief exam-

²³ Ellen Moers, *The Dandy: Brummell to Beerbohm* (New York: Viking, 1960), 52-53. See also Matthew Whiting Rosa, *The Silver Fork School: Novels of Fashion Preceding "Vanity Fair"* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936).

ples – before the authors turned their talents elsewhere, Disraeli to the political, Bulwer to the “metaphysical” and historical novel. In the meantime, silver fork fiction continued in the 1830s and 1840s in the hands of such socially informed female observers as Lady Charlotte Bury, the Countess of Blessington, and Catherine Gore. (Out of all these writers, Melville was most familiar with the works of Bulwer and Disraeli.)²⁴ In her study of the social milieu of the writers of silver fork fiction, Alison Adburgham observes that gambling scenes in these novels mirrored the extravagant habits of the contemporary upper classes: “Just as in some silver fork novels a turning point in the young hero’s life is a twenty-four hour sitting at Crockford’s or some less recherché gambling ‘hell,’ so in very fact it was with many young men of rank and fortune who faced the moment of truth after their carefree years in ‘the world.’”²⁵ We may conclude, then, that Harry Bolton’s desperate attempt in *Redburn* to win money at gambling in order to stave off financial ruin is reminiscent of a number of comparable scenes in silver fork fiction that reflected the epidemic spread of gambling in Regency and Reform-era Britain.

Two of Disraeli’s novels in particular illustrate the contemporary vice of gambling. *The Young Duke* was the author’s most extravagant foray into silver fork fiction. Its scene of ruinous gambling provides a somber contrast to the otherwise high-spirited social comedy found elsewhere in the novel. The young Duke of St. James engages in fashionable love affairs and expensive dissipations while avoiding the altruistic guidance of his Roman Catholic guardian, Mr. Dacre, and discrediting himself with Dacre’s beguiling daughter May. While Crockford’s is mentioned several times in the narrative, the climactic gambling scene takes place in Brighton at the residence of the Baron de Berghem (Book IV, Chapters VII-VIII) where the combined forces of the Baron, Lord Castlefort, Lord Dice, and Temple Grace manage, in a prolonged session at cards, to win £100,000 off our dismayed hero. The young duke redeems himself and partially recoups his fortunes by giving a speech in favor of Catholic Emancipation in Parliament, thereby earning the hand of the now-willing May Dacre.

In *Henrietta Temple*, young Captain Ferdinand Armine is secretly in love with the heroine of the title, but is deeply in debt. In order to procure needed funds, Armine appeals to a Mr. Bond Sharpe, a money lender and gambling

²⁴ Melville knew Bulwer’s silver fork fiction well enough to allude to *Pelham* in *White-Jacket* (Chs. 4 and 6). The privileged milieu of Pierre Glendinning in *Pierre* also resembles that of several of Disraeli’s heroes. See *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities*, ed. Henry A. Murray (New York: Hendricks House, 1949), xxiv, xli, and lxvii-lxviii.

²⁵ Alison Adburgham, *Silver Fork Society: Fashionable Life and Literature from 1814 to 1840* (London: Constable, 1983), 110.

proprietor based on both Ephraim Bond (a Jewish operator of the Athenaeum club from whom Disraeli himself had borrowed money) and William Crockford. After Sharpe lends him £1,500, Armine meets Count Alcibiades de Mirabel, a character modeled on Disraeli's dandified friend and fellow Crockford's habitu , the Count d'Orsay. Following the dinner where the two meet, the party adjourns to an elegant gentleman's club on St. James's Street highly suggestive of Crockford's. Inviting Armine into the unnamed club, the Count makes a Dantean allusion to its identity as a gambling hell: "Come, we will make you an honorary member, mon cher Captain Armine . . . and do not say, '*Oh! lasciate ogni speranza,*' when you enter here."²⁶ After further developments in the love plot, Armine is arrested and taken to a "spunging house" (forced confinement preceding legal process for debt); but his new friend Count Mirabel comes to his rescue by winning £15,000 at Crockford's, thereby allowing him to finally marry Henrietta. In Disraeli's silver fork novel, then, we find both a visit to an unnamed gambling hell resembling Crockford's, and a hero who has his near-disastrous fortunes retrieved by the help of a friend at an establishment explicitly identified as the famous London club.

As a young man of means who "in the company of gambling sportsmen and dandies" had "lost his last sovereign" (NN *Redburn* 217), Melville's Harry Bolton is well-suited to the world of silver fork fiction. *Redburn's* first acquaintance with him in Liverpool demonstrates that Harry is naturally formed according to contemporary standards of genteel physical refinement: "He was one of those small, but perfectly formed beings, with curling hair, and silken muscles, who seem to have been born in cocoons. His complexion was a mantling brunette, feminine as a girl's; his feet were small; his hands were white; and his eyes were large, black, and womanly; and, poetry aside, his voice was as the sound of a harp" (NN *Redburn* 216). While the modern reader may be tempted to think that the androgynous-looking Bolton must be gay, this identification fails to take into consideration the contemporary cultural stereotype of the dandy.²⁷ Like Harry Bolton, the heroes of Bulwer's and Disraeli's early autobiographical fiction possess great personal beauty along with foppish tastes in dress, but they are nevertheless heterosexual in their behavior. That Harry Bolton is a contemporary type of England's young man of fashion is made evident from Harry's familiarity with the world of London high society: "Harry enlarged upon the fascinations of a London life; described the curricule he used to drive in Hyde Park; gave me the measurement of Madame

²⁶ *Henrietta Temple: A Love Story* (New York: Knopf, 1934), 370.

²⁷ For the theory that Harry Bolton is homosexual, see Martin, 51-54. See also Bromell, 69-79.

Vestris' ankle; alluded to his first introduction at a club to the madcap Marquis of Waterford; told over the sums he had lost upon the turf on a Derby day; and made various but enigmatical allusions to a certain Lady Georgiana Theresa, the noble daughter of an anonymous earl" (NN *Redburn* 221).²⁸ In this résumé of a leisured existence, the realms of genteel public display, theater, club, turf, and aristocratic amours are all represented, although Redburn subsequently hints that Harry may have been "squandering his aristocratic narrations with a careless hand; and, perhaps, sometimes spending funds of reminiscences not his own" (NN *Redburn* 221).

Harry is an orphaned prodigal son from Bury St. Edmunds who has squandered his £5,000 inheritance by gambling and fast living. And as Redburn later realizes when he sees Harry's "incredible ignorance" (NN *Redburn* 253) of nautical matters as a sailor on the *Highlander*, Harry's claim of having been a midshipman or "guinea pig" in the East India service is just another fiction. What is certain is that Harry is a charming fraud and dandified spendthrift whose downfall has been gambling and extravagance. Harry's one last fling at the gambling table before shipping out to America is in keeping with the capricious temperament and irresponsible habits that have undermined his position in society, and forced him to seek a future in the New World. Unlike most silver fork spendthrifts, however, Harry's fate is radical dispossession from English society; and his distressed situation is later made worse by ridicule from the crew of the *Highlander*, who "put [him] down for a very equivocal character" (NN *Redburn* 254). As Redburn remarks, "I do not know exactly what they thought Harry had been; but they seemed unanimous in believing that, by abandoning his country, Harry had left more room for the gamblers. Jackson even asked him to lift up the lower hem of his trowsers, to test the color of his calves" (NN *Redburn* 254). In other words, Jackson is mockingly checking to see if Harry is a *blackleg* or sharper. Redburn had earlier revealed his familiarity with such jargon when he meditated on whether he could trust Harry Bolton before their visit to London: "What little money he has, he spends freely; he can not be a polite blackleg, for I am no pigeon to pluck; so *that* is out of the question;—perish such a thought, concerning my own bosom friend!" (NN *Redburn* 223). Just as Redburn has good reason to doubt his friend's honesty with regard to his past, the sailors on the *Highlander* are aware that such a *déclassé* young dandy may be a cheat and a con artist.

Some of the same critics who have argued that the scene at Aladdin's Palace is unconvincing have asserted that the character of Harry Bolton is an

²⁸ On the famously shapely legs of the Italian actress and dancer Madame Vestris (born Lucy Bartolozzi), see Murray, 223. The "madcap" Marquis of Waterford was a member of Crockford's; see Humphreys, Ch. 5.

imperfectly integrated addendum to the ending of *Redburn*. However, when viewed within the literary and historical contexts of the era, Harry emerges as a forceful characterization of a fallen young Englishman of taste and refinement – a dandy, in short – infected with a moral malady that Redburn is helpless to remedy, and that is inextricably mixed with Harry's considerable charm and personal gifts. Appearing two-thirds of the way through the novel, Harry is an English alter ego to the keenly sensitive, lonely, and downwardly mobile Redburn, and acts as an embodiment of Old World glamour and refinement tainted with moral corruption. As such Harry plays an important role in filling out the image of England presented in the novel and providing a dramatic foil to the more experienced and self-reliant Redburn on the return voyage to New York.²⁹

Conclusions

Based on the available historical and literary evidence, we may conclude that the gentleman's club depicted in Chapter 46 of *Redburn* was largely modeled on Crockford's of London, while Harry Bolton's squandering of his last resources at Aladdin's Palace repeats a scene that was played out many times in the lives of upper-class Englishmen, and reflected in a specific class of contemporary novels of fashion that mirrored this milieu. Moreover, once we establish the links between *Redburn*, Crockford's, the contemporary dandy, and the world of silver fork fiction, it becomes evident that the character of Harry Bolton – who has struck some critics as an insufficiently developed or sexually ambiguous figure – is recognizable as a literary and cultural type, while Harry's ruination at Aladdin's Palace and subsequent self-imposed exile suggest the fate of some well-known dissolute dandies of the period – even though most bankrupt Regency and Early Victorian dandies, from Beau Brummell in 1816 to the Count d'Orsay in 1849, fled to nearby France, not America.

Yet there remains one more question to be answered. Given the fact that

²⁹ Noting that Melville enlarged his allegedly completed manuscript at the end of June 1849, Parker writes dismissively: "The best guess as to how he enlarged the manuscript is that he added the character of the specious dandy Harry Bolton, after having first gotten Redburn safely back to New York City without his dubious companionship" (642). Asserting Melville's inability to deal candidly with homosexual themes, Martin claims that Harry Bolton's alleged weakness as a character "seems to coincide with the author's artistic (and perhaps personal) difficulty" (52). In an early article that clarified Melville's double point of view in the novel (older narrator and younger subject), Merlin Bowen remarked: "Bolton remains to the end an unconvincing and static figure, while Redburn's further progress is to be measured only in a wider, and essentially undramatic, extension of his sympathies" ("*Redburn* and the Angle of Vision," *Modern Philology* 52 [1954], 108). For a more favorable discussion of Harry Bolton's role in the novel as a corrupt European counterpart to Redburn's democratic man, see Nicholas Canaday, Jr., "Harry Bolton and Redburn: The Old World and the New," in *Essays in Honor of Esmond Linsworth Marilla*, ed. Thomas Austin Kirby and William John Olive (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), 291-98. See also Sten, 107-11.

Aladdin's Palace is, with the relevant historical data in hand, a recognizable fictional adaptation of the most famous gambling hell of the era, why didn't any contemporary – and especially English – reviewers of *Redburn* point this out? In England, for example, the writer for the *Spectator* praised the novel for its “quiet naturalness,” but took exception to the “episodical trip to London” because of its “melodramatic exaggeration.” The writer for the *London Morning Herald* remarked of *Redburn* and Harry Bolton that “among the places [sic] of entertainment they frequent is one of those splendid gambling houses which are to be met with in London”; but the writer didn't provide any further details. On the other hand, the longest English review of the novel, appearing in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, categorically asserted that an establishment like Aladdin's Palace “certainly exists no-where (at least in London) but in our sailor-author's lively imagination.” The writer went on to note: “We unhesitatingly qualify the whole of the London expedition as utter rubbish, intended evidently to be very fine and effective, but which totally misses the mark.” In America, the reviewer for the *New York Albion* was also dismissive: “A flying visit to a London gambling-house, made by the sailor-boy under absurdly improbable circumstances, does but show the author's inability to paint scenes of this sort.” The reviewer for the *Southern Literary Messenger* mentioned in passing “the melodramatic midnight trip to London,” but claimed “no room” for further remark. Finally, the writer for *Holden's Dollar Magazine*, comparing the amount of fact and fiction evident in the narrative, noted that “there are a few palpable inventions – the story of the London Hell for instance – that do not give us a very exalted idea of Mr. Melville's imaginative capacities.” Such is the failure of contemporary reviewers to acknowledge the validity of Melville's depiction of the London gambling milieu in *Redburn*.³⁰

But, of course, *Redburn* was published in England and America in the fall of 1849, more than a decade after Crockford's heyday and five years following its final demise, after which time much London gambling had been curtailed in reaction to the parliamentary crackdown in 1844. Then, too, it is reasonable to assume that none of the reviewers quoted above had ever been to Crockford's or witnessed the epidemic of upper-class London gambling that peaked in the 1820s and 1830s, and dropped significantly by the later 1840s. (The American reviewers would obviously have been at a special disadvantage here.) Consequently, the failure of contemporary reviewers to identify the background of *Redburn's* mysterious night in London need not be a stumbling block for a historical understanding of the episode today.

³⁰ Brian Higgins and Hershel Parker, eds., *Herman Melville: The Contemporary Reviews* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 258, 261, 269, 270, 282, 287, 289. See NN *Redburn* 333, for attributions of some of these reviews.

Redburn's "Mysterious Night in London" has been frequently misunderstood, but when we are apprised of the particular upper-class world of fashionable vice and opulent excess it faithfully mirrors, we gain a deeper appreciation of its artistic merits. That Melville had no direct personal experience of Crockford's or its imitators did not keep him from creating a historically accurate fictional likeness, or from dramatizing an upper-class young man's terminal losses at the hazard table. Harry Bolton's disastrous experience at Aladdin's Palace represents the young dandy's final act of dispossession from his homeland, and informs us of the tainted world of privilege he is leaving in order to seek his fortunes in democratic America. The fact that we see Harry's fall from grace through the naive and puritanical eyes of Redburn adds a special note of poignancy to this event as another of the many bitter lessons that Melville's narrator must absorb, completing the destruction of his illusions about the storied romance of the Old World.