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**Spirited Media: Revision, Race, and Revelation in Nineteenth-Century America**

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**Spirited Media: Revision, Race, and Revelation in Nineteenth-Century  
America**

**by**

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## **Dedication**

For my parents.

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# **Spirited Media: Revision, Race, and Revelation in Nineteenth-Century America**

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“Spirited Media” analyzes distributed structures of authorship in the reform literature of the nineteenth-century United States. The literature that emerged out of reform movements like abolitionism often was a product of complex negotiations between speech and print, involving multiple people working across media in relationships that were sometimes collaborative, sometimes cooperative, and sometimes antagonistic. The cultural authority of print and individual authorship, often unquestioned in studies that focus on major or canonical figures of the nineteenth century, has tended to obscure some of this complexity. Moving from phonography, to Josiah Henson and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, to spiritualism, to Sojourner Truth and Walt Whitman, I consider four cases in which reporters, amanuenses, spirit mediums, and poets revived and remediated the voices of abolitionists, fugitive slaves, and figures from American history. By separating publication into events—speech, inscription, revision, and print—I show that “authorship” consisted of a series of interactions over time and across media, but that in the case of reform, the stakes for proving that authorship was a clear and indisputable characteristic of print were high. For abolitionist, African American, and spiritualist

speakers and writers, authority depended on authorship, which in turn depended on the transparency of the print or the medium, or the perception of a direct relationship between speaker and reader. Like authorship, this transparency was constructed by a variety of social actors for whom the author was a key site of empowerment. It was authorized by appeals to revelation and race, two constructs often sidelined in media histories, yet central to discussions of society and politics in nineteenth-century America. Thinking of authorship as a distributed phenomenon disrupts models of the unitary subject and original genius, calling attention instead to uncanny acts of reading and writing in nineteenth-century literature. This dissertation argues that we should think about the transformative power of U.S. literature as located in revelation, not just creation, and in congregating people, not just representing them.



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## Introduction

In his introduction to a 2001 edition of William Wells Brown's play *The Escape: or, A Leap for Freedom*, literary historian John Ernest reports that Brown, a prominent African American writer and abolitionist, began his dramatic performances on the anti-slavery lecture circuit in 1856—but not with *The Escape*. Instead, Brown started out by performing the text of another play, one called *Experience; or, How to Give a Northern Man a Backbone*, which, as far as we know, he never published. Based on reviews printed in periodicals at the time, we can tell that *Experience* was a response in three acts to *A South-Side View of Slavery; or, Three Months at the South, in 1854*, in which Reverend Nehemiah Adams, a white northerner, described the journey through the South that led him to defend slavery.<sup>1</sup> Brown's 1856 satire of Adams in *Experience*, detailed in a review published in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, recounts the adventures of a northern minister (Jeremiah Adderson) on a journey to the South, during which—"by a strange turn of events," as one review put it—Adderson is sold into slavery (qtd in Ernest, ix). Adderson eventually obtains his liberty and denounces slavery, and the play concludes with an appeal by a fugitive slave and a "Grand Poetical Finale," the contents of which, Brown biographer William Farrison writes wistfully, "one can only wish that he knew" (280).

During a series of well-attended performances on the nineteenth-century lecture

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<sup>1</sup> Adams, a Boston clergyman, had previously supported anti-slavery causes. This book, in which he describes his surprise at the positive treatment of the slaves he saw in the South and suggests that the "peculiar institution" had a positive effect on the religious and moral character of blacks, inspired widespread criticism by abolitionists. Brown's title for his play, framed in response to Adams, was likely intended to emphasize the distinction between "seeing" slavery and "experiencing" it, a distinction that forms the basis for the revisionary plot of the play itself.

circuit, Brown played all the parts in the play. Reviewers called *Experience* “first rate,” “extremely amusing,” and “a very effective plea for the cause of anti-slavery.”<sup>2</sup> One reviewer noted of Brown’s later performances of *The Escape* that “Though this drama is not equal to the one entitled *Experience*, it is an able production.”<sup>3</sup> Brown himself wrote in a letter to William Lloyd Garrison, Jr. that *The Escape* was “far superior.”<sup>4</sup> Which was the “better” play, *Experience* or *The Escape*? Such a question might seem reductive or superficial to literary critics today. In any case, lacking a complete handwritten or printed script for *Experience*, we are unable to adjudicate. The opinions of reviewers and audiences are the only remaining evidence of *Experience*, and so we are required to return to the question of value and consider it from the perspective of an antebellum listener. Often an elusive and controversial form of textual evidence even when available, audience response, along with the nineteenth-century critical norms and values that inform it, here becomes our primary guide.

*Experience* was not the first play written by an African American author. A theater company in New York City performed a play, *The Drama of King Shotaway*, by manager William Brown in the 1820s. Scholars have described it as “no longer ‘extant’” (Gardner xiii). *King Shotaway* joins other lost plays written by African Americans in the early nineteenth century, putting *Experience* in multiple genealogical narratives of lost—performed, not printed—things, narratives that, in a broader tradition, stretch back

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<sup>2</sup> Qtd. in Farrison, 281. These comments were part of a report published in the *Liberator* on June 13, 1856.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 285. This comment was published in the *Auburn Daily Advertiser* on April 29, 1857.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 296. Brown may have had several reasons for making this assertion: white abolitionist Marius R. Robinson, editor of the *Anti-Slavery Bugle* and head of the Anti-Slavery Society in Ohio, had previously objected to Brown’s dramatic performances. See Farrison, 293-294.

through Shakespeare, and beyond.

Still, the fact that we do not have the text of *Experience* also creates opportunities for reflection. Though the plot of the play is described, we lack the details of the dialogue, the full list of characters, or a sense of the specific content of the “Grand Poetical Finale.” We do know how much money Brown made for several performances, and we can sketch his travels on the lecturing circuit and some sense of surrounding speakers and events. The fact that we do not have the text of the play, however, forces us to turn our attention from the details of a printed document to the echoes of a performed one. Audience reaction to *Experience* is described in newspaper reports in terms of feeling, attendance, and audible response. *Experience* was embedded in a larger abolitionist context of public speaking, fund-raising, contentious and participatory audiences, and repeated performances. Without the text, we are prompted to focus on the embodied, performed, temporal qualities of the play, and the reactions of specific audiences and reviewers to its content and their own experience of it. The reviews or the archival vestiges of the play—the resistance of form, in this case, to straightforward “readings”—require us to sit in a series of specific lecturing halls, our backs to the performer, tuning in only for bits and pieces, listening to and watching the faces of the audience. By turning to the very evidence that has frustrated us, in part because of its fragmentary nature and in part because of the absences it documents, we can gain a richer picture of reform literature.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of the difficulties and opportunities offered by the archive of African American literature, see Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts.”

*Spirited Media* reckons with the dynamic of speech, performativity, absence, and the archive introduced by a text like *Experience*, a dynamic whose constituent parts have begun to attract the attention of scholars of nineteenth-century literature. I expand on previous studies by focusing on the movement *between* forms, the shifts from speech to performance to print, and how people thought about such transformations.<sup>6</sup> This project makes two interventions into current conversations about literary history. The first is historical: I argue that authorship was a distributed enterprise, and that critics stand to benefit from exploring the implications of this claim, looking outside the image of the creative subject to consider multiple forms of involvement in textual production, including printing, editing, and speaking. If some modern critics have continued to privilege the author as a site of creative production or sociopolitical agency, others have conceived of the author as a social construction, and have shifted the emphasis away from the author and toward the text as an occasion of meaning. But I show that certain kinds of nineteenth-century texts depended on the author, whether real or imagined, to supply the grounds for claims to authenticity and the means for social and political change. In the disjunction between author assertions and the actual processes of textual production, I locate a series of interactions that cross racial, textual, and spiritual boundaries even as they show a nineteenth-century society working to imagine itself within a rapidly changing media landscape.

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<sup>6</sup> Previous focuses on transformations across media have been described as remediation (see Bolter and Grusin). Though I also consider forms of remediation, Bolter and Grusin's work posits for media a more teleological narrative than I am comfortable with here. In the context of nineteenth-century reform, this term more productively refers to a translation across media that occurs frequently and repetitively but privileges no form in particular. See also Daphne Brooks's discussion of the role of performance in transforming boundaries and categories of race, gender, and class in *Bodies in Dissent*.

My second critical intervention is methodological: I argue that analyzing multiple versions of texts, as well as speeches and performances, invites imaginative readings of the printed sources critics have relied on for thinking about history. In the case studies I select, authenticity, understood as a measure of consistency between representation and origin and as a measure of being authoritative or authorized, was dynamic or changeable and was invoked for different purposes at different times in the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> In keeping with other studies that have begun to think about the reciprocal effects of race, spirit, and audience on print, circulation, and authorship, I show that reproduction happened across media, that this dynamic anchored imaginations of both authorship and authenticity in the nineteenth century, and that it continues to affect the way critics conceptualize authorship today.<sup>8</sup>

This dissertation begins at the intersections of body and text, race and book history, and performance and publication. Recent considerations of textual performance, publication events, and the ways that embodied actions and book history intersect start to

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<sup>7</sup> I draw these definitions from the Oxford English Dictionary, which defines “authenticity” in the following four ways: “as being authoritative or duly authorized;” “as being in accordance with fact, as being true in substance;” “as being what it professes in origin or authorship, as being genuine; genuineness;” “as being real, actual; reality.” Authenticity has become a complicated and sometimes fraught term for critics writing about African American literature, in particular. Two examples of how authenticity has been invoked are as a way to, in Gene Andrew Jarrett’s words, “promote an ‘authentic’ version of ethnic literature, in which literary representations of ethnicity must correlate with the ethnicity of their author(s),” and as a way of authenticating texts or designating them as the creative compositions of African American authors (5).

<sup>8</sup> Precedents for this work include Brooks, Hartman, and Moten, who deal with African American performativity and embodiment, behavior, and aurality, respectively. Peterson’s work on African American “doers of the word” provides an important critical framework for African American oratory, and Gustafson has discussed what she calls a “performance semiotic of speech and text” in early American contexts. See also Roach and Taussig for discussions of performance, repetition, and mimesis across cultures.



give us a way to think about something like *Experience*.<sup>9</sup> Speech and performance require a reevaluation of some of the ways that critics have accounted for transformation as part of a material analysis of a printed object: editions, variants, distribution, and circulation. Turning from the text of *Experience* to the way it was received in reviews, for instance, challenges us to consider both event and audience as constitutive parts of the record. I focus on reform movements in the nineteenth century because such movements, in their efforts to achieve material, political, and ideological change, put pressure on the concept of the author as well as the function of the audience.

Reform created a tense and fertile climate for textual and creative production in nineteenth-century America. Reformers were unusually tuned to opportunities for transformation, perhaps in part because their actions were premised on a faith in the possibility of transforming behaviors, beliefs, actions, and laws. Audiences for reformers were not simply adjudicators: they were also potentially malleable collectives. Book historical studies have provided a framework for thinking about material forms of transformation and production, particularly the ways reform movements like abolition affected the production, distribution, and circulation of print.<sup>10</sup> But with some notable exceptions, such studies have tended to inherit a myopia, seldom shifting focus from prominent white men and their familiar productions. Race and race-based oppression complicated the means and the terms of authorship in nineteenth-century America, as the

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<sup>9</sup> See Peterson, Matthew Brown, Fliegelman, Gustafson, Gustafson et al, Rohrbach, and Matt Cohen.

<sup>10</sup> See Gross and Kelley and Casper et al; see also work by Loughran, Nord, Fanuzzi, Augst, Pratt, Risley, and DeLombard. By the end of Reconstruction, Pratt writes, the press was no longer affiliated with reform as it had often been in the antebellum period: the mainstream press had moved closer to the status quo, and the reform press was suffering at the hands of obscenity laws initiated by Anthony Comstock (“Speech” 399).

absence of Brown's *Experience* makes clear. If race was a political construction in the nineteenth century, it was also connected to a belief in the legibility of the human body, a belief that also informed popular discussions about physiognomy and phrenology. This introduces a second layer of materiality and of textuality that is organized around the human body, an imagination of how and what can be read, and of the many ways authority can be seized through the act of reading. The privileged position this creates for the reader or the audience informs the way textual production and transformation functioned in the nineteenth century.

By decentering the author, I generate a story about the intersection between reform and nineteenth-century American literature that emphasizes the complexity of the connection between methods of inscription and modes of sociality in nineteenth-century America. Studies of the relationship between print and reform have tended to situate print as a technology—a *means* or a *process* of representation—or as a series of fixed material objects. Histories of reform, like literary histories, often privilege the relation between author and work or individual and printed venue, a position that seems to be encouraged by the case of William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator*, for instance, or Frederick Douglass's *North Star* and *Frederick Douglass' Paper*. Scholars have discussed the relationship between print and reform in terms of, in the words of one study, the “efficacy of print as a vehicle for social and political change.”<sup>11</sup> But that critics of both literature and reform have depended on the figure of the extraordinary individual should make us question the

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<sup>11</sup> This phrase appears as part of the promotional material for Schreiber's collection. In the introduction, Schreiber introduces the term “print activism” to refer to “print media's role in social and political activism throughout the long twentieth century” (1).

assumptions that have guided the telling of such histories. The co-articulation of subject and medium, or the vision of print as a “vehicle” or expression of individual or collective will, has led to a vision of authorship and editorship as a primary means of political action.

In the case studies that follow I turn instead to relationships—between, for instance, speaker and reporter, or speaker and editor, or speaker and medium—that formed around processes of inscription. Printed texts were often a material expression of such relationships, and different editions reflected different configurations of social interactions. But reform, which had specific material goals, also depended on specific, convincing formulations of both authorship and authenticity. Inscriptive practices like handwriting and print became a means of negotiating and expressing fictions of authorship and authenticity that were both influential and in flux in the nineteenth century. The texts that were produced as a result situated print in time, as well as space, rendering it a nexus of voice, breath, event, belief, and interaction. The designation in my title, “spirited media,” challenges scholars to think about print in terms of its imbrication with various forms of “spirit”—from the belief in the persistence of material manifestations of the departed to the play of voice and gesture that dominated discussions of eloquence in the nineteenth century—as well as its inextricability from other forms of mediation.

To turn the focus from reformers’ declarations to reformers’ acts of inscription means turning away from the spotlight, focusing instead on the story of the local acts and interactions that, together, helped to create a dense and interconnected web of reform and

resistance in the nineteenth century. In telling this story I turn from the figures that have dominated U.S. literary and reform histories to their corollaries, surrogates, and associates. Rather than bestselling white author Harriet Beecher Stowe, I look at black reverend Josiah Henson, whose life story evolved in a complex relationship with Stowe's novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and its titular character, Uncle Tom. Rather than that most famous 'Southern Literary Messenger,' Edgar Allan Poe, I turn to spiritualist poet Lizzie Doten, who claimed to receive and transmit, in both writing and speech, verses composed by Poe's spirit. Rather than abolitionist editor William Lloyd Garrison, I take up James B. Yerrinton, printer of Garrison's *Liberator*, and his son, reporter J.M.W. Yerrinton, who produced verbatim reports of Garrison's speeches. When I return to major figures, as I do in my final chapter, I look at what happens when we consider parts of their lives that have not claimed the spotlight in literary analyses: Walt Whitman in old age and speech, Sojourner Truth in poetry and print. My approach shifts the focus from individuals to interactions, widening the lens and introducing, in some cases, new forms of evidence. It also widens the scope of what constitutes reform and acts of reform in the nineteenth century.

I have chosen to focus on spiritualism and abolitionism because they occupy two poles on a spectrum of what functions as authenticity today for historians and critics of nineteenth-century reform. As a result, they point to the evolution of conceptions of authenticity over time, creating a metanarrative or a history of thinking about history that implicates critical methodologies as much as historical narratives. If today, as Robert Levine has pointed out, one peril of studying anti-slavery efforts is the assumption that

the victory of the cause was a foregone conclusion, one peril of studying spiritualism has been a structurally similar assumption that the movement, which was organized around a belief in the possibility of communication with the spirits of the dead, was absurd.<sup>12</sup> Another way of putting this is that we come at the nineteenth century prepared to assume that abolitionists were right and spiritualists were wrong. But the conceptions of truth that have constituted “right” and “wrong” can themselves be considered as part of a history of interactions between people and media forms. If it is useful, as many historians have argued, to think of abolitionists as a diverse group of individuals with evolving and vastly differing opinions and approaches that represented a decided minority with low odds of success in the nineteenth century, it is also useful to think of spiritualists as a more popular contingent that offered “truths,” a relationship to personal and national histories, and strategies for dealing with loss that were both appealing and consistent with the beliefs of many at the time.

*Spirited Media* consists of four case studies organized around different dynamics of speech transcription in anti-slavery and spiritualist contexts. Like the reviews of *Experience*, speech transcriptions foreground the participation of audiences, speakers, editors, and transcribers in the creation of printed documents. They also resist simple dichotomies between written and oral forms of expression. Explosive mixtures and reconfigurations of speech and print combined with the emergence of new technologies and forms of communication to create the foundation for reform and transformation in

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<sup>12</sup> See the prologue to *Dislocating*, pp. 1-16.

the nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup> Reform at this time was as much a matter of bending or redirecting as a wholesale bid for social or political change. Considered this way, reform has much in common with revision. Reconfigurations of text range from one or two details over a short period of time to complete overhauls. Like revision, reform is a multiply-authored and collaborative process. Like reform, revision deals in audiences, in the ways that texts are inflected by readers or listeners and the ways that readers or listeners are inflected by texts.

In this dissertation I juxtapose spiritualism (with its human as well as print media, and with its interest in bringing spirits to bear on convincing antebellum publics in pursuit of a reformist agenda) with the abolitionist movement and the creative productions of fugitive slaves and African Americans that both spoke to and departed from prominent anti-slavery goals and factions.<sup>14</sup> Revision plays an important role in all of these documents, providing a structural continuity and a formal expression of the changing relationship between texts and audiences over time.

I treat spirit in this project as a direct reference to the spirits of the departed invoked by spiritualist discourse, as well as to the non-material or the ineffable that formed the basis for belief across sects and denominations. But spirit also speaks more broadly to a connection between the past and the preoccupations of the critical present, drawing attention to the differences and desires that guide critics' readings and their

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<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of the way media technologies shaped public discourse in what he calls a "culture of reform," see Garvey. For discussions of the relationship between religious, political, and social reform and various nineteenth-century communication technologies, see Nord, Pratt, Risley, Mott, and Augst.

<sup>14</sup> See McGarry and Robert Nelson on the intersections, including disembodiment as transcendence of difference, between spiritualism and abolition. For a discussion of the different factions of the anti-slavery movement in the U.S., see Kraditor, Newman, McPherson, and Foner.

methods today.<sup>15</sup> Differences in the way literary critics read and what they value in our current critical moment compared to critics of the past are illuminated by the dissonance of reading reviews of *Experience* through nineteenth-century formulations of value. If what was considered to be “good” literature in the nineteenth century had to do with aesthetic standards specific to that time, it also had to do with what counted as “effective” in didactic and reform contexts, or literature that advocated a continuity between values and actions for a nineteenth-century reading public.<sup>16</sup> Today, cultural criticism and surface reading are only two manifestations of different ways critics connect reading practices to the kinds of value we continue to seek in the texts of the past.<sup>17</sup> By invoking a structural relation between past and present, spirit speaks not to the essence of a text, but rather, as in the case of spiritualists revising the voices of the dead, to that which moves the critic in the present, that which characterizes the criticism or guides the reading. Method has always been a function of desire in literary studies: the desire to attend to silenced voices, for instance, or the desire to discover beauty, or the desire to

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<sup>15</sup> In casting spirit as both occasion and trope for meditating on the act of criticism, I draw on the first issue of *J19* (Spring 2013), which features a section titled “In the Spirit of the Thing: Critique as Enchantment.” The forum is premised, as Nancy Bentley writes in the introduction, on “the idea that the networks joining our present to the nineteenth-century past—networks archival, affective, or aesthetic—can offer alternative paths through which to discover historical meaning,” or the reconception of critique as *enchantment* (148-9). Spirit in this formulation refers to “a live historical germ” that animates historical affinities, affiliations, and correspondences, moving away from the kinds of debunking and disenchantment that characterized earlier forms of critical engagement. This critical interpretation of spirit also speaks to a recent “postsecular” turn in American literary studies. See the Spring 2014 issue of *American Literary History* and the *After the Postsecular* issue of *American Literature* (forthcoming 2014), as well as Warner et al, Lardas Modern, and Rivett.

<sup>16</sup> Didactic and sentimental literature fell out of critical favor at the beginning of the twentieth century: for a discussion of this, and a milestone in developing a new cultural, historical, and feminist criticism that brought texts like *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* back into the literary canon, see Tompkins.

<sup>17</sup> Politically motivated cultural studies emerged out of discussions of ideology in the 1960s and 70s; for the more recent phenomenon of surface reading that is in some ways a response to the kinds of symptomatic and structuralist readings common to Marxist and ideological criticism, see Marcus and Best.

understand the development of a national imaginary. If the history of criticism has been, for some, a history of the debunking of previous generations' forms of desire, attention to spirit as a method of recognition or resonance gives us a way to acknowledge the history of method and to look beyond it, talking about American spiritualism, for example, without the need to dismiss or disprove.

Nineteenth-century reformers paired print and speech, combining and sometimes transforming the media available to them in order to project specific and changeable forms of authenticity. This revision occurs not just in terms of the structures of relation that function as authenticity—though, as my discussion of Josiah Henson in chapter two shows, this is one way in which authenticity proved to be revisable in the nineteenth century—but more importantly as a sense that a “self” could be scripted and revised within the competing frameworks of authenticity that co-existed in print and performance. This is not to say that the national imaginary envisioned by theorists such as Michael Warner and Benedict Anderson does not exist, but rather that its projections and identifications and alignments were not the only potential products of printed media, a point that becomes particularly apparent when print is conceptualized as functioning in terms other than those of disembodiment and circulation.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> A number of critics have explored the influence of material forms on the process of broad national or collective identification in early America. Theories of material form have been advanced by scholars like Warner, Fliegelman, Ruttenberg, Looby, and Brooks. Warner's influential and compelling arguments have situated print and its relationship to authorship and anonymity as a historical basis for reimagining both national and more local forms of collective identification. But both Warner and Benedict Anderson, in the process of formulating theories of national identity around genres of print, take for granted that what they define as “text” is stable, recognizable, and legible over time; that “print” is an ideal, or an effective, category of organization; and that print-based forms of imagining enable a kind of disembodied identification. Proposed alternatives have returned to the body and oratorical and spoken performance. Fliegelman's magisterial study of natural language, oratorical culture, and material objects in the



As I show, the printed documents associated with reform in the nineteenth century are difficult to think about in terms of disembodiment and anonymity. Such documents were often disruptive, incorporating representations of sound onto the printed page, and were frequently both experienced and distributed within contexts of speech and oral performance.<sup>19</sup> In chapter one, I briefly discuss the printing company J.B. Yerrinton & Son, which links a series of anti-slavery documents printed in the same office as the anti-slavery newspaper *The Liberator*. But the printer's son was also the primary phonographic or verbatim reporter for the American Anti-Slavery Society. Here, as elsewhere, performances in print and speech intersect in complex ways. Public discourse in the antebellum period was represented, refracted, and recreated in print. The result was a series of printed documents retaining disruptive ties to sound and human presence. These ties were heightened by their unstable, ephemeral status, visible, in many cases, in the fragility of the very paper they were printed on; the sheer bulk of their collective publication; echoes of print networks in the prefaces, introductions, and appendices; and multiple editions and revisions. Attending to the specific characteristics of antebellum texts, which both engaged and helped to comprise reform, reorients assumptions about the temporalities and material characteristics of publication, decentering conceptions of a nation perpetuated under the auspices of text-based public rationality. As performative

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Revolutionary period, like Ruttenberg's consideration of the connections between voice or utterance and what she calls "democratic personality," emphasizes that spoken and printed texts are not so easily distinguished in early America. These studies have set the stage for a consideration of the ways that material forms intersected with reform movements that worked in multiple registers, attempting to create and expand smaller communities (often at odds) within a larger national public and imaginary in the antebellum period—sometimes in direct confrontation with the kinds of abstraction promoted by dominant interpretations, understandings, and uses of texts like the U.S. Constitution.

<sup>19</sup> See Lehuu's discussion of what she calls a carnival on the page, or theatricality in popular media in the antebellum period.

and ephemeral representations of interactions with a series of audiences, such documents offer an opportunity to enrich existing conceptions of how “author” and “text” functioned in nineteenth-century America.

In the chapters that follow I move from a notion of the author as an originary creative subject to a vision of textual production as a series of acts by multiple people.<sup>20</sup> The death of the author, diagnosed by Roland Barthes and constructively reformulated by Michel Foucault, was central to the poststructuralist turn, but it has also become a significant dynamic in post-poststructuralist scholarship. In recent years, American literary studies have provoked both a conversation and a non-conversation about authorship. On the one hand, the figure of the author has been called into question as a defining frame of reference. Historians of American literature like Meredith McGill have argued that even as the romantic idea of the author was solidifying in the nineteenth century, it was being dissolved by practices like reprinting. Historians of the book and scholars of African American literature and gender studies have also begun to explore the fields of collaboration, cooperation, and appropriation that defined nineteenth-century authorial production.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, a long tradition of American and African American literary criticism has engaged in a strong valuation of spectacular individuals. Early twentieth-century critics like F.O. Matthiessen and D.H. Lawrence are early practitioners of such criticism, but the model has continued into a series of author-based monographs and chapters. Such studies tend to be organized around an assertion of the

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<sup>20</sup> This is not a new position: see McKenzie, for an early and influential formulation.

<sup>21</sup> See Jackson, Peterson, and Ernest. For an example of this kind of work in gender studies, see Alison Booth. See also Leah Price.

value of literature, based either on formal characteristics or a sense of the text as a means of social or political resistance, or both. In both cases, these forms of creative production functioned in terms not just of authorship, but also of ownership, depending on a vision of subjectivity and individuality that was still under construction when many of the most famous authors of American literature were at work.

We know that authorship was a work in progress in the nineteenth-century U.S., but that knowledge has tended to be produced in relation to copyright and its lack. Martha Woodmansee has tracked the eighteenth-century evolution of the notion of the romantic author, with an emphasis on originality, out of older, cooperative and craftsman-like models that privileged “derivation rather than...deviation from prior texts,” even as proponents of originality like Samuel Johnson continued to participate in collaborative models of literary production (281). American literary historians have contended that, if authorship as a profession was rare at the century’s start, it was a career path by 1900; if the global spread of an author’s work was difficult to control in the days of Jefferson’s presidency, by Teddy Roosevelt’s the internationalization of publishing and the Chace Act signaled a change in authorship’s place in the world; if authorial economies were embedded early in the antebellum period, they were disembedded by the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>22</sup>

But thinking about the literature of reform, in particular, and the extremity of its multivocality, its “difficulty” and weirdness, especially as a literature that constantly and

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<sup>22</sup> See Charvat, McGill, and Jackson, respectively. The Chace Act was the commonly used term for the International Copyright Act of 1891. See also Gilmore, who discusses copyright in the Revolutionary and early national periods.

multiply refers to its own production partly as a record of speech and performance, positions us to think about the author differently. In *Spirited Media*, I claim that the sense of personal presence and authenticity integral to the speech event was also central to the function of authorship, particularly in testimonial genres like the literature of the abolitionist and spiritualist movements;<sup>23</sup> that that presence depended on the illusion of the transparent medium; that it made use of and helped to propagate a vision of the author as a specific site of empowerment; and that it sometimes tended to conceal the series of interactions between multiple people and across media that actually constituted the project of authorship, both before and after the Civil War.

Today, one function of the author is to structure the way we look at the past, and in the author critics have found a source of resistance, genius, political action, and stylistic innovation or reform. But what emerges from a closer look at the archive of political and spiritual reform in nineteenth-century America is a series of roles operating under the auspices of the author: speaker, writer, reporter, editor, printer, and publisher. The political agency that has been associated with authorship is not lost in this rearticulation, but rather relocated. It is hard to tell, for instance, which parts of the various editions of her narrative Sojourner Truth wrote or dictated, but it does seem clear that she orchestrated the publication of at least several of those editions and did public performances in relation to them. Thinking beyond the author is not a new strategy, but drawing out the implications of that rethinking in the specific contexts of nineteenth-

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<sup>23</sup> See Silverman for another take on this intimacy in *Bodies and Books*, where she discusses it in terms of “fantasies of communion.”

century reform sheds new light on the relationship between speech acts and political acts, acts of inscription and acts of publication, and the very matters of body and spirit that have been some of the central concerns of U.S. literature, even as they have often eluded media histories.

In this dissertation I also bring together the concerns of African American literary studies and the concerns of book history. Until recently, this has not been a common intersection, but lately and in a number of essays the question of what book history could offer to African American literary studies has been asked in provocative ways, as has the question of what African American literary studies could offer to book history. Leon Jackson's 2010 state-of-the-field essay in *Book History*, "The Talking Book and the Talking Book Historian," is one example of the attention that has been called to this gap, but several studies in recent years have begun the work that remains to be done in the space between these two fields.<sup>24</sup>

I look at problems of authorship and ownership at a time when self-ownership was a thing some authors experienced only with great effort or as a result of the Civil War. The act of speaking in nineteenth-century America could be a powerful, transformative, political act, bound up with acts of reading, listening, writing, and revision. Speaking was also, by mid-century, a heavily mediated act: reporters created

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<sup>24</sup> See Cohen and Stein's collection, as well as work by Dinius, Goddu, and Jackson. The American Antiquarian Society's recent summer seminar, "African American Print Culture," is another response to this gap: see however P. Gabrielle Foreman's critique of this seminar and the Cohen and Stein collection in *Legacy*. As Jackson acknowledges, important book historical work has been done in the field of African American literature. Peterson, Gardner, Foster, Starling, Andrews, and Ernest are all examples. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. has done perhaps the most extensive work on recovery and re-publication of African American texts, and has also introduced an important theoretical framework for thinking about the ways that African practices influenced African American creative production and discourse in *The Signifying Monkey*. For objections to and shortcomings of Gates's work, see Jackson.

“verbatim” reports using shorthand, speakers knew that they were being recorded, and shaped their discourse accordingly; publishers and editors solicited and revised manuscripts, and readers read and re-read speech reports and essay adaptations in pamphlets and newspapers. Producing print or speech may not always have been a collaborative project, but it was necessarily a cooperative one, involving complex networks of people, industries, economies, and media. It also depended on changing visions of the relationship between a text and a “real” story or history. Each of my chapters focuses on the interplay between speech and print in relation to a specific technology, historical figure, or reform movement; each deals with a different structure of authenticity generated out of that interplay; and each concludes with a reflection on the critical implications of these media and revision histories.

In my first chapter, I argue that phonographic or verbatim reports of abolitionist speeches and conventions based claims to accuracy on new stenographic techniques that could produce a “complete” representation of an event in print. Stenographers often appeared in the bylines of such reports, which were published both as pamphlets and in newspapers like the *Liberator*, but their effectiveness was premised on an ability to be transparent, and speech segments were staged as exact replicas of the words of the orator, whose authority also was constructed in relation to parenthetical descriptions of unruly audience response. A contentious abolitionist public sphere was created, populated, and disseminated through the records of these speeches and conventions. Still, stenography was an interpretive process, and composition brought together listening practices, translation from phonetic languages into longhand, and other forms of revision before the

final printed report of such events appeared. In print, abolitionist orators were framed as forceful, rational political actors. In transcription, the collaborative and multiply-mediated seams of the historical record become visible. This structure of representation affected the way orators like Frederick Douglass conceptualized speeches and authorship and the control he exerted over his words, and I conclude with a meditation on Douglass's relation to the press and the transcriptions of his speeches on the anti-slavery lecture circuit.

My second chapter turns from the language of accuracy in the transcriptions of abolitionist meetings to the language of authenticity in anti-slavery narratives. In it I take up the fictional martyrdom of Josiah Henson. My reading of the revisions of Henson's narrative from 1849 to 1891 in conjunction with the records of his public performances yields a complex view of both Henson and the nineteenth-century marketplaces that he navigated. This chapter surveys how Henson was interpreted within the orbit of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but my larger concern is with Henson's story as it develops over time, through records of speeches, at a World's Fair exhibition, and in the uncanniness of his resurrections of Uncle Tom. Public "Tom" speeches construct Henson, sometimes despite his own protests, as the paradoxically living embodiment of the fictional martyr. Tracing Henson's story from its initial transcription, through wildly popular London performances and editions late in the century, into a twentieth-century revisionist adaptation by Ishmael Reed, I argue that "authenticity" for Henson was a moving target increasingly tied to the desires of transatlantic publics for the materialization of a fictional character. Still, Henson and others leveraged and redefined authenticity at

different times for purposes ranging from funding for the community of fugitives he developed in Canada to his own financial support in later years.

After Henson died, his British editor John Lobb (who had become a spiritualist) published a book called *Talks with the Dead*, in which he claimed that both Henson and Stowe had returned as spirits to speak through human mediums. Revelations like Lobb's, part of a widespread resurrection of literary and revolutionary spirits in the nineteenth century, complicated the mechanics of both authorship and authenticity. My third chapter looks at American spiritualist publications, including *Twelve Messages from the Spirit John Quincy Adams*, dictated through medium Joseph Stiles (1859), and *Twelve Discourses on Government*, dictated by the spirit of Thomas Jefferson through medium John Murray Spear (1853). Routed through the body of the human medium and the body of the printed text, these accounts revised the words and thoughts of major national figures, constructing visions of national time collapsed at the intersection between spiritual and material worlds. Print was made to perform and verify this intersection. I argue that spiritualists manipulated bibliographical codes to conjure spirit-authors in print, from frontispieces to facsimiles of signatures and spirit writing. Putting pressure on the capacity of print to capture and represent even as they stretched this capacity, spiritualists resisted the urge to render print as a disembodied, spiritless process. Editors, publishers, and mediums worked to reroute history through revision in a radical invocation of authorship.

Literary criticism and mythmaking are the primary concerns of my final chapter, which turns to two icons of American literary history: Walt Whitman and Sojourner



Truth. In this chapter I argue that critics' efforts to avoid the myths promoted by these figures and their associates in the nineteenth century—myths collaboratively composed, mutually reinforced in speech and print, and handed down through generations—have only led to new, less visible forms of mythmaking. If Truth's age and Whitman's progeny have been shown to be fictions, so also are the less disputed and longer-lasting myths of Truth's inability to read the representations of her speeches in print and Whitman's lifelong emphasis on print and poetry. I offer alternative readings, drawing on a report of Truth's response to the records of her songs and speeches delivered during an Equal Rights Convention in 1867 to show that Truth prioritized her role as a poet, monitored the reports of her speeches and songs, and demonstrated a deep interest in literary form and the way her public performances were represented in print. In turn, Whitman in his notes on oratory and his Lincoln lectures imagined and enacted an alternate aural publication or "recitation" history for his poetry. The responses of both of these figures to their own representations suggest that print was neither independent nor self-evident in the nineteenth century, but always imagined in relation to speech and presence and as subject to question and interpretation, a point with lasting implications for what counts as evidence for literary critics today.

If the absence of William Wells Brown's *Experience* turns us from reading printed words to imagining presence and performance, relocating our experience of the text to its mediated representation by members of the audiences who witnessed Brown's enactment of it, it also serves as a reminder that even the creative productions for which we do have printed or handwritten witnesses are products of collaboration, mediation,

and revision. Thinking of authorship in this way reveals structures of agency concealed by romantic visions of the speaker or the author. Conceptualizing print and speech as overlapping and mutually informing frames of reference in nineteenth-century America positions us to more fully contextualize both the documents we read and our own reading practices. The cultures of revision at work in the nineteenth century reflected and produced a history of relationships between media and individuals that informed visions of authenticity and collectivity then and now.

Our ability to interpret Brown's motives in the complexity of his historical situation is tenuous, at best, but *The Escape* and *Experience* suggest the need to look beyond print, as well as the need to look *at* print differently. In the preface to the printed version of *The Escape*, Brown de-privileges his readers, writing that "This play was written for my own amusement, and not with the remotest thought that it would ever be seen by the public eye" (3). The print medium may have functioned as a mode of preservation, collective identification, and resistance in the nineteenth century, but Brown's dismissal of his reading audience, so different from the rhetoric of many anti-slavery texts and from the kinds of republican identification that have grounded studies of the agency and the imagination of print in the U.S., reminds us that many nineteenth-century figures regarded inscription with a combination of optimism and skepticism.

## Chapter 1. Instruments of Record: Phonography and Anti-Slavery Discourse

In the February 1, 1850, issue of *The North Star*, Frederick Douglass published a note of apology in response to a request by the *Lawrence Sentinel* for the text of a speech he had made at a meeting of the Essex County Anti-slavery Society. Because he had spoken without notes, Douglass states in the apology, “any attempt at an accurate report, on my part, would be a failure.” The request itself was not unusual. Newspapers had been printing the text of speeches made by anti-slavery orators since long before the fledgling *Liberator* printed Maria Stewart’s address to the Afric-American Female Intelligence Society in 1832. What is strange about this note is Douglass’s resistance, or his publicly stated unwillingness to submit an inaccurate record of his own speech. In a movement whose printed media had by 1850 become saturated with speech extracts, the opportunity for publicity represented by such an appeal seems an odd occasion for Douglass to pass up.

One way to think about this refusal might be to consider it in light of conceptions of the rhetoric of popular assembly. In his influential eighteenth-century lectures, Hugh Blair had said of address in popular courts that “arguments must be suited to the course which the debate takes” (256). He argued that speeches made in public places “want the native air; the appearance of being suggested by the business that is going on,” and that over-preparation or studied eloquence in such circumstances would hinder an orator’s ability to forge a connection with the audience. When comparing Douglass’s early speeches to those he made in the 1850s and after the Civil War, abolitionists tended to be

more critical of the latter, in which he increasingly spoke at more formal events and relied on speeches written in advance and read for the occasion. Many of his early antebellum speeches, on the contrary, were extemporaneous, made without notes, and delivered loosely and dynamically in the form of a dialogue with other speakers, the audience, or recent occurrences (Blassingame lxvi).<sup>25</sup>

In early American congressional debates, speeches prepared ahead of time and read to audiences generally met with disapproval. “As late as 1832,” journalism historian Thomas Leonard writes, “a senator’s charge that a colleague had read a speech in the chamber was taken as an insult requiring an elaborate defense. In the early republic political debate in each house was staged as an oral performance, not an exchange of texts” (72). When, by the middle of the nineteenth century, written documents were used more frequently in congressional settings, some argued that they flattened the space for political debate. Leonard reports that Benjamin Poore, a Washington correspondent in the 1850s, “hated the prepared speech that had become the mechanism for discussing the fate of the Union. Reporters, he believed, lost an important role in the republic when political leaders could simply issue addresses to their constituents” (84).<sup>26</sup> The role of the reporter is at the center of Poore’s objection, and in this case the reporter stands for the distinction

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<sup>25</sup> Douglass’s famous “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July” is one indication of this shift: Douglass spent several weeks preparing this address ahead of time, and the speech was published in multiple versions after the actual delivery on July 5, 1852. According to Blassingame, when confronted by audiences who responded negatively to his prepared speeches, Douglass would sometimes begin to speak extemporaneously instead, and would occasionally memorize written speeches. By the end of the Civil War, he made common use of this pattern of combining reading with extemporaneous speaking, particularly in speeches he delivered multiple times (lxiii-lxvii).

<sup>26</sup> For a discussion of the elocutionary changes that accompanied the “new rhetoric” coming into vogue during the revolutionary period that privileged “natural” expression in oratorical practice over more formal modes of eloquence, see Fliegelman, 28-35.

between a pre-prepared and single-authored written script and a more dynamic and responsive mode of address that would feature both reporter and audience as constitutive components.

As this debate shows, the relationship between speech and writing informed observers' and participants' interpretations of public discourse in relation to the expectations of democracy and the new nation in the early part of the nineteenth century. In this chapter I explore the transformation between the spoken and the printed address, capturing the speech in motion and considering the process of its transcription at one of the most contentious periods in American history. Like the distinction between prepared and extemporaneous speeches, "fixity" and flexibility in relation to speech records helped to conjure broader frameworks of collective identification. Phonographic or verbatim reports, in claiming to replicate extemporaneous speeches, offered a version of the interactions that occurred in public settings, acting as both product and production of particularly responsive oratory. Shorthand, or the "technology" of record as it developed in the mid-nineteenth century, helped to create a dialogic, inclusive, deliberative image of abolitionist speech, in particular, establishing a discursive space for identification for both attending and reading audiences.<sup>27</sup> Grounded in an appeal to accuracy, full-text reproductions of conventions and speeches were at once a reflection and a performance of publicness.

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<sup>27</sup> Phonography as stenography should not be confused with the later invention of the phonograph. See Gitelman, *Scripts*, for more on the relationship between these two separate inventions.

Phonography, a type of stenography that became popular in the nineteenth century, involved the rapid writing down of the sounds of a speech using a phonetic alphabet. The development of the technique and its introduction to the U.S. were part of a broader effort to create a more direct correspondence between sound and sign that formed the basis for a widespread movement advocating spelling and printing reform. Phonography was not the only method of speech recording used by abolitionists, but a focused consideration of this technology in the context of the anti-slavery movement offers a useful place to begin thinking about the relationship between media, authorship, and authenticity. Phonography was touted as the most accurate stenographic technique of the time by affiliates ranging from linguists to congressional reporters. Despite this consensus, there is evidence that reporters acted with creative license in the process, and the imprint of the observer is often evident in the text of the speeches. Persisting discrepancies combine with the process of selection to render the act of the reporter a constitutive component of the record. Reformers promoted phonographic records as accurate, objective, transparent representations, a promotion that obscured the mediation that structured such records in order to offer authoritative representations of speakers, audiences, and events. One example of the impact this structure had on how authorship was imagined in the nineteenth century is visible in the speech and writings of Frederick Douglass, who was well aware of the mediated process by which the speech was committed to paper and of the difference between printed speech and event, and who emphasized this distinction in his reprinting of speeches in the *North Star* and *Frederick Douglass' Paper*.

I begin this chapter with a discussion of the rhetoric of accuracy with which phonography was promoted in order to show that the phonographic speech record and the full-text publication of excerpts from convention proceedings in anti-slavery newspapers fit into broader abolitionist rhetorical tactics. Full-text records performed oratory in a way that represented abolitionists in terms of honesty, truth, and full disclosure (an image that offered an alternative to proslavery designations of “fanaticism”), while simultaneously enabling the circulation in print of the sounds of an abolitionist event. Claims to formal accuracy acted as a verification apparatus underwriting the depictions offered in printed abolitionist speeches. Truth assertions joined frequent accusations of misrepresentation by the proslavery press in the pages of anti-slavery papers, and this mode of self-representation connected to images of abolitionists as parties engaged in rational and sober argumentation, while opponents were prone to mask a disrespect for free speech with noise, disregard for law, and general disorderly conduct. The rhetorical force of these records (their self-authorizing function) depended on assertions of accuracy and objectivity, as well as the aural and embodied public presence that they implied.

Although the phonographic reporting technique was not the first used to record speeches, the fact that abolitionists increasingly relied on phonographic reporters to create a written record of proceedings for official meetings meant that a large number of anti-slavery speeches were recorded using this method. These records regularly depicted audience responses, included in the text in parentheses or brackets. They also conveyed the dynamism of speakers who responded to audiences and to other speeches. This affected the terms of representation of speech, in that the authority of the single orator

gave way to a dialogue, or the representation of an event that consisted of interactions between orators and audiences. This was true of earlier reports of legislative and other types of gatherings, and reports of multiple speakers and audience responses certainly extended to non-abolitionist contexts. But the contention at anti-slavery meetings taxed the capacity of reportorial representation, and verbatim reporting was particularly effective in conveying both this contention and the ways that abolitionist orators responded to the specific circumstances of their performances. Audience responses also presented reading audiences with evidence of the sounds of the crowds in attendance at abolitionist meetings.

In this chapter, I go on to argue that abolitionists used the technologies of record available to them in order to develop a mode of publicity that combined the eventfulness and physical presence of speech with the mechanical reproduction and circulation (both imagined and actual) of print. Robert Fanuzzi has argued that abolitionists, hearkening back to earlier models of rational argumentation, structured their discourse in the form of an abolitionist public sphere, particularly in the representation of multiple points of view on the pages of major anti-slavery newspapers like the *Liberator*. I suggest that implicated in this representation of multiple points of view were the actual inscriptive practices used to generate the records of many anti-slavery conventions and speeches. Phonography, by facilitating a “true,” complete representation of speech, fit into and enabled a rhetoric of accuracy, while creating the printed space for abolitionists to voice their concerns to a broader audience. If, for Jürgen Habermas, the mode of political confrontation characteristic of the public sphere was “people’s public use of their



reason,” then, for abolitionists, in the case of phonographic reporting, this mode corresponded with another reason- and objectivity-evoking *form*: that of the verbatim record (27). This form and the appeals to accuracy it invoked represent one form authenticity took in relation to the anti-slavery movement. Phonographic reports shifted the emphasis from speaker to event, but they also situated the reporter as an important factor in the transformation of speech to print. Looking at the distributed forms of authorship at work in phonographic reports suggests the importance of hearing and mishearing, sound and presence, to reporters’ representations of speech in print.

#### **THE PHONOGRAPHIC IMAGINATION**

Phonography first crossed paths with the U.S. anti-slavery movement in spring 1843, when abolitionist Stephen Pearl Andrews traveled to England on a mission to convince representatives to purchase Texas from Mexico, under the condition that they would invest enough money to free all slaves in the state. Although his mission was unsuccessful in this respect, Andrews did not return to the United States empty-handed: his bag was packed with a series of books written by Isaac Pitman, an English linguist who had invented a phonetic language in an effort to improve and simplify what he saw as the labyrinthine and antiquated constructions of the English language. The phonetic alphabet that phonography relied on made no use of roman characters. Rather, it was a system based on the abbreviated transcription of spoken forms, making it (in theory) capable of representing any language exactly as it sounded. Captivated by his reading of Pitman’s manuals, and forced to flee from his home in Texas as a result of the England

fiasco, Andrews relocated to Boston and opened an institute of phonography with a partner named Augustus Boyle.<sup>28</sup> The two did all they could to advertise the new system, conducting classes, staging lectures, and publishing instruction manuals and advertisements in local newspapers.

Advocates of phonography lauded its speed and simplicity, as well as its grounding in precepts of rationality and mathematical precision. The technique was frequently evaluated in terms of other technological revolutions of the time. In an 1845 speech at a “phonographic soiree” held in England that was republished in the *Liberator*, J. Pitman proclaimed of phonography: “This is in keeping with the age in which we live. This is befitting the nineteenth century. The printing press abolished the tedious process of writing books; the pack horse and stage wagon have been superseded by railways; and why should we not have a true and expeditious mode of writing?” (4)

In 1845, William Lloyd Garrison cited a reference to phonography as “the daguerreotype of literature,” and in 1846 Morris Dwight sent a letter praising phonography to the *Liberator*, noting that “it is the grand daguerreotype art for the world to fix their thoughts upon paper in their exact original likeness” (“Phonography”). As Lorman Ratner and Dwight Teeter point out, the expansion of American newspapers in the nineteenth century coincided with the mid-century impact of technological development: “By 1850 the three characteristics of modern mass media were in place and accelerating: availability of steam-driven presses for reproduction, growing railroad networks for distribution, and rapid development of near-instantaneous communication

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<sup>28</sup> See Stern’s biography of Andrews for more detail about his plan for the liberation of slaves in Texas.

via telegraph lines” (8). Coming into popularity in conjunction with these other developments, phonography boasted the capacity to generate a speech record whose consistency matched the result of technological innovations in the industry more broadly.

Phonography was not the first kind of stenography in America, nor was it the first effort at verbatim reporting. Audience response had long been represented parenthetically in sermons, speeches, and meetings of various kinds. Congressional reporters, using other stenographic methods, had been creating full-text descriptions of legislative proceedings for years, enabling Washington papers like the *National Intelligencer* and the *Congressional Globe* to publish extensive records of debates in Congress.<sup>29</sup> What phonography did do, however, was catch on. The Lincoln-Douglas debates were recorded by phonographic reporters, and by mid-century, phonography had become the method most commonly used to obtain legislative record. An advertisement for a upcoming publication titled “Report of the Treason Cases,” published in the *National Era* in 1851, notes that the accounts are by “the sworn phonographic reporters appointed by the Government especially for these cases,” and that “the reporters being experienced phonographers, the public may rest assured that every word uttered by court, counsel, or witnesses, will be faithfully and accurately reported.” An August 1857 article in *Godey’s Lady’s Book and Magazine* states that “This system, although so recently discovered, is

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<sup>29</sup> See Frankel and Leonard for a history of government reports and publishing, and the evolving role of reporters in political settings in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America, respectively. Frankel notes that in 1848, the Senate voted to hire reporters to take down debates in phonetic shorthand. See also Kreilkamp, who discusses Charles Dickens’s early career as a stenographer using the Gurney method in both (Kreilkamp’s) “Charles Dickens” and the adaptation of that essay in *Voice and the Victorian Storyteller*, 69-88.

now used almost exclusively for securing verbatim reports of the debates in the American Congress and the British Houses of Parliament” (“Phonography”).

The importation of phonography enabled reports to move from synopses of events to consistent, accurate, full-text replications of extemporaneous speech. Lisa Gitelman notes that “it was not until the arrival of verbatim reporting that text safely *equaled*, rather than ‘registered’ or ‘sketched,’ the aural experiences of debates and proceedings” (43). This was particularly relevant in the case of anti-slavery publications, which increasingly gave front-page space to speeches and convention proceedings, even extending particularly long speech records over multiple issues.

A key characteristic of phonography, according to both reviewers and promoters, was its ability to promote a more direct correspondence between sound and sign. Both written and printed notation, as a result of the new process, could imitate the speed and structure of the spoken word almost exactly. Supporters also described it as preferable to longhand because it avoided issues of ambiguity regarding pronunciation and idiosyncratic alphabetical combinations. Pitman, in a published defense of his new system, argued that “The English language is yet unwritten, and never can be written except on the Phonetic principle” (“A Letter” 4). With his new phonetic language, scientific principles could be adapted for the purposes of semiotic representation, and a new system of signs was born.

Both Pitman and Andrews, in his advertisements for phonography in the U.S., presented the language as “most true,” or as representation that could correspond directly (with greatest fidelity) to the sounds of the English language. Garrison, in his first

extended consideration of the system in 1845, noted the growing popularity of phonography, as well as the corresponding use of Phonotypy, or “the art of representing spoken sounds by printed characters or types” (“Phonography”). Garrison went on to cite the claim that, with the adoption of these new arts, “all our words will be words of truth.”<sup>30</sup> Truth, in this context, referred to the fidelity of the written language to the spoken word, but it also enabled the phonographic record to correspond with and support other truth claims made by abolitionists about the verifiable nature of their representations.

Andrews, however, had another vision for phonography, one consistent with his abolitionist leanings: he wanted to use the new language to quickly teach illiterate African Americans to read.<sup>31</sup> Phonography was early associated with reform, in both England and the U.S.<sup>32</sup> The *Emancipator* was the first anti-slavery publication and one of the first publications in the U.S. more broadly to pick up on phonography in 1844, when it published a brief article describing the method. The article alluded to an experiment conducted by Andrews, in which the proof he produced phonographically “showed not a

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<sup>30</sup> Garrison wrote that Phonotypy “will save at least one-fifth of the number of types now required” (“Phonography”). Though this article on phonography, which appeared in the *Liberator*, is not signed, Garrison is certainly the author, as the biographical information offered in the article is consistent with Garrison’s visits to England in 1833 and 1840. The quote that “all our words will be words of truth” appears to be from a speech by Joseph Pitman at a Nottingham Phonetic Festival, published in proceedings as a supplement to the *Phonotypic Journal* in 1843. See “Report of the Proceedings,” 90.

<sup>31</sup> Andrews staged a demonstration of this in March 1846, in which he taught four African American adults “totally ignorant of the rudiments of written language” to read phonographic characters, and had them demonstrate their skills in a public test. See Stern, 53-64.

<sup>32</sup> For a discussion of the rhetoric of reform that developed around phonography in an English context, see Kreilkamp, *Voice*, esp. 72-76.

single variation from the copy.”<sup>33</sup> By March 1845, the *Emancipator* noted that phonography was gaining some attention in the mainstream Boston press, which it found to be “gratifying to us, as we were, we believe, among the first to call attention to this wonderful facilitator of the business of writing and to recommend it to the American public” (“Phonography”). Also in 1845, Andrews found himself showing off the new system to Garrison for the first time. Like Andrews, Garrison supported the new phonetic language with an eye to its capacity for human rights work. In an 1845 article praising phonography as a step towards language reform more broadly, and the development of a universal language, Garrison noted that “it seems to me indissolubly connected with the cause of universal philanthropy and reform” (“Phonography”). In July of that year, Garrison wrote a letter to S. J. May, calling phonography “perhaps next in importance to the discovery of printing in the fifteenth century” (W. P. Garrison 148).

It would not, however, as Garrison’s biographers recognized, be phonography’s linguistic potential that proved to be most helpful to the abolition movement, nor Andrews’s vision of its transformative effect on literacy. Rather, phonography’s utility—and, arguably, the quality that made a more lasting impression than its claim to orthographic fame—would come in the form of an adaptation of Pitman’s shorthand for the purposes of verbatim reporting. Garrison also recognized this potential early on, writing in his 1845 article that “a familiar acquaintance with it, as with the present mode

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<sup>33</sup> Aside from the initial news about “a new discovery” in England (in the *Daily National Intelligencer*, 1842) and notations about classes offered by Andrews, the only other reference to phonography in America around this time was a highly skeptical article published in the New York *Herald*, which called phonography a “farce” and claimed that it was not appreciably different from previous stenographic methods. By 1845, the *Herald* grudgingly admitted that there was “quite a furor” on the subject; an article published later in the year referred to Andrews’s classes as a “great success.”

of writing, will enable a person to report even a rapid public speaker verbatim.” His biographers point out that, for abolitionists, “The official report soon became a necessary self-defence against systematic caricature or neglect on the part of a hostile press” (W. P. Garrison 148).

In his exploration of abolitionist tactics, Fanuzzi argues that a joint appeal to objective truth and standards of rationality that privilege discussion and the representation of multiple points of view reflected the efforts of abolitionists to “resurrect a public identity from another era,” or to “create a deliberately anachronistic public sphere” whose precepts imitated those of a more republican era (xv). It was also, however, as Jeannine DeLombard points out, a way to construct an “adversarial model” that put slaveholders on the defensive and engaged a national obsession with legal spectatorship (3). Assertions of authority of the document, speech, narrative, or testimony were often directly correlated to its capacity for corroboration, or its reliance on verifiable historical or statistical fact. A series of truth claims, including vouchers citing “the authority of SLAVEHOLDERS,” began Theodore Dwight Weld’s incorporation of the “testimony of a thousand witnesses” into his 1839 publication of *American Slavery As It Is* (3). In 1853, Harriet Beecher Stowe, reacting to accusations of inaccuracy made about her bestselling novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, published an extensive *Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, which included an assortment of facts intended to establish the veracity of her popular sentimental narrative.<sup>34</sup> Phonography, in many ways, participated in a general abolitionist effort to construct a public image that differed from proslavery

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<sup>34</sup>See also Fabian’s *The Unvarnished Truth*.

representations by advocating rational argumentation and demonstrating a concern with accuracy. In an antebellum climate rife with misrepresentations, personal attacks, accusations, and counter-accusations, the ability to invoke a rhetoric of accuracy, particularly one that could be supported by historical precedent and the materiality of textual documentation, had obvious advantages.

Abolitionist editors responded to criticism increasingly by casting theirs as more accurate than other representations. Samuel Cornish and John Russwurm began the publication of *Freedom's Journal* in 1827 with the note that "From the press and the pulpit we have suffered much by being incorrectly represented," a fact that the publication of the first black-owned and operated newspaper would attempt to rectify ("To Our Patrons"). In the first issue of the *Liberator* in January of 1831, Garrison devoted the bulk of the second page to a report of his libel trial in Baltimore, which he published with a note that his defense would appear in a subsequent issue, and that the official trial record was "as rich in embellishments as the ingenuity of a servile reporter could make it" ("Baltimore Trial" 1). Garrison's reliance on the "report" of his trial reflects his awareness of the utility of an "official" account of public events to recount to a wider audience the happenings (and, in this case, inequities) of a single occasion. His dismissal of the accuracy of the account implies a gap between representation and reality that phonography would represent itself as mitigating almost fifteen years later. The mid-century introduction of phonography to the U.S. would offer an opportunity to advance both this rhetoric of accuracy and the space for representation. The connection of the practice with the word "verbatim" and claims to full and complete representation enabled



abolitionist publishers like Garrison to capitalize on the claim of fair, accurate, and complete records. In an 1854 letter to Sydney Howard Gay, Garrison notes the multifaceted utility of a full speech record:

I think our wisest and best expenditure is in having a pretty full report of the proceedings at our great anniversaries, as they are *the* occasions which attract the attention of the whole country; and especially in view of the disposition of the New York press to caricature and misrepresent us most foully, or, if not unfriendly, to pass us by in the mass without particular notice. (*Letters* 297)

Hiring phonographic reporters would enable the reproduction of events in print both as a way of ensuring accurate representation, and as a method of dissemination. Circulation had the potential to recreate perpetually the conditions of publicity of the original events themselves.

By 1853, a number of anti-slavery meetings were phonographically recorded by various people, in particular a Dr. James W. Stone, president of the American Phonographic Society, which was started by Andrews in 1845 and boasted Garrison as an officer. Another printer-recorder who captured conventions for the Anti-slavery Society was J.M.W. (Winchell) Yerrinton, son of James Brown Yerrinton, the printer of the *Liberator*. In a letter written to Winchell a month after the publication of the last issue of the *Liberator*, Garrison credited the phonographer with a key role in the movement:

The best phonographic reporter in this country, you have held an important relation to those grand reformatory changes which have taken place within the last quarter of a century. But for your marvellous skill, where would have been the eloquent speeches of Phillips and others but in the dim remembrance of those who listened to them? (Garrison and Garrison 4:169)

In a letter published in *The Critic* after Yerrinton's death in 1893, Charles Wingate also wrote that "Had it not been for Mr. Yerrinton's skilled pencil, the silvery speeches of

Wendell Phillips might never have been preserved” (309). The distinction between speaker and reporter is carefully maintained in these comments, which grant Yerrinton a major role in the “grand reformatory changes” and the history of the anti-slavery movement.

### **ABOLITION IN THE LANGUAGE OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE**

Phonographic reporters, using the method described in Pitman’s guide, were advised to record the words of the orator as completely and accurately as possible, but they were also instructed to include “signs of approbation; dissent, etc., interjected by the audience, or descriptive of their feelings” (*The Phonographic Reporter* 26). Such audience responses were to be enclosed in parentheses, and described in terms of kind. Reporters were instructed to include such expressions as “loud and continued applause,” “cheers,” “laughter,” “hisses,” “uproar,” and so forth. Although not all phonographic reporters in America included audience response, both Yerrinton (reporting regularly on behalf of the *Liberator*) and Stone did use this technique. As a result, the “grand daguerreotype art” of speech record captured at length the sounds of both abolitionist orators and the audiences in attendance, in whose responses the drama of the debate over slavery was often enacted.

The record of audience response shows that the delivery of speeches was not the act of an isolated speaker. Rather, the speeches were public acts, both in the sense that they were delivered in a public setting and to a particular audience, and in the fact that the audience participated in the delivery, making through alternate expressions of

approbation and dissent their impression on the text of the speech itself. The publicness represented in these records, then, is distinctively dialogic. Like a variety of other antebellum American reform movements, abolitionists advertised their conventions using a “language of publics,” staged them in a variety of public spaces, and built in the recording mechanisms for both the full representation of contention (phonographic reports included even irrational audience response) and the broadening of access to public discourse that Mary Ryan describes (conventions were open to the public, and those unable to attend could read a print rendition in the next week’s paper) (268). This representation and manipulation of publicness cultivated a conception of public discourse as open to any potential speaker or even noise-maker, a conception that would be both preserved and perpetually recreated through the mechanism of print.

A partial account of the 1850 New England Anti-slavery Convention, published as a phonographic report by Dr. Stone in the June 28 issue of the *Liberator*, exemplifies this process. When abolitionist Parker Pillsbury took the platform after Garrison’s speech at Faneuil Hall, he faced a large and unruly public. The transcription of Pillsbury’s speech registers the impact of audience interjections:

I suppose most of those here are in favor of order. We shall determine whether Boston is in the hands of the mob or not. I am very glad we are having it demonstrated, whether Boston contains a law-abiding people. [‘Hurrah.’] It has been boasted, in behalf of Boston, that a mob could not rule here...Is this what we call a law-abiding people, and is this an exhibition of obedience to law? [Laughter.] (Stone 1)

Here Pillsbury, drawing on the tumult, creates an opposition. “Order” is associated with “law-abiding people,” which group is set in clear distinction to “the mob.” In its textual

form, this characterization is both punctuated and reinforced by the reporter's representation of the public:

I was only asking the audience, is this the liberty of speech for which those great men fought and fell? ["No!"] If Washington and Warren could face Great Britain, with its twenty millions, is Boston to be ruled in this manner? ["No!" "Yes!"] If the patriots and heroes of that day could bid defiance to the British lion, and hold him at bay, have we so lost their spirit that a meeting in Faneuil Hall cannot quietly be held?

The Mob—"You insult our Senators."

Two factions, expressing diametrically opposed sentiments ("Yes!" and "No!"), become clearly visible in the parenthetical response to Pillsbury's question. By making the subject of the address liberty of speech, Pillsbury is able both to connect the occasion to Revolutionary rhetoric and to demonstrate the departure of the current audience from the image of "patriots and heroes" whose "spirit" is compromised by a belligerent, mob-like public. The account generated by the reporter conforms to Pillsbury's initial depiction: the opposing audience members are given their own textual space and take on a definite character as "The Mob." The reader is left to connect the disturbance caused by the dissenting "mob" with opposition to law and order.

This opposition becomes more apparent as Pillsbury attempts to continue by appealing to actual police presence, in the face of more frequent and disruptive interjections:

I was only telling you, ["Three cheers for Webster!"] that if the prominent— ["Three more—Three cheers for the Constitution."] I wish one of those officers of the police might come near enough, that he might hear what I say, if nobody else does. [Laughter.] [An officer advanced to the platform.] I was saying simply this; that when I came in to-night, and witnessed this cloud of human faces, every eye almost fixed in this direction; when I saw every part of this spacious hall crowded

to its utmost capacity, I was reminded of the words uttered at the consecration of the Bunker Hill Monument—[Mirth—“Three cheers for Old Zack”]—And I thought, this mighty gathering is itself the orator of the evening.

Pillsbury’s point is apt. As a result of its physical and aural presence, performed textually as parenthetical interjections, the audience becomes an integral part of the speech—both for the evening, and for the evening as it will be re-encountered in the record. This is not a single, authoritative orator preaching to a passive audience. Instead, the text reflects the speech-turned-dialogue, registering and mobilizing the impact of the various parts of the audience. Pillsbury concludes by letting the audience carry the point home:

If violence can overwhelm us, we will consent to be overwhelmed. But I appeal to the sober men around me, if argument is not better. [Uproar.] Is this a meeting where free speech is allowed? [“No.” “Yes.”] Is this the place where it cannot be had? Is this your confession of that? [Hurrahs.] Then I am content. (2)

Here, Pillsbury cements the opposition he constructed at the beginning of his speech: the crowd around him is divided into “sober men” (a group consistent with law, order, and rational argumentation), and the rambunctious crowd that would cause the orator to be “overwhelmed” by violence. Violence is opposed to sobriety, mob to audience, and noise to argument. Confronted with a pairing of terms that leaves little question about which faction of the listening public constitutes the more reasonable side, the reader is left both to imagine the speech event, including the presence of the audience, and to identify with one side or another. The speech record represents the variety of parties present at the meeting, giving textual space to both assenting and dissenting points of view.

But this very representation enables the validation of Pillsbury’s points by what appears to be an external authority of objective representation; without the parenthetical

action surrounding the platform and audience response, Pillsbury's observations would lack much of the resonance they gain as a result of the interjections of the crowd. The apparent democratization of the record, in that it subjects the authority of the orator to the contingencies of the event, could be mobilized as proof of both the abolitionists' willingness to represent dispute and the correlation of their observations with the apparent objectivity of the record itself. If authority is displaced from the orator by the representation of multiple parties, it is retained by the printed report itself. The document—as verbatim record—contains its own built-in verification apparatus.

Anti-slavery groups had been some of the first to encourage extensive coverage of political debate. In the case of the Missouri Compromise of 1819-20, which he describes as corresponding to a major step toward full publication of congressional debate, Leonard notes that “Historians have been impressed by the amount of coverage in local papers and the work of the new anti-slavery organizations to further popularize the arguments” (75). In anti-slavery papers, adjacent to the speech records, editors often included a note justifying their decision to publish full text reports with an appeal to the reader's interest. In the case of an 1848 State Convention, published in the *Emancipator*, for instance, the editor notes that “we give below a few of the speeches delivered at the great Convention, which we take from the Republican, as reported, phonographically by Dr. Stone, and which will be read with interest by all” (“Speeches”). An 1851 *Liberator* article notes that it provides only a summary of events that occurred at an anti-slavery convention, and refers the reader to a “full phonographic report,” soon to be published, “which will supersede all other reports” (“Annual Meeting”).

Technologies of inscription, Gitelman argues, existed both as commentary on contemporary models of reading and writing, and as forces that worked to redefine reader and writer. Hailed as the catalyst for “reading and printing reform” or a “reading and writing revolution,” phonography doubled as technological innovation and cultural lens, capturing more than just the sounds of nineteenth-century society. Did an increased demand for verbatim records, whether they represented congressional proceedings, anti-slavery conventions, or sermons, signal a change in the American public’s mode of perception? Certainly, as scholars have noted, there was an increase in literacy in the nineteenth century.<sup>35</sup> Observer James Ford Rhodes claimed that in 1854, *New York Weekly Tribune* readers, at least, were “of the thorough kind, reading all the news, all the printed speeches and addresses, and all the editorials, and pondering as they read” (Ratner and Teeter 12). This pondering reader, presented with an “official” report of proceedings, was perhaps conditioned in ways that would promote a studied attention to the full text of a speech or convention. It seems that anti-slavery newspapers assumed the interest of readers in such publications: 41 out of the 52 issues of the *Liberator* published in 1850 included extracts from speeches or debates on the front page. Full-text phonographic reports of the speeches delivered at the New England Anti-slavery Convention that year were spread out over the front pages of twelve issues. The presumption of a critical reading public likely to be interested in full descriptions of such proceedings enabled abolitionists to engage in both debate and rational argumentation

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<sup>35</sup> See Schudson, pp. 151-152. For a discussion of the measurement of literacy in nineteenth-century America, see Casper, pp. 179-180.

with the goal of successfully convincing readers to form opinions against slavery. But anti-slavery activists could not afford for this public to remain fictional. In order to effect the abolition of slavery, they had to expect that the space they created for the participation of a critical public would be filled by an actual, persuadable public, whose opinion would translate to action.

As Schudson points out in his refutation of romantic visions of the nineteenth-century (rational, critical) public sphere, inferences about the actual commitment of readers can be problematic.<sup>36</sup> Although abolitionist speakers invoked accuracy and evidence in a way that demonstrated that they, at least, were interested in cultivating a critical response on the part of the reading public, the image of the public that they projected remains, for the most part, speculative. And likely an interest in full-text reports was also piqued by both the sensationalism of audience responses and the identities of the orators whose voices were published by abolitionist periodicals. For African-American and female speakers, often addressing audiences of both black and white and male and female, the very act of public speaking as it was represented in an anti-slavery newspaper was a curiosity for many readers. In the case of the Twelfth Annual Convention of the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1845, “The New York correspondent of the *American Traveller* thought the crowd had been ‘drawn together by *idle curiosity to hear women speak in public*’” (Blassingame 27). Ripley notes that “John A. Collins, general agent for the Massachusetts Anti-slavery Society, informed Garrison in 1842 that ‘the public have

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<sup>36</sup> Schudson refutes the romanticized public that scholars have mapped onto the Lincoln-Douglas debates, arguing that “political campaigns were, in a sense, more religious revivals and popular entertainments than the settings for rational-critical discussion” (145).



itching ears to hear a colored man speak, and particularly a slave” (28). Catering to these “itching ears,” black orators traveled the country, and for that part of “the public” that was unable to attend, their words made the front pages of many abolitionist newspapers. Whether readers attended to the articles out of curiosity or an appreciation for rational debate, the space created on the pages of anti-slavery newspapers for speeches became the second of a two-part process of publicity, particularly for new voices asserting their space on the page with increasing frequency.

By including phonographic reports, abolitionists after 1843 began to establish the parameters for the mediation of their own representation. Appropriating the mechanics of publicity, they adopted a form that, as an act of full disclosure, exploited the fascination of antebellum audiences with legal spectatorship and discreetly facilitated abolitionist claims to accuracy, while also drawing a distinction between abolitionists and their proslavery opponents. Unlike proslavery factions, who made efforts to subsume debate under the auspices of a false consensus, abolitionists had nothing to hide.<sup>37</sup> As Iris Young argues, working from Hannah Arendt’s conception of a public, “a genuinely public discussion is in principle open to anyone” (402). The representation of multiple points of view in abolitionist newspapers made a claim for their pages as a potentially universal forum.

Unlike copies of written speeches, phonographically reported speeches recreated the moment, rather than the prepared address. This moment, as an interaction between speaker and audience (in the case of a single speech) and speaker, audience, and other

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<sup>37</sup> See Roberts-Miller for more on proslavery imposed consensus.

speakers (in the case of a convention) was necessarily both multivocal and contingent. Its existence depended on spoken exchange, public utterances framed by and formed in response to one another. In that abolitionists frequently appealed to evidentiary proof and debated issues, tactics, and resolutions to be passed, the anti-slavery conventions that were reported phonographically were often manifestations of abolitionist efforts to work within the parameters of rational argumentation. Full-text records of entire proceedings of conventions were published both in pamphlet form and serially in newspapers like the *Liberator* and the *National Anti-slavery Standard*. Such records took the form of the accounts of congressional debate published in papers like the *National Intelligencer*, in terms of both completeness and accuracy. Records of anti-slavery conventions could now imitate the detail and form associated with reports of congressional debates, enabling them to participate in the claims to accuracy and legislative parallels made by abolitionist rhetors.<sup>38</sup>

#### **THE POLITICS OF PRESENCE IN PUBLIC ASSEMBLY**

The goal shared by all anti-slavery newspapers was, of course, the abolition of slavery. In this respect, abolition exists as a social movement with a clear political and ethical goal. Participating in a general abolitionist appeal to accuracy, phonographic records offered a supplement to conceptions of verifiable truth as they developed in this context. This tactic was consistent with the rational public projected by abolitionists, as well as a way of representing themselves, contrary to the accusations of “fanatic,” as

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<sup>38</sup> For more on legislative parallels as they were used by abolitionists, see DeLombard.

reasoned, logical advocates of a cause whose validity could be demonstrated publicly through rational argumentation. But behind the sincerity of full disclosure and the representation of rational debate, there was a more corporeal aspect to the speech records that complicated the public image of abolitionists and added an extra dimension—just the hint of a threat—to the imagination of public assembly. In expressing the sounds of a speaker and the responding audience, verbatim speech records also relied on the suasive qualities of sound recorded in text.

The image of the anti-slavery movement that results from phonographic reports is notably aural, as well as visual. And this sound, representing the physicality of both audience and speaker, established the materiality of presence in the space of the text. In *Nineteenth-Century Sound*, Mark Smith engages in a detailed consideration of the sound of sectionalism leading up to and through the Civil War. Smith alludes to the abolitionist movement's attempt to identify the "other" (the South) in terms of the sounds of slavery. The same abolitionist audience worked to define itself in the context of its own shouts of liberty. He argues that periodicals from both North and South were cacophonous, exploding onto the antebellum ear with the "sounds of slavery," the "clanking of cruelty," and the "shouts" of abolitionists (Smith 156, 157, 172).

Audiences in attendance at anti-slavery events had themselves been distinctive and sometimes villainous characters in the narrative of the abolitionist movement. Newspaper stories told of mobs interrupting orators, orators having to leave through the back door, objects being thrown, boos, hisses, and more. In the case of the 1850 meeting,

for instance, Garrison's speech is interrupted by a bracketed reference to a disturbance in the audience:

[Cries of 'Fire!' and considerable disturbance, which lasted for some minutes. A person who fired a torpedo was arrested, and removed from the hall by the police. Order being at length restored, Mr. Garrison proceeded:] (Stone)

When the speaker responded to audience reactions, the public became an integral part of the speech, creating a mutually dependent situation like the one Blair imagines in his formulation of the rhetoric of public assembly. Such interactions also enabled orators like Pillsbury to create a space for identification, either with or against the responding audience, for a reading audience.

At the annual meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-slavery Society in 1861, a "noisy and vulgar" crowd of dissenters filled the gallery soon after the speeches began. The responses of this crowd, which appear in Yerrinton's report of the event, create frequent disruptions, at one point driving Ralph Waldo Emerson to conclude his speech prematurely. The responses of the orators to the sounds from the gallery read like a conversation between three parties: the speaker, the anti-slavery audience, and the disruptive group in the gallery. After a series of exchanges, the group in the gallery takes up singing during Wendell Phillips's attempt to speak, which Yerrinton describes as follows:

[Here the reprobates in the gallery struck up the song:  
    "We are going home,  
    We are going home,  
    We are going home,  
    To die no more"—

which gratifying declaration they repeated, again and again, but did not go. Instead of that, they struck up another equally interesting lyric, which, as near as we could make out, ran in this wise -

“Tell John Andrew,  
Tell John Andrew,  
Tell John Andrew,  
John Brown’s dead.”

Then these model patriots and lovers of the Union gave three groans for General Scott, and amused themselves with imitating the sounds of the barn-yard, and the cries of the street. At length, Mr. Phillips was enabled to speak again.] (1)

Phillips’s response to the uproar is to cast the gallery’s response as a compliment, indicating the success of the anti-slavery movement in agitating the country over the issue. The next interruption of his speech is described as follows:

(Uproarious singing.) That is the death-knell of slavery—don’t you hear it? (Applause.) [The volunteer choir in the gallery again struck up, “We are going home,” &c.] That is the maniac, singing in his chains. (Loud applause.) It is necessary that we should understand the state of things among different classes of people.

Here, the three parties engaged are clearly represented: the group in the gallery, uproariously singing; Phillips, who responds again by using the noise to illustrate the success of the abolition movement; and the anti-slavery audience, applauding Phillips’s efforts. The remainder of the meeting consists of the orators addressing the group in the gallery, until the meeting is broken up soon after the Mayor’s interference.

While such an exchange between orator and disruptors, like the exchanges described at the 1850 meeting in Faneuil Hall, cannot perhaps be characterized as a rational debate, it does represent the kind of raucous interaction that Ryan locates in the

democratization of the public sphere.<sup>39</sup> It also reflects the role of the phonographic report in illustrating what a prepared copy of the speech could not: the contingent nature of abolitionist oratory. Phillips's response relies on sound to formulate a relational description of group identity, as well as the effect of abolitionist efforts. The opposition is represented as maniacal, their sound as the "death-knell of slavery," the applauding anti-slavery public (juxtaposed to the "maniac, singing in his chains") as the rational audience, and, finally, all these representations as a statement on "the state of things," or the degree of rational behavior demonstrated by each party. The dissenting mob enables Phillips to construct a rational space for identification for "us," while simultaneously describing "them" as maniacal, and allowing their responses, recorded phonographically, to provide (once again, "objective") proof of these designations. Notably, the report also reveals, in the parenthetical descriptions of audience reactions, the reporter's touch: Yerrinton scornfully refers to the mob in the gallery as "reprobates," and sarcastically describes them as "model patriots and lovers of the Union."<sup>40</sup>

If speech events such as the one Douglass referred to at the beginning of this chapter are contingent in a Bakhtinian sense, in that they were utterances dependent for their construction on the spoken interaction between speaker and public, or speaker and other presenters, in the case of convention records, then the republication of them in print that could circulate comprised a performative act, a restaging of the original event in text. They became a printed surrogate for a distinctively aural presentation, whose dual

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<sup>39</sup> Ryan notes that "American citizens enacted publicness in an active, raucous, contentious, and unbounded style of debate that defied literary standards of rational and critical discourse" (264).

<sup>40</sup> In the description of the 1850 meeting, Stone also shows his hand: one response to Pillsbury is described as "[Laughter from the enemy.]"

existence on pulpit and page was emphasized subtly by the byline of the phonographic reporter.<sup>41</sup> As a reference to a point in the past, an embodied orator, and an amorphous public, the phonographic report acted on the reader in a way that neither letters nor editorials could: it effectively recalled into existence an aural community, facilitating the reimagining of an event. The text performs the aural function of an actual, specific audience in response to the visual textual representation and audible speech of the orator.

By writing aural response into the speech record, the reporter allows the reader to re-imagine both the event and an audience, based on that audience's response to the speaker. Abolitionist audiences who read the accounts could identify with the in-text applause, imagining themselves as part of a community. In contrast, proslavery or unaffiliated audiences who might encounter reprints of the speeches in their local newspapers would be forced to visualize both the dreaded "abolitionist" through the voice of the orator, and the audience, through the parenthetical responses, which help to explain and shape the responses of the orator. The deliberate construction of the image of a rational abolitionist that emerges from the juxtaposition of speaker and dissenting audience works against the image of the fanatic abolitionist, while also performing an effect, in the form of the agitation that results from the convention. Alternately, the juxtaposition of speaker and applauding audience, or other speakers, implies a crowd of supporters.

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<sup>41</sup> This inclusion of a byline was unusual in antebellum newspapers. Ratner and Teeter note that "bylines were not common until military commanders required them once the Civil War was under way" (11).

As opposed to the authoritative textual space taken by an orator, the inclusion of the responses of multiple factions makes of the page a public sphere, but that impression is created through the specific inscriptive practice and protocols of verbatim reporting. The representation of audience members to the reading public is the result of the context provided by both orator and phonographic reporter: the orator responds to and recreates the space for public participation (by, for instance, asking questions and riffing off of audience response), while the phonographer reproduces this process textually and typographically for the page. In his study of the sounds of the nineteenth century, Smith argues that not only was the heard world “a powerful...proxy for a host of ideas about self and identity,” but also that the “ideal soundscape peddled by northern abolitionists and capitalists” slowly began to merge with the real soundscape (13, 15). Might not the abolitionist press have hoped a public would fill the sound-space projected for it? Readers captivated by the imagined community of abolitionist discourse could write themselves into that community by treating the parenthetical responses of the listening audience as a cue for their own participation.

Perhaps for Douglass, in our beginning quote, the potential for a variant account of his speech to appear—causing its accuracy to be called into question—might have caused readers to question the entirety of the event, undermining the real, temporal proceedings that existed behind the printed text. But for him to write a “similar” speech would remove the aural referent, silencing the delivery and rendering the speech itself merely text, without responsiveness or spoken parallel, in the form of the addresses or resolutions that were also published as the written culmination of anti-slavery meetings.



Southern states reacted to two things with the most extreme hysteria and promotion of new legislation: the circulation of “incendiary texts” and the gathering of slaves or anti-slavery activists in one place to be influenced by the sound of “fanatic” orators. Both of these specters were represented in printed replicas of anti-slavery meetings and lectures. If abolitionists were unable to directly influence legislative proceedings through petition, they could potentially influence through the communication network offered by newspapers the population in the South that the most influential congressional figures represented.

If hyperbolic and emotional proslavery argumentation did not typically function in the same register as some of the more deliberative, fact-based claims of abolitionists, references to acts of assembly and aural protest still might have the power to threaten, if not persuade. By generating a vast amount of noise, abolitionists facilitated the development of a larger-than-life perception of themselves in southern imaginations. As New Hampshire Senator John P. Hale stated in one Senate debate, “there has been a small band of fanatics who have made so much noise that many people...imagined them to be greatly more numerous than they are” (Smith 154). Depicting conventions as an outright attack on proslavery powers, Jermain Wesley Loguen wrote in an 1851 letter to Douglass that “I would that we could have force sufficient to commence a war upon this State, by the way of holding conventions in every county in this State, this fall” (Ripley 4:86). The holding of conventions, and their subsequent replication and circulation in text, presents a threat equivalent to war on Southern defenders of slavery. But what are the terms of battle referenced here? In contrast to military strategies framed “in terms of

domination and subordination” that inform proslavery public discourse, this abolitionist rhetoric of war references martial acts of deliberative assembly (Roberts-Miller 198).

In her consideration of relations between publics within a public sphere, Fraser notes that in stratified societies, “subordinated social groups usually lack equal access to the material means of equal participation” through media that promote the circulation of views (120). For the abolition movement, this access, both in terms of intra- and interpublic relations, was markedly expanded by phonographic reporting. As Garrison’s biographers point out, “it enormously increased the audience of every anti-slavery speaker whose words were worth quoting verbatim” (Garrison and Garrison 3:149).

The capacity for the full-text speech record to reach multiple audiences was also enhanced through the antebellum practice of reprinting.<sup>42</sup> Garrison’s biographers point out that “An orator like Wendell Phillips quickly appreciated the fact that he was addressing, not merely the little handful of the faithful who were gathered before him, but a bench of reporters for the local daily press, in addition to the official phonographer of the *Liberator* and the *Standard*. These reports the telegraph by and by dispersed to all the newspapers in the country” (Garrison and Garrison 149). In the contentious meeting of 1861, Phillips, overwhelmed by the noise of the crowd, at one point responds by circumscribing the public of his address: “[Here Mr. Phillips addressed himself for some time, in a moderate tone, to the reporters and friends immediately round him—a

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<sup>42</sup> This practice is readily observable by a perusal of virtually any antebellum newspaper, and it is also described in some detail in Ratner and Teeter, Risley, and Mott. Risley describes newspaper exchanges, which “provided newspapers with stories and editorials from other newspapers in distant locations. Editors merely clipped the articles and published them as written, giving credit to the original newspaper” (25). For a discussion of reprinting in relation to copyright, authorship, and U.S. literature, see McGill.

proceeding which seemed to provoke the rowdies at a distance to a curious silence.]” (Yerrinton). This act of limitation seems, at first, to reject the premises of democratic inclusion promoted by the image of the abolitionist public meeting. But Phillips concludes his speech by referring to the reporters, whose access to an even larger public renders the local one, by comparison, irrelevant. Appealing specifically to the abolitionists in the audience, Phillips speaks in defiance of the mob:

Abolitionists, look here! Friends of the slave, look here! These pencils [pointing to the reporters] will do more to create opinion than a hundred thousand mobs. When I speak to these pencils, I speak to a million of men. What, then, are those boys? (Applause.) We have got the press of the country in our hands. Whether they like us or not, they know that our speeches sell their papers.

Douglass also acknowledges his multiple—in the sense of both print and non-print and proslavery, anti-slavery, and neutral—audiences at an Anti-Colonization meeting in 1849.<sup>43</sup> A phonographic record published in the *National Anti-slavery Standard* and reprinted in the *North Star* records his statement as follows: “I know that I am speaking now, not to this audience alone, for I see reporters here, and I learn that what is spoken here is to be published, and will be read by Colonizationists and perhaps by slaveholders” (“Anti-Colonization Meeting” 2). In this speech, Douglass goes on to play the print and non-print audiences that he addresses against each other, casting the sound of the audience present for his speech as a potential threat to the slaveholding and Colonizationist audiences that could read the text of the speech in a newspaper. After

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<sup>43</sup> Anti-Colonizationists protested efforts to promote the emigration of blacks out of the United States. The American Colonization Society, founded in 1816, included many antislavery activists who viewed colonization as a sister cause to abolition. Most black abolitionists opposed both voluntary and coerced emigration.

noting the fact that his words might be read by slaveholders, he makes the following incendiary statement:

I want them to know that at least one colored man in the Union, peace man though he is, would greet with joy the glad news should it come here to-morrow, that an insurrection had broken out in the Southern States (Great Applause.) I want them to know that a black man cherishes that sentiment—that one of the fugitive slaves holds it, and that it is not impossible that some other black men (A voice—we are all so here,) may have occasion at some time or other, to put this theory into practice. Sir, I want to alarm the slaveholders, and not to alarm them by mere declamation or by mere bold assertions, but to show them that there is really danger in persisting in the crime of continuing Slavery in this land.

In order to “alarm the slaveholders,” Douglass evokes not only his sentiments, but those of the crowd. His comment that “it is not impossible that some other black men...” followed by a parenthetical response from the audience, implies consensus in a way that both casts Douglass as representative and adds to his words the force of a coalition whose words and responses—and physical presence—are also represented in the record that will circulate throughout the country. The real danger, as opposed to “mere declamation” or “mere bold assertions,” is represented by the image, or aural presence, of a community of listeners in agreement with the orator.

#### **AUTHORSHIP AND PRINTED REPRODUCTIONS OF SPEECH**

It is possible that Douglass, in his refusal to provide a copy of his speech to the *Lawrence Sentinel* described at the opening of this chapter, was trying to police the terms of accuracy within which he knew his speech would be interpreted. He may have wanted the speech record to register the sense of physical presence and responsiveness characteristic of the event, or felt that the extemporaneousness of the speech was

important and any attempt to reproduce it after the fact futile. He may simply have been too busy. But it is also possible that Douglass's motive was more complex, and had to do not just with reprinting and its effect on speech records in mid-nineteenth-century America, but also with the way authority was constructed in the process of representing speech in print more generally. This interpretation of Douglass's refusal, which is suggested by some of his comments about speech reports in other contexts, leads back to the question of authorship and how it relates to accuracy and ownership, for African American speakers, in particular.

In a brief 1853 article about a lecture by James McCune Smith, an African American physician and abolitionist, Douglass wrote the following in his *Frederick Douglass' Paper*: "We can make no adequate report of Dr. Smith's discourse; nor will we presume to give passages from it." Writing that extracts from the speech would not do justice to its broader structure and completeness, Douglass concludes: "Lecturers should enjoy a copy-right, as well as others; for who wants to hear a lecture, after having seen and handled the back-bone of which it is made?" ("Dr. McCune Smith").<sup>44</sup> It is unclear in this comment whether the "back-bone" Douglass refers to is the extracts or notes from the speech or the speech report more broadly, but the assertion about copyright is unambiguous. If the report is a skeleton, the speech is the fully fleshed out human body,

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<sup>44</sup> This article appears unsigned in the November 18, 1853 issue of *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, but in assuming Douglass wrote it I follow the example of Blassingame, who attributes the quote to Douglass in his introduction to Series One of the *Frederick Douglass Papers* (xxiv). Douglass made a similar statement about the speech record as "skeleton" in a 7 July 1852 letter to Gerrit Smith: "By the way I did not publish the *Skeleton* of your speech which was published in the Carson League, because I did not think it well to bring that "SKELETON" before my readers. I desire to present the giant to my readers in the fullness of health and strength. Please favor me with a copy of the speech as soon as it is got ready" (545).

the substance of the event. Casting a printed surrogate of the speech as something that had the potential to stand in for attendance at the event itself, Douglass claims the locus of authority for the event is the speaker, who depends on the presence of new audiences at each speaking event. The reproduction and promiscuous circulation of the content of the speech, allowing readers to “see” and “handle” the “back-bone” in the form of reports, summaries, or extracts, could transfer the sensory emphasis of audience experience and deprive the speaker of both his control over the structure of the speech and his pecuniary due.

If verbatim reports that included audience response seemed to provide the quintessential depiction of democratic discourse, in that they re-opened the circuit of the speech event and dislocated the authority of the speaker, they did not always live up to that standard. Douglass here suggests one way in which the model of complete disclosure and access could compromise the efforts of African American speakers to control the terms of their representation and their ability to draw an audience. Speech reports complicate the romantic vision of the author, but they also trouble romanticized visions of the collaboration at work in the recording practices associated with the abolitionist movement. Collective composition within the social network of the abolition movement—the speech report, but also the ubiquitous framing presence of William Lloyd Garrison’s words at the front of many texts written by African Americans—may push back against a unified conception of the author, but it reinstates that unity as a characteristic of the relationship between text and reader, in that the presumption of a transparent text or a verbatim report could conceal the very processes of transcription and

interpretation that produced it. In some ways that unity, or the perception of the text and the reporter as transparent, is a legacy of nineteenth-century recording practices, and a challenge to critics encountering speech reports today.

In a 1968 study analyzing the rhetoric of Frances Ellen Watkins's speeches, Janey Montgomery bases her evaluation of Watkins's effectiveness on the response Watkins received from the audience. She notes of an 1857 speech that "the main reaction was applause and verbal encouragement for the speaker to return soon" (85). In *A Brighter Coming Day: A Frances Ellen Watkins Harper Reader*, Frances Smith Foster makes a similar point in relation to Harper's speeches: "Because the reporter included parenthetical comments about the audience's response, this essay not only gives examples of some of Harper's rhetorical strategies to strengthen her antislavery message...but also shows these strategies were successful with her listeners" (96). But can these parenthetical descriptions also be read, with the technology of record, as themselves constituting an argument? Despite consistent references to phonography in terms of objectivity, there were points at which phonographic representation failed to demonstrate the direct correspondence between sign and sound that it advertised.

Although phonography enabled greater accuracy than previous techniques had, the reporter still engaged in an act of interpretation even in the act of recording. Speech records were filtered through human reporters, who often brought preconceptions to the listening process. As journalist Eugene Didier pointed out in an 1889 article published about phonography in the *Writer*, verbatim reporters were at times disadvantaged by the lack of particular kinds of knowledge. Didier writes of "a story told of an uneducated

reporter who is said to have rendered the well-known Latin quotation, “*Amicus Plato, amicus Socrates, sed major veritas*,” as follows: “I may cuss Plato, I may cuss Socrates, said Major Veritas” (30). Phonographers also confessed to occasional emendations of the language or ideas of a speaker. In his description of his career as a phonographic reporter in Congress for *The Phonographic Magazine*, Henry Parkhurst talked about his “interpolation” of speeches: “as I knew the speaker was to revise my report before publication, I interpolated, in different places, several sentences to carry out his ideas even farther than he had done” (103).<sup>45</sup>

What is the effect of this disconnect between the stated accuracy of phonographic reporting techniques and the actual differences between the record and the speech event? For one thing, it shows that descriptions of accuracy common to accounts of phonography functioned, at least to some extent, as a rhetorical tactic. Although the method did enable more accurate reports than previously, it was still far from perfect. Describing the phonographic record of the Lincoln-Douglas debates, historian Harold Holzer writes that “these phonographic reporters were reliable professionals, but it soon became apparent to politicians and ordinary readers alike that their debate transcripts differed substantially once in print” (11).<sup>46</sup> Even the records of anti-slavery conventions

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<sup>45</sup> Parkhurst also notes another occasion when he practiced what he calls “official reporting:” “On the last night of a session, a certain senator undertook to express an idea, but did it in so bungling a way, that when I came to the place I discarded my notes entirely, and expressed his idea in my own way, confident that he was too much intoxicated to remember the next day what he had said, and that nobody else would remember anything more than the idea which I had preserved” (105).

<sup>46</sup> For a consideration of ways in which politics shapes transcription in more recent (linguistic) contexts, see Buchholz.



that appeared in the *Liberator* privileged some speakers over others.<sup>47</sup> Claims to accuracy deceptively rendered the stenographers transparent. The conception of a “phonographic report,” associated as it came to be with the standardization and objectivity of technology, inspired certain expectations. This had (and has) the potential to blind contemporary (and current) readers to a consistent fallibility on the part of the phonographer, even in the case of more accurate speech recording techniques. In accounts of anti-slavery conventions, the phonographic reporter is framed as the omniscient narrator, the external, invisible perspective to whom everything is visible and audible. In reading the record he created of the event, we unconsciously accept his claim to this position, and either remove him or consider him transparent as a mediating component. But the byline acts paradoxically as a cue to both the authority of the record (the “phonographic report”) and its subversion in the form of human presence (“by J. M. W. Yerrinton”). The space the phonographer occupies is not fully external, nor is it objective. He is subject to the limitations of space, sound, and vision as much as the crowd that surrounds him, and Yerrinton’s own descriptions of the crowd as it responds to Phillips reflect his bias in favor of the orator.

The act of phonographic recording, then, becomes an act of creation, couched in terms of accuracy. Although phonographic records were an improvement over previous techniques, their appeal to scientific, mechanical precision, as in the comparison to daguerreotype, was an overstatement. The record facilitated an act of imagining on the

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<sup>47</sup> Although black abolitionist speakers appeared in some of the records, phonographic reports of speeches by Phillips, Garrison, and other white abolitionists occupied the bulk of the printed (and spoken) space, and extracts and summaries were sometimes substituted for full records of speeches by female orators, in particular.

part of the reader, whose encounter with the constructed public image of the “abolitionist” could inspire identification with a cause whose success depended on the successful invocation of an audience. Phonographic records represented the proceedings of abolitionist meetings in print, conjuring and fulfilling expectations of democratic publicness, paired with demonstrations of deliberative argument, evidentiary support, and logical proof. Ultimately, the reader was presented with a text that incorporated a self-verifying apparatus, in that it could represent itself as transparent, objective, a “daguerreotype” of an event, removing the necessity for interpretation, and thereby facilitating informed identification.

In Garrison’s 1866 letter of thanks to Winchell Yerrinton, he wrote of the reporter that: “In many ways and on an extended scale, you have been a public benefactor, and a most efficient instrument in disseminating light and knowledge—‘thoughts that breathe, and words that burn’” (Garrison and Garrison 4:169). Yerrinton, as “public benefactor,” helped to generate both the text of Phillips’s speeches and an image of abolitionist public discourse. The significance of the speech record, both rhetorically and historiographically, makes it necessary to reinstate the stenographer in the narrative of abolitionist record. Garrison’s “most efficient instrument” was in fact a human mediator, not the technological force that the description implies. The stenographer served as gatekeeper, mediating the transition between aural and written form for many abolitionist orators. The audience that would receive the speech in its new version was a reading audience, and the accuracy implied by the phrase “phonographic report” would imply to this audience that the report was verbatim, a virtual “daguerreotype” of speech. But like a

daguerreotype, which requires a process of selection and staging on the part of the operator, the phonographic record was inflected by the voice, location, and perspective of the stenographer.

## CONCLUSION

Phonography complicates notions of authorship in relation to practices of inscription and revision. Even verbatim reports of speech events were products of transcription, translation, and a complicated dynamic of hearing, mishearing, and expectation. In some cases, audiences changed the words of the speaker as he or she responded to challenges or responses. In other cases, as I discuss in chapter four with Sojourner Truth, reporters privileged the responses of the audience and the spectacle over the words of the speaker. The multiple variants of many of the most famous anti-slavery and reform speeches speak to the significance of the reporter and techniques of recording and representation to the historical record.<sup>48</sup> Interestingly, Douglass maintained control over the earliest printed versions of one of his most famous speeches. The speech titled “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” delivered in Rochester’s Corinthian Hall on July 5, 1852, was published in three places under Douglass’s oversight: in his *Frederick Douglass’ Paper* on July 9, 1852; as a pamphlet published in Rochester and sold out of

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<sup>48</sup> See, for instance, Sojourner Truth’s well-known speech at the Women’s Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, on May 29, 1851. Scholars have shown that the refrain “Ar’n’t I a woman?” commonly associated with that speech was likely the product of a much later recollection written by Frances Gage and published in the *History of Woman Suffrage* (Painter, Mabee).

the newspaper office; and as extracts, in the 1855 edition of his autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom*.<sup>49</sup>

Abolitionists were often accused of manipulating media in order to stir the emotions of American people. In a striking development, Douglass himself was accused, once his speeches began to be reported regularly and at length, of copying the words of others. In a development seemingly at odds with phonographic claims to accuracy, the more complete reports in Douglass's case prompted not the perception of complete disclosure and honesty, but rather challenges about the authenticity of his speeches. In response to an 1854 speech, a reviewer in the Wisconsin *Daily Argus* wrote: "His information is limited even upon the subjects of which he treats, and the fact of his being a copyist, is continually apparent, by the incompleteness of the facts he states, and his inconclusive, fragmentary logic."<sup>50</sup> Casting Douglass as "copyist" in an uncanny displacement of the reporter, this reviewer took the speech report as an occasion to engage the speaker as author, holding him to a standard of authenticity slightly different from the demands for accuracy that were more common in relation to anti-slavery

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<sup>49</sup> After Douglass finished his speech, according to the account in *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, "A request was also made, that the Address be published in pamphlet form, and seven hundred copies of it were subscribed on the spot" (2). The pamphlet was advertised in the issue of July 16, 1852: "The 'Address' may be had at this office, price ten cents, a single copy, or six dollars per hundred." According to Patricia Bowman, Douglass's paper was the only Rochester paper to mention the speech; the next publication that Blassingame cites that includes it is from 1893 (2:359). Douglass wrote in a letter to Gerrit Smith on July 14, 1852, that "I must tell you however that I really am desirous to make some money as well as do some good with that speech. I am intending to do considerable lecturing—and I must have something to carry with me to sell. I rely mainly on this method for the means of living and travelling. Every town has not a Gerrit Smith in it—to slip him a five "dollar bill" in the hand of the antislavery lecturer, to enable him to pay his way. I must have something to sell. Your pamphlets which you generously gave me are now nearly exhausted—and I must have something to fill their place" (547).

<sup>50</sup> Blassingame writes that "in a scathing review of an 1854 speech, the Wisconsin *Daily Argus* contended Douglass had borrowed much of it from Gerrit Smith, Charles Sumner, and Truman Smith" (xxxviii).

documents.<sup>51</sup> Shifting the focus back from event to text, a combination of stenographic records and celebrity in Douglass's case introduced a dynamic that moved him into a perceived realm of ordinary authorship in order to accuse him of departing from it by being a fraud or a copyist.

As this response to Douglass shows, moving from the ground of the event, which created one kind of dynamic between speaker and audience, to the printed text, which created quite another, opened up new possibilities for intertextual relations and structures of authenticity. The charge of copying or stealing the words of others would also come up in relation to Josiah Henson, a figure also associated with a fugitive slave narrative, whose story I take up in the next chapter. Like Douglass, Henson spent a great deal of time orchestrating and revising his public image in both print and speech. In his early years Henson gained notoriety for his role as a leader of a community of fugitive slaves in Canada; in his later years, his notoriety was a product of his relation to Uncle Tom, the literary creation of Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose bestselling novel was a milestone for the anti-slavery movement in the U.S. But unlike Frederick Douglass, Henson had the added complication of being a black speaker presumed not to be able to read or write. His interactions with his recorders, editors, and publishers changed the terms of authenticity from the correspondence between representation and reality to a concatenation of fiction and representation that left reality even more in question than discussions of stenographic

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<sup>51</sup> It was in response to these very earlier demands, in fact, that Douglass had published his narrative to begin with. Skeptics cited Douglass's unwillingness to provide detailed information about his life as a slave or his escape, combined with his articulate form of expression, as proof that he was lying about being a fugitive (Blassingame lii). Blassingame writes that "*Narrative* effectively stilled the debate over Douglass's authenticity, but it increased fears that he would be recaptured," fears that prompted Douglass to travel to England (lii).

reports by reporters themselves. If some critics accused Henson of capitalizing on the success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or falsifying his relation to the novel, others accused Stowe of stealing Henson's story, a reinterpretation resonant in critical and fictional adaptations of Henson into the twentieth century.

## **Chapter 2. Resurrections from the Page: The Multimedia Martyrdom of Josiah Henson**

Josiah Henson's narrative is, like many slave narratives, difficult to read. The basic facts are generally consistent across the many editions that were published in the nineteenth century. Henson was born into slavery in Maryland in 1789. His father's ears were cut off after an attempt to defend his mother from an attack by a white man, and his subsequent gloominess and depression caused him to be sold. Henson's master kept Henson and his mother, and eventually made him an overseer. He was given a series of responsibilities, including transporting a group of slaves from one plantation to another, during the course of which Henson talked several out of escaping—a decision he would later regret. An overseer of a neighboring plantation, angry about Henson's interference in a fight on behalf of his master, orchestrated a beating that broke both of Henson's shoulder blades, and after the assault he could not lift his arms above shoulder level. Disillusioned after his master cheated him out of money he had raised to purchase his own freedom, Henson eventually escaped to Canada with his family and helped to establish Dawn, a fugitive slave community in Ontario. Dawn would come to consist of a lumber mill and a school, called the British and American Institute and open to blacks, whites, and Native Americans.

Later editions track the publication of Henson's story and its subsequent development. Years after a ghostwritten account of his life was published in 1849, Henson was pulled into the national spotlight as the supposed model for Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom in her bestselling novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. After Dawn collapsed in

the 1860s because of mismanagement and a lack of funding, Henson found an editor in England who would capitalize on the Uncle Tom association by issuing several new editions of Henson's narrative, starting in 1876, and Henson spent his later years traveling in Scotland and England and giving talks to large audiences. He had 12 children and 85 grandchildren. He died in Canada in 1883.

This is the information available in the various editions of the narrative, the final version of which includes an account of his burial. The difficulty in reading is, in part, a result of the violence described in the narrative. The graphic anecdote about Henson's father begins the narrative, and Henson's permanent affliction as a result of the early beating he received becomes a lasting physical record of the legacy of slavery. The difficulty is also a product of authorship and ownership, both hard to track. Henson would describe himself as mostly illiterate, and a series of editors made claims to composing various parts of his printed story. As a result of both of these difficulties, which are to some degree a product of the effect of the institution of slavery on texts produced by fugitive slaves, a conventional analysis of the publication history of Henson's narrative, attending strictly to authorship, production, and distribution, seems to miss something.<sup>52</sup>

Then again, so do many scholarly considerations. Henson was at the center of a number of contentious conversations in the nineteenth century, over topics ranging from his management of *Dawn*, to his ties to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, to his encouragement of

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<sup>52</sup> It is worth noting that such a focused study has not yet been attempted. The closest resemblance to a bibliographical history of Henson's narrative is Robin Winks's excellent introduction to his 1969 edition.



fugitives to enlist in the Civil War. After his escape from slavery, a flurry of controversy seemed to follow Henson wherever he went. Henson's narrative and his life went through a series of revisions and rearticulations, points of attachment that shifted as the circumstances around him changed. Stowe's novel exerted a gravitational pull, particularly at the end of Henson's life, but the way that Henson frames his resistance to an easy conflation of himself with Uncle Tom is notable in records of his speeches. The lines of confluence, if not influence, spin out: starting from Henson, one can move toward Stowe, or one can follow Henson's British editor, John Lobb, to an English edition of Frederick Douglass's narrative. Longfellow meditated on Henson, as did the Queen of England.<sup>53</sup> He attended major antislavery meetings and consorted (and argued) with abolitionist luminaries like William Wells Brown, Charles Remond, and William Lloyd Garrison. He met the 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury, a prominent abolitionist, on one trip to England, and the introductions to the editions of his narratives bear witness to his acquaintance with a veritable who's who of abolitionist and literary lore in both England and America.

Such connections situate Henson within broader networks of nineteenth-century reform and African American literature and print, though Henson himself spent much of his life outside the U.S. They also explain his appearance in work by scholars of American literature, including Frances Smith Foster, Eric Sundquist, David Reynolds,

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<sup>53</sup> Longfellow met Henson in 1846, when Henson called on the poet to request support for his school (likely the Institute at Dawn). "Which apparently Longfellow did, and over a longer period of time: in March 1875, for example, "Father Henson" received \$20.00 out of a total of \$122.00 in donations for that month" (Irmscher 116).

Joan Hedrick, and John Ernest.<sup>54</sup> Henson has been discussed frequently and at some length by African Americanists, but has seldom been a major figure in broader studies of American literature.<sup>55</sup> The pursuit of default critical categories leads in his case to an impasse, or, perhaps, a projection. If you are looking for authorship, you can find it in Henson. If you are looking for resistance, you can find it. If you are looking for truth, scandal, fiction, or friendship, all these things are there. But if the structures of relation that these categories represent can be invoked for Henson, they must take account of the difficulty of pigeonholing him as a historical figure. He defies national boundaries, discursive structures of conversations about African-American rights, literature, and resistance, and modes of publicity that depend on a single medium, even as he works within all of these frameworks.

This chapter, like the critical inquiries that have come before it, looks at the ways that Henson was interpreted within the orbit of Stowe's novel in the nineteenth century, but my larger concern is with the way that authorship functions across material forms in relation to Henson's story. If abolitionist speech reports drew on the language of objectivity and a particular technique of transcription to make claims about the correspondence between representation and reality, Henson's story demonstrates both

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<sup>54</sup> See *Witnessing Slavery*, Introduction, *Mightier*, *Harriet Beecher Stowe*, and *Chaotic Justice*, respectively.

<sup>55</sup> Henson often appears in articles and monographs as part of a list—representative as an example of a fugitive slave narrative, intertextuality, fugitive slaves in Canada, fugitive slaves in England, and so forth. One notable exception to this is Winks, on whose close attention to Henson I lean heavily throughout this chapter. Starling, Foster, Ernest, Hedrick, and Reynolds are three of the more substantive recent considerations. The latter three all deal largely with Henson's relation to Stowe (casting it as eclipsing, informing, and questionable, respectively). Both Foster and Starling also feature extended discussions of Henson in the context of slave narratives more generally.

that “reality” did not necessarily have a stable referent and that there were multiple versions of authenticity at work in relation to anti-slavery reform in the nineteenth century. I argue in chapter one that reading speech reports as objective representations may obscure the collaborative and interpretive processes of their construction. But Henson offers a curious case in which popularity changes the terms of authenticity, and fiction supplants reality as the basis for belief. This shift makes it difficult to assert a stable or definitive point of reference for authenticity, and it has implications not just for the way that critics read fugitive slave narratives, but more importantly for the very terms that have guided critical conversations.

Authenticity and accuracy have persisted and evolved into analytical terms in present-day critical conversations about African-American literary publication and slave narratives. But such conversations have often worked from a definition of authenticity that depends on notions of correspondence based on a “real,” as well as the stability of the text and the subject. I argue that Josiah Henson’s mode of publicity shifted between speech and print, responding to public expectations and desires and making provisionality more than authenticity the point of emphasis. Henson’s narrative became a series of reflective texts that pointed outward, implicating reading audiences from different national contexts in specific, local reform efforts that only sometimes relied on the rhetoric of broader national reform movements. After the Civil War, the appeals in Henson’s narrative increasingly made use of an identification with Uncle Tom, even as Henson himself resisted such impositions, or turned them into cultural critiques, in his speeches.

In this chapter I relate the complex set of editorial and authorial interactions that went into the publication of Henson's narrative to the projection of various kinds of desire manifested by individuals and collectives over the course of the nineteenth century, as they responded to different historical moments and circumstances. These diverse desires inspired Henson and his editors and publishers to respond by adapting his story, and in effect his identity as a storyteller, or the form it took in print, writing, and performance. Each new edition claims to be the authoritative edition, the statement of Henson's true story, and the strongest iteration of the relationship between Henson and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The expressions and manipulations of identity and desire visible in the editions of Henson's narrative are one of the main reasons why a reader can find almost whatever she looks for in relation to Henson, and they emerge most clearly through an approach to Henson's story that takes into consideration its textual iterations with an eye to provisionality rather than authenticity. A diachronic examination, or an exploration of the texts related to Henson in terms of both iteration and desire, allows us to see the fuller, richer story.

The chapter is divided into parts, each of which represents a different configuration of provisionality, desire, and identity in relation to Henson. The first is a consideration of Henson's appearance at the World's Fair in London, a performance that forms a chapter of Henson's narrative, and one that I argue presents an analog or a lens through which to read Henson's other publications and performances. If Henson's life story bears witness to other, more fugitive texts like the World's Fair exhibit, it also marks the performative and economic dimensions of its own circulation. Moving to the

the publication history, I consider the authorial and editorial interactions and the forms of desire—economic, racial, aesthetic, national—that drive the revisions and republications of Henson’s tale. I conclude with a meditation on the connection between Henson’s narrative and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, a connection that provoked a conversation about authorship and theft that began in the nineteenth century and continues today. The association between Henson and Uncle Tom also erupted into a series of publications and performances in Scotland and England at the end of the nineteenth century. Henson became, for audiences, the living embodiment of Stowe’s main character, a martyr resurrected on stage and in print. Left on the printed text, and retrievable, are impressions of the fields of national and cultural desire that surrounded Henson. These impressions make him an ideal figure with whom to think about nineteenth-century processes of authorship, communication and exchange, and the forms these have taken in the different but no less revelatory desires of critics today.

#### **DAWN AT THE WORLD’S FAIR**

In 1851, Josiah Henson traveled to the Crystal Palace to exhibit walnut boards and Indian corn. Both were products of the industry of the fugitive community he had helped to organize in Dawn. The main description of his time at the World’s Fair appears in the third edition of Henson’s narrative, published by John P. Jewett in 1858. In it Henson describes his experience at the Great Exhibition, which he attends to “negotiate for the sale of lumber” in order to contend with the debts that would turn out to be a perpetual feature of enterprise in Dawn. When an American superintendent claims the lumber for

the American department because it was transported to England on an American ship, Henson protests: “Thought I, if this Yankee wants to retain my furniture, the world shall know who it belongs to.” He hires a painter to paint on the boards, in “good large white letters”: “THIS IS THE PRODUCT OF THE INDUSTRY OF A FUGITIVE SLAVE FROM THE UNITED STATES, WHOSE RESIDENCE IS DAWN, CANADA.” Henson’s banter with the furious superintendent attracts attention: “English gentlemen began to gather around, chuckling with half-suppressed delight, to see the wrath of the Yankee” (190). After a heated exchange, Henson’s boards are moved, but the paint remains. “Perhaps my complexion attracted attention,” Henson continues, “but nearly all who passed, paused to look at me, and at themselves as reflected in my large black walnut mirrors.”<sup>56</sup>

Both the incident and its appearance in print in 1858 negotiate a set of transatlantic interests, configuring publicness as a product of national identity and a relation to the visible text. Henson’s description implies that, as a result of the writing on the boards, he himself has become part of the exhibit, figured as the fugitive slave in question despite the general terms of the inscription. But so, he points out, has his audience. Implicated in the reflection, both passersby and readers must consider themselves within the semantics of what has become a politically charged presentation, a text whose written components merge with and impact its living contexts. This

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<sup>56</sup> At the beginning of his account of his experience at the World’s Fair, Henson describes the lumber he took to exhibit as “some of the best specimens of our black walnut lumber,” stating that “the boards which I selected were four in number, excellent specimens, about seven feet in length and four feet in width, of beautiful grain and texture. On their arrival in England, I had them planed and perfectly polished, in French style, so that they actually shone like a mirror” (187-188).

presentation is dynamic, in the sense that it is updated to reflect the image of each new viewer. It is also interactive, and contingent on surrounding circumstances. Henson leaves to return to Canada after a series of printed attacks on his motives, and the exhibition is left standing with no living referent or counterpart. The viewing public also takes multiple forms, diversifying and expanding from the “English gentlemen” of Henson’s initial audience. Henson describes his conversations over the course of the exhibition with visitors from a variety of nationalities, his encounter with the Queen, who speaks not to him but to her attendants about him, and finally his sense upon returning from Canada that the crowd was “Like the waters of the great Mississippi...the channel was still full, though the individuals were changed” (192).

Settled into the Canadian section, Henson and his exhibition entered into a space of transnational exchange and spectatorship, surrounded by products ranging from coal to bookbinding specimens. His painted declaration repositions him in relation to national boundaries, becoming a political statement that takes on meaning broader than its origins in a local conflict over placement at the Crystal Palace. Scholars have viewed this account of the Great Exhibition variously as representative of an African-American transnational, democratic aesthetic or a political statement premised on border-crossing and a resistant deployment of alternative textualities.<sup>57</sup> And indeed, one might read the movement of the lumber as a reenactment in miniature of Henson’s own relocation from the geographical space of the U.S. to the geographical space of Canada. In the superintendent’s claim to the presence of Henson and the products of his community’s

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<sup>57</sup> See Knadler and MacLean, respectively.

labor in the American section sounds an echo of the claims prompted by the Fugitive Slave Act, passed one year before the Fair. Henson's assertion of Canadian residency for the fugitive slave mentioned in the words on the lumber invokes a kind of English cosmopolitanism—the Fair groups Canada in the West End of the Crystal Palace with several other territories as a “British dependency,” while the U.S. is assigned to the East End with other “foreign states.” Henson's successful resistance results, as in the case of his escape, in physical relocation outside the physical and legal boundaries claimed by the U.S. As an act of resistance, this assertion criticizes the superintendent's claim and its territorial and ideological basis, and the chuckles betray its appeal to an English audience. The painted letters become a key to a larger text, and the reflective black walnut a stand-in for Henson himself, a neat metaphor of victory over a politically charged situation in the United States. The text becomes participatory and interactive, as the crowds circulate around it, see themselves reflected in the lumber, read the words that frame them, and inquire of Henson whether or not he is a fugitive slave.

But unlike the waters of the Mississippi, the audiences comprised by the crowds at the Fair would wane with the event, and Henson's exhibition would transform into a single line in a massive catalog of all of the objects at the Crystal Palace. Persisting only in public memory, and perhaps in ongoing conversations prompted by the event, the painted words and their black walnut surface would cease to be an act of publication, and Henson would return to Dawn soon after the end of the Great Exhibition.

In 1858, however, the exhibition was resurrected in a new edition of Henson's narrative, published in Cleveland and Boston. This time the exhibition rather than the



audience was on the move, as it began circulating in a new form among readers in the U.S. In the narrative, the exhibition is recontextualized as part not only of a display of international industrial prowess and political discourse, but more fundamentally as an episode—materially, a chapter—in the printed life of an individual: Henson himself. Like the painted words on the top of the walnut, early editions of Henson’s narratives were ghostwritten, signatures of corporate authorship as well as individual protest. The exhibition becomes one part of a series of descriptions of notable events during Henson’s visit, punctuated by constant shuttling between Canada and England. The chuckling English gentlemen of Henson’s description are set up for an American reading public to encounter in text, if not in person. This is a playing of a live historical audience against an extended, projected, reading audience, one implicated in the writing on the boards.<sup>58</sup>

Henson’s propensity in his speeches is to make jokes, and the anecdote of the World’s Fair is framed in the narrative as a comedic moment, a funny story likely to entertain the reader. “The history of my connection with the World’s Fair,” he says, “is a little amusing.” But under the entertainment is a savvy storyteller: Henson represents himself as a clever opponent and defiant resident of Canada, outwitting the superintendent who tries to claim the lumber on behalf of the U.S. In the context of the World’s Fair, where national identities are defined by the exhibition of products, such a claim was based not on the history of the production of the lumber, but rather the rights

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<sup>58</sup> An American readership would not necessarily identify with the American superintendent in this description, however, as a letter printed in the *Liberator* from a disgruntled southerner demonstrates in denouncing the appointment of Riddle as superintendent. The article refers to Riddle as a “horse-auctioneer of Boston—a man without the first qualification fitted for such a position...a fellow who cannot speak a sentence of good English or any other tongue, except that of Yankeedom: and, if he have any knowledge of the arts or of literature, we have yet to discover it” (Duncan 113).

established through its transport. To appropriate Henson's boards would have effectively erased their authorship or the geographical space of their production. Pushing back against this potential theft, Henson stages a scene of amusement that is remediated in the Boston edition of his narrative. An American audience is faced with the option of identifying with the tricked and foolish-looking superintendent or laughing with Henson at the scene, acknowledging (perhaps grudgingly) the resonance and cleverness of his reaction. For his reading audience to laugh at the World's Fair scene is, ultimately, for them to laugh at themselves. The walnut mirrors brook no hiding by the viewer, print or corporeal.

But *whose* mirrors? The transformation of the white letters on the black wood into black ink on a white page signals a shift in authorship and ownership, as well as media. Although Henson hired a painter to paint the words on his lumber, his presence was an argument. The reference on the boards may be ambiguous, but the description is not: the lumber on the page becomes "*my* large black walnut mirrors." Henson's ability to take control of this exhibit hinges on its deviant textuality. The reversal of black and white is not just symbolic. It accompanies a text whose meaning is generated, in part, by the physical presence of its owner. The relationship between ownership and authorship becomes difficult to parse, and Henson's presence asserts an authorial role even as he claims ownership in the narrative. The exhibit has been recreated in print—indeed, it is difficult to tell whether the anecdote in the narrative happened at all, so it may be entirely

a product of print.<sup>59</sup> The reflective effect of the polished walnut is reproduced figuratively in the print, which reconfigures viewer as reader and owner as author and includes both as a constitutive part of the commodity, or the text. Print abstracts even as it reproduces this moment, but the metaphor has done its work. The negative image of the painted letters in the ink proposes a clear relationship between author and reader, staged in marketplace terms. The combination of performance and print implicate a broader audience in a mirror made more revelatory, perhaps, by the contrast of processed paper to reflective wood surface.

This incident at the World's Fair is a useful place to begin, in that it provides a figure for the competing forms of desire that produce the adaptable structures of authorship, identity, and authenticity apparent throughout the body of documents that relate to Henson. The painted words function in relation to a particular set of circumstances: the superintendent's desire to incorporate Henson into the American department; the English observers' amusement; the changing composition of the audiences that pass by the exhibit and their interpretation of Henson in relation to the words on the black walnut. Henson asserts his authority in the local interaction with the superintendent, but also through the inscriptions that he brings into being through intermediaries: the painting on the walnut and the ink on the page. The editions of the narrative enact a form of textuality that depends on performance, as well as print. Reckoning with this structure of distributed authorship and publication across media

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<sup>59</sup> Descriptions of abolitionist activity at the World's Fair in the *Liberator* note an exhibit of Indian corn produced by fugitive slaves in the Canadian section, but there is no account of the painted letters that Henson describes. See Farmer and Wright. A catalogue from the Great Exhibition lists the exhibit as follows: "HENSON, J. Dawn.—Black walnut plank. Indian corn in the ear" ("Official" 169).

involves tracing its representation in the text itself, in the form of records and descriptions of Henson's speeches, as well as events like the exhibit at the World's Fair. This method of reading offers a way of interacting with the printed artifact that shows its dependence on embodied engagement, marketplace language, and audiences whose desires, national affiliations, and literacies become part of the show. As the nineteenth century progresses, the editions of Henson's narrative feature more descriptions of events oriented around his reactions to audiences on both sides of the Atlantic. In each event, the meaning of authenticity changes, as does Henson's configuration of the terms of ownership and his relationship to print, both the printed pages of his own narrative and those of Stowe's novel. As his narrative is revised or revisited by various editors and Henson himself, the making new or resurrection of such episodes in updated contexts signals the effectiveness of the inscribed mirror as metaphor. The crowds are continually new, the channel still full, and the text is refreshed to meet them.

#### **EDITIONS AND REVISIONS OF HENSON'S NARRATIVE**

The transformations of the story of the World's Fair exhibition were one part of a broader set of transformations of Henson's narrative, and like the exhibition, the editions reflected a series of ongoing negotiations between Henson and his editors and publishers over the specific terms of authorship, ownership, and authenticity. At least nine different editions, published throughout the nineteenth century in both the U.S. and England,

formed and reformed the account of the exhibition.<sup>60</sup> Like the World's Fair audience, the page changed. The letters of Henson's painted message fall from capitals to lowercase in later editions, and the chapter itself moves from the end of the narrative to the middle, as additional chapters are added. Introductory materials by white authors and editors come and go, and are supplemented in some editions by appendices.<sup>61</sup> The title pages of the editions associated with British editor John Lobb capitalize on Henson's association with Uncle Tom, conflating fact and fiction with substitutions and subtitles.

These changes were the product, in part, of the way that the massive, transatlantic circulation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* stretched and reformed the circulation of Henson's

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<sup>60</sup> Henson's narrative was not unusual in this: many slave narratives in both England and the U.S. went through multiple editions. Foster notes that Olaudah Equiano's *Narrative*, first published in 1789, went through 36 editions by 1837. Douglass wrote three versions of his autobiography (*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, first published in Boston in 1845; *My Bondage and My Freedom*, first published in New York in 1855; and *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, first published in Hartford, CT, in 1881, and published again in a longer version in Boston in 1892), each of which went through multiple editions and reprints. At least five editions of Sojourner Truth's narrative, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*, were published in the nineteenth century (in Boston in 1850, in New York in 1853, in Boston in 1857 and 1875, and in Battle Creek in 1878 and 1884). See Foster, Andrews, and Washington.

<sup>61</sup> The first edition of Henson's narrative was 76 pages. Published in Boston in 1849 by Arthur D. Phelps, it included an advertisement by Samuel Atkins Eliot (the ghostwriter). A manuscript copy of this edition survives at the Boston Public Library. A 118-page 1851 edition was published in London, Edinburgh, and Dublin by Charles Gilpin; Adam and Charles Black; and J.B. Gilpin, respectively. This edition included a preface by T. Binney, Eliot's advertisement and two appendices. The next edition (212 pages) was the Jewett edition, published in Boston and Cleveland in 1858, which included a preface by Harriet Beecher Stowe. The next edition appeared London in 1876, edited by John Lobb. It included Stowe's preface and an introductory note by George Sturge and S. Morley. Lobb published a series of London editions in 1877, 1878, and 1890, each with some additional material. Lobb also published a "Young People's Illustrated Edition" in 1877. A new Boston edition was published in 1879 by B.B. Russell & Company with introductory notes by Wendell Phillips and J.G. Whittier and an appendix assembled by Gilbert Haven. An 1881 edition was published in London, Ontario, by Schuyler, Smith, & Co. The narrative was translated into at least eight different languages, including Swedish, Danish, Dutch, German, French, and Welsh. An adaptation was also published in the nineteenth century, by Henry Bleby, titled *Josiah, the Maimed Fugitive; A True Tale*. Starling describes a special "Harriet Beecher Stowe" edition issued in 1857 with an introduction by Stowe that links Henson to Uncle Tom (which Stowe does not do in the introduction to the 1858 edition), but I have seen no other mention or evidence of this edition.

narrative.<sup>62</sup> But editions also responded to the specific time and place of publication, reflecting the fact that the narrative was a contingent production, affected at different times by political circumstances ranging from local to international. As the reform project changed, so did the text. Prior to the Civil War, Henson's narrative focused on goals having to do with Dawn and the liberation and education of fugitive slaves. In the postbellum period, the editions appealed to different audiences, aiming to raise money for Henson's personal goals, like the liberation of his brother, or those of a new community, or to claim historical and literary significance.

Henson's narrative behaves like a fluid text, but the specific nature of its additions and reconfigurations over time work against a strictly linear narrative of development. New editions introduce bits and pieces of older events and additions and shed others, cycling back, in an 1879 Boston edition, to the plates from the earlier 1858 Boston edition, while incorporating later revisions added by the heavy-handed Lobb. The alterations to Henson's narrative over the course of the nineteenth century demonstrate the continual making new or provisionality of the story. They also reveal the ways that individual and community desires intersect with national ones. Even as the advertisements, prefaces, and introductions to Henson's narrative identify new points of relevance, they hew closely to the goings-on of Henson and his community in Canada, locating Dawn as a site against which national values, identifications, and funding might be cast and clarified.

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<sup>62</sup> *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published on March 20, 1852. By mid-October, it was announced that 120,000 copies had been sold. See Winship, "Uncle Tom's Cabin." For a list of the American editions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, see Parfait, 211-240. For a discussion of the novel's popularity in England, see Fisch.

The first edition of the narrative in 1849 gave little indication of its eventual popularity, nor did its simple, pamphlet format anticipate the media blitz and ornate editions that the association with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* would produce.<sup>63</sup> To compose the narrative, Henson dictated the story of his life to Samuel Eliot, a historian and sometimes-abolitionist public figure in Boston. The 76-page ghostwritten narrative was titled *The Life of Josiah Henson: Formerly a Slave, Now an Inhabitant of Canada, as Narrated by Himself*. It was published in Boston by Arthur Phelps. Consisting of a brief introductory note by Eliot and the main text, with no chapters, it begins with Henson's first encounters with slavery and concludes with a brief sketch of the establishment and progress of Dawn. A second edition of the narrative, printed in London, Edinburgh, and Dublin in 1851, is structurally similar to the first. But this edition is much more overtly an abolitionist project, printed with a preface by English minister and abolitionist Thomas Binney, appendices about the recently-passed Fugitive Slave Law, anecdotes from fugitive slaves, and a description of the Institute Henson had helped to establish in Dawn.

Next, in 1858, John P. Jewett in Boston and Henry Jewett in Cleveland published a new edition titled *Truth Stranger than Fiction: Father Henson's Story of his Own Life*, with a brief introduction by Stowe. Jewett would later state in an interview published in an 1883 issue of *The Manhattan* that his was the first edition of Henson's narrative, and

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<sup>63</sup> The sales of the first edition were modest: Foster estimates that the 1849 narrative sold 6,000 copies in three years (*Witnessing Slavery* 22). By comparison, Douglass's 1845 narrative "sold 11,000 American copies and went through nine British editions in its first two years. By 1860, it had sold 30,000 copies in England and America. Other bestselling slave narratives included those of Solomon Northup (27,000 copies in England and America in its first two years)" (Sun-Joo Lee 10). Foster writes, by way of putting these figures in perspective, that "in 1849, the same year that Father Henson's story was published, Thoreau's *Week on the Concord and Merrimack River* appeared. In four years, it sold 219 copies" (*Witnessing* 22).

that he and minister Gilbert Haven had worked, through “tedious cross-examination,” to write the remaining part of Henson’s story.<sup>64</sup> Jewett’s version of the narrative, now expanded to 212 pages, was split into 24 chapters. New material included, among other things, an extended description of lumbering operations in Dawn and Henson’s visit to England, including his efforts on behalf of ragged schools and his exhibition at the World’s Fair, the publication of his narrative, and his return to Canada. The final chapter describes the number and condition of fugitive slaves in Canada.

John Lobb first appeared in the text of the narrative in 1876, when a London edition emerged titled *"Uncle Tom's Story of His Life." An Autobiography of the Rev. Josiah Henson (Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Uncle Tom"), from 1789-1876*. Editor of the weekly *Christian Age* in London, Lobb assembled the new edition and published it out of the *Christian Age* office. The narrative, now 224 pages, presented material that had not appeared previously, including more detail from the intervening years, explicit associations of Henson with Stowe, and a chapter matching characters in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to acquaintances of Henson’s. This post-war edition of Henson’s narrative, the first to explicitly associate Henson with Uncle Tom, includes a note that Henson had given the copyright and sole authority to distribute the narrative to his editor as an act of friendship and appreciation for Lobb’s assistance with editing the new edition, raising funds, and

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<sup>64</sup> See “Uncle Tom’s Cabin.” This failure to note the 1849 edition may have been a lapse in memory on the part of Jewett, who in this interview was arguing that Stowe was mistaken in her statement that incidents from Henson’s story inspired parts of her novel. It also is possible that Jewett only saw the manuscript written by Eliot, used that for the publication of the first section, and therefore never knew about the earlier printed version, though in the interview he declares that Henson’s story had been neither printed nor written when *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was published.



arranging speaking engagements in England.<sup>65</sup> A list of Henson's speaking engagements in England and a brief biography of Stowe appear at the back. The edition was popular: Lobb would later announce that he had sold 400,000 copies and translated the work into at least 9 languages.<sup>66</sup> He also edited a *Young People's Illustrated Edition* of Henson's narrative, a richly illustrated adaptation of the story that includes an opening address ostensibly by Henson.<sup>67</sup>

Soon after Lobb's initial republication, a Boston firm called B.B. Russell issued a 362-page edition complete with introductory notes by John Whittier and Wendell Phillips and an appendix compiled by Gilbert Haven, whose involvement with the book spanned nearly a twenty-year period.<sup>68</sup> Staged in part as a historical artifact, a reflection back to a time when slavery had not yet been outlawed, the edition served (say the publishers, in a publishers' preface) as a reminder to generations fast forgetting that slavery ever existed that the time was not so far gone. The introduction also laments the fact that none of those writing or reading would be likely to see Henson (by this time, an old man) alive again. The Russell edition includes much of the new material from Lobb. Also appended are separate chapters describing Henson's meeting with Queen Victoria at Windsor Castle and a visit he made back to Maryland to see his old living quarters and to visit his mother's grave.

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<sup>65</sup> Although John and Henry Jewett published advertisements that linked Henson with Tom, no mention of the association appears in the 1858 edition. For an example of such an advertisement, see "The Real 'Uncle Tom.'"

<sup>66</sup> Lobb claimed it was 12 languages. Seven different translations of the text are listed in WorldCat.

<sup>67</sup> Scholars are skeptical about this attribution. See Winks, "Introduction."

<sup>68</sup> Lloyd Pratt writes that B.B. Russell was a publishing firm that "specialized in biographies of antebellum abolitionists, American presidents, and other prominent figures of the Gilded Age, along with a smattering of nostalgic books about old-time New England, but which avoided tackling more current reforms" (399).

An 1881 edition edited by Lobb and published in London, Ontario—the first Canadian edition—is both the most extensive and the most heterogeneous edition, in terms of original content. It includes the introductory notes by Whittier and Phillips, Stowe’s 1858 preface, a segment of Lobb’s introduction from earlier editions, parts of the text from the Boston 1879 edition, a new conclusion, possibly written by Lobb, Haven’s appendix, Lobb’s earlier appendix of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s biography, and the list of Henson’s speaking engagements, with additional information taken from newspapers describing Henson’s visits to Scotland (an extended version of which had appeared in a separate pamphlet, issued by Glasgow publisher George Gallie & Son, in 1877). Lobb also included in this 1881 edition a description of Windsor Castle that differs from the Russell chapter, taken from a newspaper, even as he retained from the Russell edition the description of Henson’s visit to Maryland.

The final nineteenth-century edition of the narrative was published by Lobb in 1890. Much of the introductory material, including the Whittier and Phillips notes, was absent from this edition, but the new conclusion contained a description of Henson’s illness, death, and burial, drawn from a letter Lobb had received from Henson’s wife after his death. Perhaps in an effort to adhere to the finality of the death in the last chapter, the 1890 edition omits both appendices and the advertisements and list of public services that had appeared in previous editions, moving from a final note about surviving family to the blankness of the endpapers.

As this brief description implies, a series of revisions occurred across these editions as they splintered into an increasing number of chapters. The title alone is

revealing: from “Life” to “Story” to “Autobiography,” in the later editions changing slightly (1876, 1879, 1881, 1883) to reflect updates, and moving from a story of “Josiah Henson” to one of “Uncle Tom,” the very generic, temporal, and ontological ground of the narrative shifts.<sup>69</sup> All of the editions begin with an introduction to slavery rooted in the graphic description of injury to Henson’s father. The violence of this scene resonates perhaps more heavily in its stability across versions of the story, the significance of torture and the depiction of violence seemingly persistent despite the absence of the pre-war antislavery reform occasion, and despite the general instability of the story itself, which changes significantly over the years.

A great deal of additional detail and exposition is added to editions after 1858. Perhaps the most obvious change, other than size, is that of the stated goal of the narrative. Henson’s plan for publishing his narrative appears in different forms at the conclusion of each of the antebellum editions. Eliot in the introductory “Advertisement” to the 1849 narrative hopes that the story “will be found fruitful in instruction by those who attentively consider its lessons” (iv). This moralistic effort, which resonates with appeals to the reader throughout, culminates in the conclusion with a note that Henson has decided not to “indulge” an inclination to “particulars,” but rather to conclude “simply” by

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<sup>69</sup> Titles are as follows: *The Life of Josiah Henson: Formerly a Slave, Now an Inhabitant of Canada, as narrated by himself*. (1849), *The Life of Josiah Henson: Formerly a Slave, as narrated by himself* (1851), *Truth Stranger than Fiction: Father Henson's story of his own life* (1858), *"Uncle Tom's Story of His Life." An Autobiography of the Rev. Josiah Henson (Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Uncle Tom"). From 1789-1876*. (1876), *The young people's illustrated edition of "Uncle Tom's" story of his life (from 1789 to 1877)* (1877), *"Truth is stranger than fiction.": An autobiography of the Rev. Josiah Henson (Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Uncle Tom") from 1789 to 1879* (1879), *An Autobiography of the Rev. Josiah Henson ("Uncle Tom") from 1789 to 1881* (1881), *The autobiography of the Rev. Josiah Henson (Uncle Tom), from 1789 to 1883* (1890).

recording my gratitude, heartfelt and inexpressible, to God, and to many of my fellow-men, for the vast improvement in my condition, both physical and mental; for the great degree of comfort with which I am surrounded; for the good I have been enabled to effect; for the light which has risen upon me; for the religious privileges I enjoy, and the religious hopes I am permitted to cherish; for the prospects opening to my children so different from what they might have been; and, finally, for the cheering expectation of benefiting not only the present, but many future generations of my race. (76)

This statement moves the close of the narrative carefully from past to future and from secular to religious, beginning with gratitude for what has been achieved—secular “comfort,” to communal “good,” to spiritual “light” and “religious privileges”—and concluding with future-facing “hopes,” “prospects,” and “expectation.” This vision of future generations is consistent with Henson’s preoccupations at the time: a note in the 1876 edition describes Eliot’s introduction to Henson in the context of raising money for Dawn, and such efforts match the ways the narrative was constructed in later antebellum editions.<sup>70</sup>

Issued in conjunction with Henson’s journey to the World’s Fair, in the 1851 London edition production immediately assumes a more overtly financial aspect. Binney’s “Preface to the English Edition” concludes with a description of Henson’s attendance at a meeting at Weigh-House Chapel in London, citing the passage by the meeting of a resolution tendering an “expression of its Christian sympathy” and an “extemporaneous collection” of funds (vi). The preface appeals to a “religious and philanthropic public,” asking “its giving to Josiah Henson a kindly welcome, and promoting the object he has in view by some pecuniary gift” (v). Appended to the

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<sup>70</sup> Eliot and Lawrence financed many of Henson’s activities, which likely included the narrative. See Winks, *Blacks in Canada*.

conclusion drawn from the 1849 edition is a postscript, specifying this object and acknowledging it as one of both financial and moral value:

P.S.—Having devoted my time and attention, as well as so much of my worldly substance as I could spare, to the well-being of my suffering fellow countrymen, there yet remains one other object dear to my heart, which I am anxious to see accomplished. It has been a matter of grief to me, when I have seen in our various meetings several hundreds congregated together, amongst whom scarcely a single individual could read a single syllable; and I have, therefore, resolved to use every effort to obtain for them the blessings of education. We have now established at Dawn, Upper Canada, schools of instruction, which greatly need assistance, and it is intended that any profits arising from this publication shall go to the support of this worthy object. (96)

Alluding to the Institute at Dawn, the narrative makes a specific claim for its own purchase as a means of facilitating Henson's efforts to benefit a broader collective. Not just the reading, here, but also the purchase of the narrative becomes an act of philanthropy and reform for an English public, and their support is for a community not in the United States, but outside of it, in British territory.<sup>71</sup> Unlike the Boston edition, which treads carefully and in terms of spirituality and abstraction, this text reflects a specific goal—the construction and maintenance of schools of instruction in Dawn—and the more direct financial relationship developing between Dawn and English sponsors.

In the Jewett edition from 1858, preface and text diverge slightly. Stowe, in the prefatory material, notes that Henson is selling the narrative in an effort to free his brother from slavery. Among the expansions of the 1858 edition is a final chapter detailing the development of the community in Dawn, parts of which had appeared in the

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<sup>71</sup> English involvement with Dawn was fairly robust over the years of Henson's association with the community, and was also one cause of its downfall, when the administration and prejudice of John Scoble, a British anti-slavery advocate, began to provoke critiques of the project. See Winks, *Blacks in Canada*, as well as the *Provincial Freeman* from this time (in which editor Mary Ann Shadd Cary was critical of Henson).

1851 edition as an appendix. Henson concludes his 1858 account with the following: “My task is done, if what I have written shall inspire a deeper interest in my race, and shall lead to corresponding activity in their behalf I shall feel amply repaid” (212). This “corresponding activity,” framed in concrete terms in Stowe’s preface, rearticulates the project of the narrative in accordance with a new, more local goal, one specific to Henson (and one that responds to and seeks to affect conditions within the U.S., unlike the bids for assistance for Dawn).

The project continued to evolve after the Civil War. In the preface to his much later *Talks with the Dead*, Lobb relates his initial acquaintance with Henson as a product of British abolitionists’ desire to raise money for Henson to pay a series of mortgages that he had incurred as a result of a Dawn-related lawsuit in Canada. Though ostensibly part or product of the same effort, the Lobb editions of the 1870s do not mention an explicit financial motive, instead calling upon the reader to honor the inspiration for Stowe’s novel by purchasing the new production. By 1879, the narrative had been repurposed yet again, this time with greater specificity on the Boston side: in the B. B. Russell edition, both Whittier, in his introductory letter, and the publishers in their preface note that proceeds are intended by Henson to be used as funds for erecting a meeting-house in Dresden, Canada, near the old site of Dawn.<sup>72</sup>

When Lobb incorporated Harriet Beecher Stowe’s 1858 preface into his 1877 edition, he omitted both the date of her comments and the final paragraph where Stowe

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<sup>72</sup> This is also cited as the goal of the narrative in a letter from Eben Tourjée to William Lloyd Garrison, asking Garrison to contribute a note for the 1879 edition.

writes that the purpose of the narrative is to gain money to liberate Henson's brother. This goal resurfaces, however, in a chapter of the narrative, where Henson notes that the sale of the narrative enabled him to liberate his brother. Henson's narrative accumulates, self-referentially, across editions, picking up and appending stories of itself succeeding in the goals set out for it, making an implicit argument for why readers should continue to patronize and support Henson through the purchase of new editions. Lobb manipulates the temporality of the narrative in his editions, the absence of the date—only conspicuous after a look at the 1858 version of the preface—pointing to an effort to refresh Stowe's note as a product of the present day. Lobb also includes an excerpt from the introduction to the 1851 London edition in the advertisements section at the back of the narrative, adding famous abolitionist and minister Thomas Binney's voice to the chorus. Such efforts, combined with the self-referentiality of the narrative, wrinkle the time of its evolution, creating through republication a resurrection or a perpetual present, even as the goals and the contexts of the narrative change according to Henson's needs and the perceived expectations of different readers.

The wrinkles extend further into the material reproduction: the B.B. Russell Boston edition of 1879 mimics almost exactly the format of Jewett's 1858 Boston edition. Several pages are printed from the same plates used in 1858, though the Russell edition includes the chapters added to the Lobb edition and part of the list of public services that Lobb appended. Lobb's 1881 edition incorporates the introductory notes by Phillips and Whittier that show up first in the Russell edition, including the appeal by Whittier for funds to support Henson's meeting house in Dresden. These revisions imply

that the publication of the narrative became a transatlantic dialogue. There is a material consistency across the editions printed in Boston before and after the Civil War, in format, intervention by Gilbert Haven, and production plates. The exchange of portions of the narrative between Boston and London at the end of the century also demonstrates each firm's awareness of previous productions. Claims to ownership factor in: new copyright claims are made for each edition. The Lobb edition contains in-text assertions by Lobb of copyright bestowed upon him by Henson (omitted from the Russell edition, which claims copyright for the publishing company), and Lobb's own co-optation of the Russell introductions from Whittier and Phillips, with dates removed, does not acknowledge any earlier edition as source for them.

What role did Henson play in all this? As early as the first edition, authorship becomes difficult to track, and the question is complicated further by the fact that editors' descriptions of Henson's involvement refract Henson's position as "author" through underlying cultural and racial assumptions about black textual authority or subjectivity. Early assertions of the book's accuracy were consistent with the rhetoric of other abolitionist texts at the time.<sup>73</sup> In an introductory note to the first (1849) edition, Eliot stated of the narrative that "The substance of it, therefore, the facts, the reflections, and very often the words, are [Henson's]; and little more than the structure of the sentences

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<sup>73</sup> See, for instance, *American Slavery as it Is*, in which Weld invokes a legalistic rhetoric of evidence and accuracy to make his case. Many fugitive slave narratives included assertions of accuracy, either in the text or the introductory material: for the most well-known of these, see William Lloyd Garrison's preface to Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* ("I am confident that it is essentially true in all its statements...nothing exaggerated, nothing drawn from the imagination" (xiv)), or David Wilson's preface to Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave* ("That he has adhered strictly to the truth the editor, at least...is well satisfied" (xv)).



belongs to another” (iii). Eliot wrote that his rendition was read back to Henson, so he could confirm the details, and claimed that “the story has this advantage, that it is not fiction, but fact.” The next major expansion, by Jewett in 1858, incorporated the Eliot text, despite Jewett’s claims never to have seen an earlier edition. In the 1883 interview, Jewett stated that “I was obliged to write about one-quarter of the book myself,” and that the other parts had been composed by Gilbert Haven and another clergyman from Massachusetts (likely Eliot). Jewett told the interviewer that Henson was illiterate and that he “had not sufficient mental capacity to dictate a continuous narrative,” suggesting that the narrative was composed largely by the white amanuenses from “hints” given by Henson (28). But Jewett’s interview also demonstrates Henson’s involvement and interest in the production of the book. Jewett said that, after the first bit of the narrative was written, Henson “induced” Haven to take on the project, and after Haven had to leave for New York because his father was ill, Henson approached Jewett “in a peck of trouble” (28). Jewett took on the remaining part of the narrative, “not an easy job, for it required not a little patience to make a connected story out of Father Hensen’s [sic] jumbled and incoherent talk” (29).

The disconnect between a Henson whose force of will managed to get a new edition of his narrative published by Stowe’s publisher after orchestrating the assistance of three white men and the mumbling, incoherent Henson of Jewett’s description is a sizeable one, and in this gap authorship is renegotiated, Jewett laying claim to the writing even as he dismisses Henson’s authorial capacity. The interviewer, struck by Jewett’s representation of the narrative’s collaborative composition, asks a logical follow-up

question: “Did the three parts of ‘Father Henson’s Life’ match?” To which Jewett responded:

Wonderfully well. No one seemed to perceive that they were by different hands. And I never saw any comment which suggested any difference of style or treatment in different portions of the book. (29)

In this exchange, the joint authorship of the narrative is effectively concealed, overwriting both the specific and embattled terms of Henson’s involvement and the racism that informs Jewett’s representation of the transcription and publication process. The interview continues on to a discussion of the publication of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and Jewett prides himself for his abolitionist leanings and his adept handling of and willingness to publish Stowe’s narrative (29-30). If the pre-war goal was to cast Henson’s narrative as explicitly *his* story, within abolitionist terms of accuracy, Jewett backtracks from this reformist goal in the post-war period, emphasizing his own work in connection with the publication.

This is only one instance of editorial intervention that affects both the narrative and the story of its publication: later editions would reflect the priorities of British editor John Lobb, who introduced descriptions of Henson’s transfer of the copyright to him, and who staged the association with Stowe largely in his own terms. But an 1879 letter from Eben Tourjée to William Lloyd Garrison, soliciting a contribution from Garrison to the introductory material for the 1879 edition (one that Garrison apparently decided not to provide) suggests that Henson was continuing to orchestrate the publication of his narrative after the war in the same way that he had with Jewett. Tourjée writes that:

By request of the Rev. Josiah Henson, the once-fugitive slave, who has spent his

long life of nearly a century in active labor for his race, and who is anxious to do them a final service by building a substantial church for the colored people of his home, Dresden, Canada, I have consented to re-publish his Autobiography, to advertise it, and to do all that may be possible to bring its receipts up to the required sum.

In what terms, then, are we to consider the relationship between Josiah Henson, his publishers, his printers, his readers, and his narrative? The revisions indicate that such relationships were not static—the recasting of the narrative was the product of relationships ranging from local to international. Publication histories suggest Henson’s determination to get new editions produced, even as his editors and publishers sought to change the terms of his authorship and his agency in interviews and discussions of the production process. Still, the narrative is recast to respond to new needs and new contexts, extending a series of pleas to its readers based on Henson’s situation at the time and with reference to reform as it pertains to the specific place of publication. Readers in England are encouraged to donate money to a cause in Canada, while readers in the antebellum U.S. are approached gently and indirectly, the narrative framed as an effort to inform rather than persuade.

Scholars have introduced us to some of the characteristics of slave narratives, and Henson’s narrative fits many of these, to be sure.<sup>74</sup> Like the “unfinished stories” that critic Ann Fabian describes, Henson’s 1849 narrative “made good literature for a political movement,” because it, with other narratives, “encouraged those who heard and read them to take action to complete the tales” (85). The remaking and the narrativizing of self

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<sup>74</sup> Some of these characteristics include structural features, like beginning with a birth date, the “murky area of authorial collaboration,” and introductory assertions of reliability. For representative discussions of slave narratives, see Foster, Gates, Starling, and Fabian.

that Fabian describes, however, as well as the call to publics to act, acquire for themselves a narrative in the revision process. The participatory role or the responsibility for action projected on to audiences is apparent in each of the editions, but it also changes, as the narrative is published in different places, for different purposes, and for different audiences. The completion of the tale was a moving target, as was the particular set of political and cultural circumstances it responded to. This unfinishedness was a perpetual state for Henson's narrative, resurrected with the emergence of each new "enlarged," "revised," "expanded," or "authoritative" iteration. If antebellum editions deployed reform rhetoric, playing to the spiritual desires and sentimental identifications of U.S. readers and the national affiliations of readers in England, postbellum editions of the narrative began to cultivate connections to a transnational phenomenon: the massive popularity of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

#### **HENSON AND HARRIET BEECHER STOWE**

Much of the literary critical interest in Josiah Henson has focused on his possible influence on Stowe's bestseller, which was first serialized in the *National Era* from 1851 to 1852, then published in two volumes by Jewett.<sup>75</sup> After its publication, in light of its

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<sup>75</sup> Winship writes that "As a serial, the novel attracted considerable attention, but it was only when it was published as a book that it would truly take off" ("Uncle Tom's Cabin"). As previously noted, the book was published on 20 March 1852. By mid-April, 1852, Jewett announced that two printings of 5,000 each had been exhausted, and said that "Three paper mills are constantly at work, manufacturing the paper, and three power presses are working twenty-four hours per day, in printing it, and more than one hundred book-binders are incessantly plying their trade to bind them, and still it has been impossible, as yet, to supply the demand" (Winship, "Uncle Tom's Cabin"). More than a million copies were reported to be sold in England by the end of 1852. After the initial surge, sales slowed for the next three decades, but picked up between 1886 and 1890, when the novel "again achieved broad popular appeal." During that time "Houghton, Mifflin & Co. sold a total of 109,495 copies and paid Stowe \$13,324.50 in royalties."

popularity and its potential to act as ammunition for the antislavery cause, readers questioned the accuracy of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In response, in 1853, Stowe wrote and Jewett published a *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which included excerpts from and a summary of Henson's 1849 narrative, and one reference to Henson as an example of a "parallel" to the character of Uncle Tom.<sup>76</sup> The association caught on. Many years later, in 1882, an embattled Stowe would declare in a letter reprinted in the New York *Sun* that although "the character of Uncle Tom was not the biography of any one man," she had encountered Henson's narrative in the "Anti-slavery Rooms in Boston" while writing her novel and had "introduced some of its most striking incidents into my story" ("Uncle Tom a Myth"). Stowe concluded the letter dismissively: "So much in reply to your inquiries. I trust this plain statement may prevent my answering any more letters on this subject." Jewett, in the 1883 *Manhattan* interview, dismissed the letter, stating that Stowe's memory had deceived her and declaring incorrectly that "When 'Uncle Tom' was published, the 'Life of Hensen' had not only not been printed, it had not been written" (28).

As Dawn faded to an inglorious close soon after the Civil War, Henson's associative identity began to take shape, a legacy that would last into the twenty-first century. Subsequent editions of his narrative and advertisements for his speaking engagements exploited the relationship and the desires of audiences in England to see

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<sup>76</sup> Stowe's *Key* included some embellishment of both Henson's descriptions of his conversion to Christianity and his illiteracy. Starling postulates that Stowe may have encountered a review of Henson and several other narratives, rather than Henson's narrative itself.

Uncle Tom alive and in person, with frequent reference to the *Key*.<sup>77</sup>

The association of Henson with Uncle Tom must have begun in earnest soon after the *Key* was published. It produced one response in the form of a letter by Martin Delany, published in *Frederick Douglass's Paper* in 1853, in which Delany argued that Jewett should pay Henson a portion of the vast proceeds from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in return for the “living testimony” used in the novel. By 1858, when Jewett issued the Boston edition of the narrative, the story was set. In a speech record from an 1858 Convention of Colored Citizens in Massachusetts, the reporter acknowledged the association in a way that seems to indicate it must have been common knowledge to his audience, noting that “Rev. Josiah Henson, of Canada, ‘Uncle Tom,’ took the platform.” The introductory comments at the convention make the association explicit: “A fervent prayer was then offered by Rev. Josiah Henson, of Canada, ‘Uncle Tom,’ as he is generally known, being said to be the ‘original’ in Mrs. Stowe’s novel.” Cast in terms of print reproduction, Henson is repeatedly invoked as the prototype for a fictional hero.

Like Delany, some later constructions would describe the association in terms of theft. Perhaps the most notable recent example of this characterization is Ishmael Reed’s novel *Flight to Canada*, a revisionary take on *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that begins with a chapter titled “Naughty Harriet.” Nineteenth-century readers offered other interpretations of the relationship between Stowe and Henson. A review included by Lobb in his

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<sup>77</sup> Stowe never conclusively confirmed nor denied these associations, claiming different degrees of influence at different times over the years. The letter reprinted in the *Sun* is the closest she comes to a definitive claim. The interview in *The Manhattan* notes the confusion between Stowe’s letter and Jewett’s assertions that she was mistaken: “Mrs. Stowe has recently shown that she is a very unsafe guide in the case.” The process continues: the historical site currently situated on the land that used to be Dawn, now called Uncle Tom’s Museum, is credited with being the one-time home of Uncle Tom.

editorial note at the beginning of the 1877 edition of Henson's narrative offers a good early example, as it moves from a discussion of the wood on display at the World's Fair to Henson's narrative:

It bore the inscription, 'This is the produce of the industry of a fugitive slave from the United States, whose residence is Dawn, Canada.' In the autobiography of that fugitive slave, first published at Boston a couple of years before, republished in this country in the very year of the Exhibition, and of which the latest recast is now before us in its thirtieth thousand, after a career of six weeks, lay the germ of that remarkable work of fiction, the circulation of which has been exceeded by that of no book save the Bible. (10)

In this comment the reviewer constructs the relation of Henson's narrative to Stowe's novel as that of "germ" to final product, a "remarkable work of fiction." The "germ" bears the implication of both its influence on the content of the narrative and the structural similarity: the remarkable sale and distribution of the "latest recast" of Henson's narrative echoes the unprecedented popularity and rapid, transatlantic circulation of Stowe's novel.

As these accounts indicate, the relationship between Henson's narrative and Stowe's novel is complex, in part as a product of the power structures that affected authorship and publication in reform circles in the antebellum U.S., and in part because of the material overlap that the perception created. Strands cross, and if Henson inflected Stowe's tale and made an appearance in the *Key*, Stowe also infiltrated later editions of Henson's autobiography, coming to make a visual appearance as a co-frontispiece in an 1882 edition. A brief version of her own biography joins that of Henson in the appendices, beginning in 1876, and all the manifestations of the narrative after that time betray some graphic or textual reference to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Critics remain divided in their representations of the relation between Stowe and Henson, from Eric Sundquist's reference to the claim as both orchestrated by Henson and "dubious" to Joan Hedrick's endorsement of it as "well known," if the subject of debate. Historian Robin Winks, in the course of his work on Henson's activities in Canada, concluded that it was unlikely that Henson and Stowe were in contact during the composition of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, as both were later to claim. Robert Stepto argues that Henson's was only one of several narratives that Stowe drew on for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but establishes a useful framework of direct and indirect discourse, arguing that the intertextual relationships between Stowe and Solomon Northup and Frederick Douglass, in particular, were more complicated than mere linear influence or appropriation. Marion Starling argues that Stowe encountered Henson's narrative in the form of an extended review by a Reverend Ephraim Peabody, which appeared in the *Christian Examiner* in July 1849. Recent work by David Reynolds points to the lack of resolution: he notes in a discussion of Henson and other slave narratives that may have influenced Stowe that "Few issues remain as nebulous as the relationship between *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and these works" (103).

Late editions of Henson's narrative, edited by Lobb, depend heavily for their marketing strategy on an association between Henson and Uncle Tom. And in a chapter in the 1877 edition, possibly added by Lobb, Henson the narrator links characters in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to acquaintances in his own life. The strange climate of surrogation that ensued led to a spectacular display of push and pull, particularly during Henson's speaking engagements on an 1876 and 1877 tour in England and Scotland, between



introducers' efforts to cater to what Marcus Wood calls "the intense public desire to see Tom rise in flesh and blood from the page, to have the 'state of vision' become corporeal" and Henson's own response and occasional resistance to such a desire, which can be seen in the records of the events (195). Introduced in a series of speeches as Uncle Tom, Henson grows indignant: "My name is Josiah Henson," he says, "always was, and always will be." But as Winks points out in relation to the later editions of Henson's narrative, what Henson did not say explicitly or argued against within the quotation marks, Lobb (and other interlocutors) said decisively for him outside of them. Such associations were not without their cachet, nor their economic benefits. Lobb's ongoing production of texts having to do with Henson, even after the latter's death, and the legitimacy Henson lent to him (Lobb and Henson went together to meet the Queen), underwrite such claims as the following, from Lobb's *Talks with the Dead*: "Within seven months, by lectures and preaching sermons, [Lobb] raised for [Henson] upwards of £2,000. He edited the story of Mr. Henson's life, which also contained a preface by the Right Hon. The Earl of Shaftesbury K.G. Within six weeks upwards of 30,000 copies were sold. Subsequently the book was translated into twelve languages. A quarter of a million have been sold" (*Talks* xix). Though this number of sales is self-reported, the volumes must have sold well, based on the crowds that came to see Henson speak and other sources that cited the financial repercussions.<sup>78</sup> *The Literary World*, for instance, noted in 1877: "We see...that as an acknowledgment of the services rendered by Mr.

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<sup>78</sup> Winks reports that sales of the narrative reached 96,000 by 1878. He goes on to write that "Lobb's narrative of his life sold a quarter of a million copies and became a Sunday School favorite" (Introduction xxiv). It is unclear whether this is a reference just to the *The Young People's Illustrated Edition of "Uncle Tom's" Story of his Life*, or to the editions of the narrative more generally.

Lobb, in arranging and presiding over various meetings which he has attended, Mr. Henson has made over to him the sole copyright of this autobiography, which certainly must represent a very handsome remuneration.”

If representations of Henson as capitalizing on the fame of his association with Stowe are simplistic, as the editions of his narrative, the association with Lobb, and the evidence in his speeches indicate they might be, conceptualizing the relationship between Stowe and Henson as Delany, Reed, and others have, in terms of theft, may also bear reconsidering. A broader conversation about accuracy in relation to slave narratives is at work in the early editions, as Fabian has pointed out in relation to antebellum narratives. Authentication often depended on both the “living proof” of the body of the fugitive slave and the “unvarnished,” spoken story itself. Samuel Eliot’s assertion that Henson’s narrative was factual, despite the fact that the writing was his, points in this direction, as do later testimonials described in relation to Henson as speaker, particularly in response to questions about his role as a representative of Dawn. Henson’s accounts in his speeches were also held up against the account in his narratives, and he was interrogated about specific names, which at least in one post-war instance, he provided.<sup>79</sup>

But the conditions and the stakes of provability changed after the war. Henson

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<sup>79</sup> In a speech in Glasgow, Scotland, on Friday, April 20, 1877, Henson told the story of a Scottish man he had encountered during his escape from slavery. “I don’t say this,” he said, “because I am among Scotch people now. I have written this some thirty-seven years ago, and you will find it in the history of my life written then; so I am not making a speculation of it now” (12). After Henson finished speaking, a Rev. Dr. Alex Wallace was called upon to speak. Wallace, after a series of introductory remarks, said: “There are a few things I would like to know in connection with our friend. I would like to know the name of the Scotchman who was the one to give him the last push, after a terrible struggle for liberty, into the land of freedom” (20). Wallace then went on to recapitulate the segments of Henson’s narrative that describe his meeting with the Scotchman. Henson, after Wallace finished, responded that: “the name of the Scotchman who had so much befriended him in his efforts to reach Canada, was, to the best of his recollection, John Burns on Burnet...” (24).

faced an unusual circumstance in his assertions of veracity: as the century progressed, he was held not to the standard of his own self-consistency, but rather to that of a fictional character. The “living proof” became the incarnation of a popular figure. Speaking as much to the possibility of living fiction as to the wrongs of slavery, Henson’s body existed in a strange defiance, alive when the character mapped onto it was dead, at once proof and contestation of the intersection of real and fictional worlds. Complicit or not in the association of himself with Stowe’s famous novel, Henson found himself with the challenges once removed. He could call the novel a novel, claim only correspondence to his own narrative, and thereby evade more pressing interrogations. In a speech in Scotland in 1877, for instance, Henson pushed back against a public perception that his claim to the identity of “Uncle Tom” is an imposition on his audience: “Now allow me to say that my name is not Tom, and never was Tom, and that I do not want to have any other name inserted in the newspapers for me than my own.” Doubt is a product of bad reading, and a mistaking of literary genre: “when people have this doubt on their minds it shows me they ain’t well read, or have forgotten what they read, if they have ever read at all. (Laughter.) They have forgotten that Mrs. Stowe’s “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” is a novel” (32).

Fending off both interpellation and critics, Henson faced a different version of the calls for accuracy than other authors of slave narratives, and his response to and awareness of the different demands placed by different genres, and the absurdity of being called to account for a fiction, caused Henson to respond as a literary critic. In this his reaction is markedly different from Lobb’s defenses waged in the introductory materials

of multiple editions of the narrative. In response to skepticism about the association of Henson with Uncle Tom, Lobb pointed to specific pages in the *Key* as incontrovertible evidence of influence. Lobb does attribute what he sees as the key distinction, and what seems to be the key objection—Tom’s death—to artistic license, but he relies more on what he spins as positive proof of association and points of commonality, leaning heavily, for instance, on the association of Henson’s acquaintances with Stowe’s characters (a unique feature of Lobb’s editions).

As this account indicates, the records of Henson’s speeches give a different perspective in many particulars than the narrative itself, creating a richer and more multi-dimensional image of his work, his relationship to the publication of his narrative, and his association with Uncle Tom. If Jewett, in his discussions of Henson’s participation in the creation of the narrative, and Stowe and others in their representations of his relation to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* cast Henson as a passive figure, Henson’s speeches suggest otherwise. When it came to black authors in the U.S., authorship was imagined differently in relation to speech and in relation to print, and the distinction between speaker and author could be an important one. Henson’s use of the occasion of speech events to resist the impositions of cultural and racial assumptions that had framed the story of his relationship to print is comparable to the tactics of Sojourner Truth, who as I discuss in chapter 4 also used her power as a speaker to effect revisions in the printed representations of her words.

Challenges by audiences torn between their skepticism and their desire to see the incarnation of the fictional character produce a two-part structure of authenticity for

Henson, who, in alluding to the ridiculousness of the expectation that fiction could become reality, turns the questions back on the audiences themselves. The rapid circulation of Henson's narrative at the height of his association with Stowe's character indicates the success of the appeal, and the way that the marketing of the narrative at Henson's public performances capitalized on the performances themselves, casting the narrative as souvenir and record of a singular appearance. During one speech in Scotland, Henson vied with his narrative for precedence, even as he leaned on it for profit. One introducer retold a story Henson himself related in a speech based on the account in the narrative. After Henson finished his speech, the introducer, Maxwell, rose to say the following: "Our friend has referred to his own life, an account of which I hold in my hand—and I advise every one of you to get it, for you will read it with thrilling interest—our friend has referred to his own life, and I may be pardoned if I should do the same" (18). Brandishing the narrative, Maxwell went on, casting the speech as a limited event that could be, as he put it, "amplified" with the purchase of the text: "Let me urge you, however, to buy his book, and so have amplified the account of his life which you have just been hearing" (34). In this moment of overlap, Henson's story, as he speaks it, and his ventriloquized narrative, combine in a single event. Maxwell's final sales pitch blurs the activity of the audience in listening, his own participation in making Henson's story audible, and the purchase of the narrative. The "amplification" of the account the audience has been "hearing" can be accomplished through the purchase of the text, here rendered as speech surrogate, and a projection of the kind of "referring" that Maxwell himself has done as supplement and recreation of Henson's story.

Fabian argues that one dynamic of the slave narrative was the fact that it was designed to accompany the fugitive slave on the lecture circuit, the venue for the slave to perform what Fabian calls a “conversion to honesty” after the deceit often required to escape from slavery (86). Henson’s story, like those of other fugitive slaves, spoke two ways: toward the past, as a record of Henson’s personal history and a souvenir of the particular speech event, and toward the future, which for Henson in lecture circuits after the Civil War was aimed at raising funds for a variety of purposes, including the support of his own family and the retroactive expenses of Dawn. But a conversion to honesty was no longer necessary, after the war. Rather, Henson had once again to convert authenticity to provisionality, constructing himself as an important historical figure and contending with the ever looming figure of Uncle Tom.

But he walked a fine line. Skeptical or not of this connection, descriptions of audiences demonstrate the appeal of Henson as Uncle Tom, an appeal affected by the immense popularity of Stowe’s novel in England.<sup>80</sup> Near the end of Lobb’s 1877 edition is a list of Henson’s speaking engagements, titled “Summary of Public Services.” Nearly all of them describe a massive audience. The summaries create images of “a congregation exceeding 2,000 persons,” venues “crowded beyond the capacity of the place,” and notes like “the place of meeting was thronged.” Specific places, combined with the specificity

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<sup>80</sup> Sales in England were estimated to reach a million and a half in the first year of publication, more than in the U.S. The popularity was aided by a series of fugitive slaves who went on lecture tours in England in the antebellum period, including Frederick Douglass, whose 1845-1847 tour increased substantially his celebrity as an anti-slavery speaker in both England and the U.S. William Wells Brown and William and Ellen Craft were there on tours in 1850 and 1851, in the course of which they attended (and staged a protest at) the World’s Fair. Stowe herself went on a tour in England in 1853, where she encountered “increasingly large and hysterical crowds” (Blake 30). At the height of the novel’s popularity, Fisch writes that Victorian consumption of Uncle Tom “in his various commercial forms” was “nearly universal” (14).

of the audiences, ground the descriptions as events, circumscribing them in print as moments in time and space: “*Mayfield Terrace* Wesleyan Chapel on Sunday was, though large and commodious, filled to overflowing.” Rooted in particular places, the summaries allow readers to track Henson’s movement across England. Visions of excess lurk in the descriptions of the crowds, sometimes taking on a menacing tone. One venue was “crowded to overflowing. Hundreds, failing to get into the chapel, which accommodates 2,000 persons, crowded into the excellent schoolroom.” In another, “This large and beautiful house of prayer was crowded, and besieged by anxious hundreds unable to enter.” The crowds imply the celebrity culture that developed around Henson, whose initial appearance as ‘Uncle Tom,’ both in the assumption that the audience would be familiar with this association and in the quotation marks that qualify it, signal a field of reference or a materialization of the public desire that Wood describes.<sup>81</sup> The rhythm of these summaries of speaking events is palpable in the reading, the structure repeating the formula of place, audience, and, in almost every entry, the obligatory, quotation-marked ‘Uncle Tom.’ Spilling outside of physical spaces, the crowds are invoked as ostensibly a sign of Henson’s popularity—but also of his “public services,” his efforts to cater to the massive presences that embody a joint public for him and for Stowe’s novel, and that actively interpret him in relation to the fictional character.

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<sup>81</sup> The popularity of Stowe’s novel had produced a situation where Stowe’s own characters were out of her control, as she discovered when she sued a Philadelphia publisher who had published a German translation of the novel in his newspaper. Stowe lost the case, and in *Stowe v. Thomas*, presiding Justice Robert Grier wrote that the characters of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* “have become as much public property as those of Homer or Cervantes” (Homestead 105). For a discussion of Stowe’s suit in relation to literary property more broadly, see Homestead, 105-149. Scholars have also argued that the creation of a vast array of artifacts and “Uncle Tomitudes” related to the book abstracted the characters from their original anti-slavery context, particularly in England: Fisch writes that “Uncle Tom became an icon and, ironically, an icon detached from his original, political meaning” (101).

These descriptions also give accounts of the effect of Henson's appearances on his audiences. One account noted that "This neighborhood has been rarely moved with an excitement like that which followed 'Uncle Tom's visit.'" From another, a conversion tale of sorts: "All present were deeply affected, and three resolved to give their hearts to God." Henson was credited on a few occasions with "moving his listeners to tears." Such responses were sometimes tuned to a sense of the finality of Henson's visit: "As the time for his departure draws near, the enthusiasm caused by his stirring narratives grows stronger." Coming after the abolition of slavery in both England and the United States, these emotional responses seem associated with a sense of piety as well as the sympathy that drove abolitionist identification in the antebellum period. By this time Henson had experience speaking in front of audiences: he had raised funds to buy his freedom by preaching while he was a slave and he continued to preach in Canada after he escaped. His narrative also describes his lectures to fugitives in Canada "on the subject of crops, wages, and profits" (66). The descriptions of responses to his later speeches reflect a reaction to Henson's own individual religious dedication, but they also reflect a hailing of him as the prototype or the original for a (foreign) fictional character. The resonance of this response with demonstrations of Christian piety, consistent with descriptions of the reception of Stowe's novel in England, seems to derive from more than the effect of Henson's skill as a preacher: Henson, as a result of his association with Uncle Tom, is paradoxically made a *living* martyr.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> For a discussion of the ways *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was used to shore up British identity, see Fisch. Ernest draws attention to the following quote, from a newspaper description of Henson's visit to the Queen printed in the 1881 London, Ont. edition: "Windsor welcomed a visitor yesterday around whose name and history



The description of Henson's official farewell meeting at Spurgeon's Great Metropolitan Tabernacle presents one example, reminiscent of Jewett's description, of how the terms of authorship were interpreted for Henson:

Nearly 6,000 persons were present. The *Times* report was, that the Metropolitan Tabernacle was filled, floor and both galleries alike, with a meeting brought together to take a farewell, on his approaching return to Canada, of the Rev. Josiah Henson, whose identity with Mrs. H. B. Stowe's 'Uncle Tom,' on the strength of her own testimony in the 'Key' to her great work, is a scarcely disputed article of faith, especially in the religious and philanthropic world."

Mr. Henson spoke with great freedom and effect for upwards of an hour; and to the delight of the audience sang the following verses:--

#### SLAVES' PARTING HYMN

This hymn was composed by 'Uncle Tom,' and was sung by many thousands of slaves when severed through being bought, sold, and separated by cruel masters. The composition is printed as it was originally sung, without any attempt to adapt it to modern taste, and irrespective of any grammatical or poetical errors."

The audience then sang the following hymn with great fervor:--

#### PARTING WORDS.

Specially composed for the occasion by Rev. G. Hunt Jackson, author of "*The Sculptor, and other Poems.*"

Here the process of composition is dialogic, as well as its spoken enactment at the event. Print plays a complementary role to its culmination in performance at Spurgeon's Tabernacle—one might even say that the reporter retreats to print, as the description references the *Times* report and casts Stowe's *Key* as the evidentiary basis for an association that is presented as a "scarcely disputed article of faith." The occasional

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clusters an exceptional interest. He has done nothing, in the ordinary meaning of the phrase, to win fame. He has produced no work of genius, performed no feat of statesmanship, discovered no new lands. He has not devastated countries with conquest, or colonised them with venturous enterprise. He has done nothing but suffer" (*Chaotic Justice* 153).

composition of the audience hymn, a direct response to the attribution of the “Slaves’ Parting Hymn” to Henson, marks the occasion. Both songs are printed in full in the report, which is self-reflexive in its printing of the parting hymn “as it was originally sung.” But the composition processes are different. Henson’s hymn is a product of songs sung by slaves, rather than an original composition. G. Hunt Jackson, by contrast, is introduced with his qualifications as an author, and no such qualifications of grammar or printing technique are offered for his “Parting Words.”

The way in which such performances move into print—and their interpretation, as in this case, within the respective and prejudicial parameters of print, speech, and original—is to some degree a product of the fact that the visits are situated in time and so always a repetition in their appearance on the page, even as the question remains of whether Uncle Tom is an echo of Henson, or vice versa. This structure resurfaces in the descriptions of the events themselves. Some occasions declare their boundaries by serving as a reminder, a marker of previous visits. One example of this is visible in the following description: “The interest previously felt in ‘Uncle Tom,’ led to a second visit. The Wesleyan Chapel was crowded, and a delightful meeting held. ‘Uncle Tom’ disbelieved the statement that he had preached in the same chapel twenty-five years before, until the register was shown him with the date, his text, his own autograph, and that of his son Isaac, now in heaven! The revival of his memory gave him much joy” (214). Henson, whose name is removed entirely from this description, is faced with the repetition of his own visit, the crossing of his own path in time, in the form of a written register. And the register bears not only his name, but that of his deceased son; the

spectral nature of this encounter is represented in terms of revival, memory, and emotion, as disbelief becomes for the reporter a display of joy.

Such descriptions refer to Stowe's novel as a matter of course, in cases like the tale of "a delightful 'Uncle Tom' meeting" or the note that "services were conducted by 'Uncle Tom.'" These descriptions abstract Henson, even as the distance between fiction and fact is acknowledged and performed by the quotation marks. But another marker of this distance in the 1877 list of speaking engagements is a sense of the pace of such lecturing tours for Henson, then 88 years old. One account notes in passing of the audience at a tabernacle that "After they had heard 'Uncle Tom' awhile, he would need to rest a few minutes." The physical toll implicit in this note suggests that any public desire to see Uncle Tom "rise in flesh and blood from the page" was both fulfilled and undermined by the physical presence of Henson, who in demonstrating the very human response of getting tired, resisted the urge to abstract, or to remake reality over as fiction.

Perhaps, then, it is not surprising that Henson plays with genre in his speeches, relying on the sound of his words to push back against the impositions that have conflated fictional character and actual man. Speaking of Stowe's publication of the *Key* in response to accusations of fabrication, Henson says, "And so, as she was in duty bound to give something, she, I think in 1853, brought out the 'Key,' between you and she, and in that she spoke of me, and in that way set the negro free. (Laughter and applause.) I am not a Robert Burns—(laughter)—but that is a fact. (Applause.)" (32). Invoking a Scottish national poet in impromptu rhyme, Henson drives home his genre-switching acuity, shows his knowledge of his audience, criticizes the doubters, who are not so sensitive to

generic distinctions and demands, and subtly differentiates himself from this national identity, invoking appreciation that moves from laughter to applause from the house.

### **CORPOREAL FANTASIES AND THE MARKETPLACES OF DESIRE**

*Harriet caught some of it. She popularized the American novel and introduced it to Europe. Uncle Tom's Cabin. Writing is strange, though. That story caught up with her. The story she "borrowed" from Josiah Henson. Harriet only wanted enough money to buy a silk dress. The paper mills ground day and night. She'd read Josiah Henson's book. That Harriet was alert. The Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave. Seventy-seven pages long. It was short, but it was his. It was all he had. His story. A man's story is his gris-gris, you know. Taking his story is like taking his gris-gris. The thing that is himself. It's like robbing a man of his Etheric Double. People pine away. It baffles the doctors the way some people pine away for no reason. For no reason? Somebody has made off with their Etheric Double, has crept into the hideout of themselves and taken all they found there. Human hosts walk the streets of the cities, their eyes hollow, the spirit gone out of them. Somebody has taken their story.*

- Ishmael Reed, *Flight to Canada*

*Mrs. Henson.*—From G. Williams, Esq. (of Messrs. Hitchcock, Williams, and Co.),  
St. Paul's, two beautiful silk dresses for Mrs. Henson.  
- "Summary of 'Uncle Tom's' Public Services," *'Uncle Tom's' Story of his Life*, 1877

What does it mean to be a living martyr, and what is its significance for literary studies? Henson's association with Uncle Tom landed him in a liminal space between fact and fiction, but also between life and death. In an editorial note at the front of an 1877 edition of Henson's narrative, Lobb notes the objection raised by critics, that doubt has arisen about Henson as inspiration for Stowe "chiefly because Mrs. Stowe *kills* her hero" (6). His next line veers into the uncanny: "We candidly confess that, when one has read the pathetic and powerful description of 'Uncle Tom's' end by Mrs. Stowe—a chapter which has brought tears into the eyes of thousands, and which has impressed many a heart with the beauty and glory of true religion—it is not easy to think of him as

still alive.” But Lobb reverts to an aesthetic standard, what he calls the “novelist’s privilege”: “Mrs. Stowe was quite justified in using the novelist’s privilege even to the ‘bitter end,’ to give her story all the effect possible. In a literary, artistic point of view, the story would have been incomplete without it, and faithfulness to her design and to the mournful facts of slave life demanded it.” “Nevertheless,” Lobb continues, “the truth remains unaltered and unalterable.” Lobb alludes to Stowe’s responsibility to a broader reality: both “her design” and the “mournful facts of slave life” form the basis for mimetic consistency in the novel. In this representation, Henson’s individual story has been adopted and altered to make it representative of a larger, composite story and narrative object. The difference creates a paradox perhaps best expressed by one subtitle of Henson’s narrative, an 1858 addition that invokes the words of Lord Byron: “Truth Stranger than Fiction.”<sup>83</sup>

An uncanny traversing of the border between fact and fiction, death and life, authorship and theft, marks the debate over Henson’s relation to Uncle Tom. The spirit that this dynamic introduces to the text is apparent in the reviews of Lobb’s edition of Henson’s narrative, which Lobb includes both in his editorial note and at the back of the volume. One reviewer writes of the association between Tom and Henson that “such, in spite of the nursery protest that ‘Uncle Tom’ was killed in the book, and that Father Henson, therefore, can be no more than his ghost, is an undoubted fact, as a glance at the

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<sup>83</sup> Winks postulates that Eliot “invoked the spirit of Lord Byron, widely-known to be the center of one of Mrs. Stowe’s spiritual obsessions, for it was Byron who had written in 1823, that ‘truth is always strange,/Stranger than fiction’” (Introduction xxi). See *Don Juan*, Canto XIV, stanza 101. The rest of the stanza reads: ‘Tis strange—but true; for Truth is always strange, / Stranger than Fiction: if it could be told, / How much would novels gain by the exchange! / How differently the world would men behold!”

chapter on her hero in Mrs. Stowe's 'Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin' must convince any reader" (10). Such projections acknowledge the frequency and the oddity of the objection to Henson's association with Uncle Tom. The very fact that he was alive made him living proof, not of the accuracy of Stowe's portrayal, but of the inaccuracy of his relation to it. Stowe herself made the point in the 1882 letter that appeared in the *New York Sun*, writing that:

The good people of England gave my simple good friend Josiah enthusiastic welcome as the Uncle Tom of the story, though he was alive and well, and likely long to live, and the Uncle Tom of the story was buried in a martyr's grave. (2)

Such assertions shifted the terms, both pre and post-war, within which Henson was interpreted. John Ernest makes a more recent version of the point, in a discussion of Henson's life as "lost" or eclipsed by the fame of Uncle Tom: "we could well say that Stowe's Tom still lived and Henson was killed off along the way" (93).

If Henson served as a focal point for the projection of the desires of nineteenth-century audiences, what can his story tell us about critical desires today? In his discussion of Henson's involvement with Dawn, Robin Winks offers conflicting images. Describing the association with Uncle Tom, he writes that Henson illustrates "the problem of the intelligent fugitive slave of the time: he was seldom left free to be himself...for he became the focus of abolitionist attention, a tool to be used in a propaganda campaign" (181). In subsequent pages, however, Winks represents Henson as capitalizing on the association with Uncle Tom. He quotes William King, leader of another community in Canada, who said: "Henson was more than a match for anyone that ever tried to curb his authority, or to call him to an account." Yet by the end of his life, Winks writes, an

elderly Henson, “ninety-three and past caring...*for the first time*...categorically assured his listeners that he was Uncle Tom” (194, my emphasis). Was Henson a manipulator of the circumstances in which he found himself? Or was he a victim, first of abolitionist agendas, and next of the ambition of editors in a competitive literary marketplace?

In Ishmael Reed’s satirical novel *Flight to Canada*, organized around authorship and publication and built out of the story of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, the terms of both spiritual and authorial agency are shifted. Reed draws on voodoo to invoke the concept of spiritual resistance, creating a new story where author and fugitive slave Quickskill uses twentieth-century technologies to write the story of Uncle Robin, with whom he worked on a Virginia plantation built to be a replica of King Arthur’s castle in Camelot. Reed may have been the first to project a manipulation of spirits in relation to Henson:

*When Lord Byron came out of the grave to get her, the cartoon showed Harriet leaving her dirty stains all over Byron’s immaculate and idealized white statue. Did Josiah Henson do this? The man so identified with Uncle Tom that his home in Dresden, Canada, is called Uncle Tom’s Museum? Did Tom have the power the Brazilians say he has? Does he know “roots”? Umbanda. Pretos Velhos, Pai Tomas, Pai Tomas. The “curer.” Did Tom make Byron’s ghost rise out of his undead burial place of Romance and strangle Harriet’s reputation, so that one biographer entitled a chapter dealing with the scandal “Catastrophe”? (10)*

Reed’s description refers to the widespread controversy over Stowe’s accusations of incest in relation to Lord Byron in an article published in both the *Atlantic Monthly* and *Macmillan’s Magazine*. The publication resulted in a great deal of criticism of Stowe from audiences on both sides of the Atlantic for whom Byron was a heroic figure of the

literary imaginary.<sup>84</sup> The critique took a variety of forms: Susan Ryan describes the sexualized and racialized valences of a cartoon published in an 18 September 1869 edition of *Fun* that depicted Stowe, climbing a statue of Byron, leaving black stains all over it.

Was this an act of revenge? Reed wonders. Could Henson have known voodoo? Could he have drawn on Africanist religions to take revenge on Stowe for her theft of his story, through the resurrection of Byron's ghost? Reed's surrogate history in *Flight to Canada* invokes the concept again, briefly, parenthetically, juxtaposing received history with spiritually charged possibility: "Quickskill would write Uncle Robin's story in such a way that, using a process the old curers used, to lay hands on the story would be lethal to the thief. That way his Uncle Robin would have the protection that Uncle Tom (Josiah Henson) didn't. (Or did he merely use another technique to avenge his story? Breathing life into Byron.)" Respiration here pairs, inspires, and separates Byron and Henson. Life is transmitted, and Byron comes back from the grave to strangle Stowe's reputation.

The literariness of the particular summoning, Byron's emergence from the "undead burial place of Romance" and Reed's tying of the possibility to reputation and subsequent textual reproductions—its material presence and the importance of titling practices, that is to say, in Stowe's biography—resonate with Henson's own experience and the way he has been interpreted, whether or not he chose this particular method of pursuing revenge. But although Reed clearly represents the relationship between Stowe

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<sup>84</sup> For more about this controversy and the reaction as enmeshed in and symptomatic of broader arguments about aesthetic and moral judgments in the nineteenth century, see Susan Ryan.



and Henson as one of theft, he does not put Robin in the role of the singular author, writing his own story. Voodoo and satire function here as a means of protection against theft, but Quickskill, like Reed, is still writing someone else's story.

Spirit for Reed is two things, and both relate to publication. Spirit refers to the undead, the can-be-summoned, and to the story: Henson's gris-gris, his Etheric Double. In *Flight to Canada*, for Stowe to steal Henson's story was a spiritual theft for material gain. In the quote that forms the epigraph to this section, Reed follows Martin Delany's example in framing the relationship between Stowe and Henson as one of theft, referencing the silk dress in conjunction with the paper mills. The silk dress appears in the 1883 interview with Jewett as a dream not of Stowe, but of her husband, who is doubtful about the potential success of the novel: Jewett writes of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that "Prof. Stowe was in favor of selling the manuscript for a sum down. 'I tell wife,' he said to me, 'that if she can get a good black silk dress or fifty dollars in money for the story she had better take it'" (29). In Reed's account, the silk dress is resurrected, and Henson's story is produced, commodified, given form and shape and sold for a shape to cover a form that was not Henson's. Henson's form has been separated from the story, which has been processed by paper mills into a form no longer coterminous with Henson. The Etheric Double, the spirit, leaves the form, the Human Host, to take up a printed form instead. Separated, set at odds, the two assume different trajectories. And so Reed's tale assumes a different trajectory, substituting Robin for Tom through the interlocuting, conjuring figure of Quickskill, whose ministrations to the story take the place of a different kind of conjuring by Samuel Eliot in 1849.

Henson's interpellation within the bounds of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* placed him in a liminal space, somewhere between truth and fiction. But it also suspended him in a space between life and death. At the meeting in Dumfries in 1877, Henson performs this suspension through an imagined (or factual, historical?) dialogue: "You have read and heard some persons say that 'Uncle Tom' was dead, and how can he be here?...A great many have come to me in this country and asked me if I was not dead. (Laughter.) Says I, 'Dead?' Says he, 'Yes. I heard you were dead, and read you were.' 'Well,' says I, 'I heard so too, but I never believed it yet.' (Laughter.)" The structure of this dialogue is revealing. The collective, summoning what seems to be incontrovertible evidence—Uncle Tom dies, and Henson is still living—relies on a distinction between life and death. But as Henson goes on to point out, the generic shift—Stowe's work as fiction—is only one way in which the line between life and death becomes fuzzy. At the point of absurdity in the dialogue—the questioning of Henson whether he was dead or alive—the imagined or described interlocutor becomes singular, moving from "a great many" to "says he." The "he" of this sentence combines two forms of knowledge. He both "heard you were dead" and "read you were." But both forms of knowledge fail here against a stubborn reality: Henson is, of course, not dead, and the basis for speculation stems from a fictional work. The foundation of knowledge shifts, and the absurdity of the conversation points to the fact that endless amounts of hearing and reading mean nothing at all if the premises are flawed.

Still, Henson's humorous tale, like that of the World's Fair, does more than render the problematic of how his relation to Stowe's novel has been discussed. It points to the

space that this association has created for Henson, whose inauthenticity is unarguable because it is premised on an accuracy tied to a fiction. The fiction writes Uncle Tom dead, and so Henson, if Uncle Tom, becomes a specter. The rising in flesh and blood from the page is accompanied with a death that also must rise from the page; if public desire brings Tom to life, it must kill off Henson. In such a world, a living Henson violates the fiction-made-real. In a late edition of the narrative, the narrator Henson acknowledges the point, but uses the occasion to redirect the attention of the audience from fiction back to reality: “Though she made her hero die, it was fit that she did this to complete her story; and if God had not given to me a giant’s constitution, I should have died over and over again long before I reached Canada” (“*Uncle Tom’s*” *Story* 158). Henson has defied death, both literal and fictional: his persistence here is a matter of constitution. The repetitive construction of his death, projected here in relation to the “true” story of his life, rather than Stowe’s novel, iterates a liminal, near-death encounter, and falls back on spirit or “constitution” as the source of continued presence or escape.

If a look at the revisions and the multiple media that comprise Henson’s narrative as evidence teaches us anything, perhaps it is that the silk dresses cut both ways. Henson’s response to audiences—his insistence on his own reality, and the fictionalization of fiction—is still applicable. Reed’s tale, like Stowe’s, is a novel, and the silk dress is a complicated symbol. When Henson’s wife came with him to England for one of his speeches, she was given two silk dresses as a hospitality gift. Reports of the speeches place her on the platform, where she accepts such gifts with a bow but does not speak. Calvin Stowe’s invocation of a silk dress for his wife in Jewett’s account

represents his doubt about the ability of her novel to sell. Around the dresses we can rotate a series of textual and intertextual references, accusations of theft, manipulations of print and profit. But maybe the more productive approach would be to view them, like the polished lumber at the World's Fair, as a sign of multiplicity, a cue to the complexities of the story of Josiah Henson. If the dresses symbolize the marketplace motives underwriting reform texts, as the reference to Stowe's dress in Reed's novel would seem to indicate, these dresses might act as mirrors for each other. Stowe's novel, Reed's novel, Henson's narrative, and his speeches each take up the effort of reform, in different ways. Bent on making people *feel* right, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* participated in an abolitionist reform effort, even as the first editions of Henson's narrative sought to procure sympathy from an American audience and money from an English one for a more focused reform effort with the establishment of Dawn. For Martin Delany and Ishmael Reed, Stowe's novel was a theft, not a simple reform text, an unauthorized use of Henson's story for Stowe's own profit and individual benefit—and that Henson seemed to profit little from Lobb's editions perhaps adds strength to this interpretation.<sup>85</sup> But does this argument detract from Henson's own, complex motives, and his various methods of pursuing them? Perhaps the spirited manipulation of marketplaces and media could also be said to characterize Henson, who describes his work circulating and distributing his narrative, whose 1858 edition Stowe herself framed as an attempt to liberate his brother, and whose later editions capitalize on the popularity of *Uncle Tom's*

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<sup>85</sup> Winks writes of Lobb's editions that "Henson seems to have received very little money from the enterprise and his estate certainly received none," and "whatever little he gained financially he apparently did give to the community he died serving" (Introduction xxiv, xxviii).

*Cabin* even as Henson used the occasion of his speeches to remind his audiences of the difference between fiction and reality and to resist his conflation with Stowe's character.

What is it that we want from Josiah Henson? Do we want a story of victimization, or one of resistance; one of authenticity or of signifying? Conversations about authenticity, authorship, and appropriation have given and still give us a productive way to talk about print and the oppression and violence of slavery and its aftermath in nineteenth-century America, but it is worth making sure that our critical perspectives are not limited by such terms. Drawing on speech records and revisions, what we begin to see here is another possibility, the other revisionary take on Josiah Henson, the supplement to or surrogate of Reed's story: the image of an unusually resourceful figure in an often successful attempt to work with, against, and in spite of the unequal relations of power and the various editors, reporters, and novel writers that mediated his life story, alternately drawing on and resisting popular fictions and public desires to establish viable terms of speech and publication while juggling the complicated overlap of national, reformist, and historical rhetorics before and after the Civil War.

## CONCLUSION

There are parts of Josiah Henson's life that we cannot access. We can speculate about his thoughts, feelings, and priorities from the records that remain, but all of these are mediated, some through interlocutors, some through editors, all through print. Henson's story is also a story of the multiple modes of revision at work in the nineteenth century, and the transatlantic publication and performance history of his narrative speaks

both to the changing, multifaceted meanings of the bestselling reform text of the nineteenth century and Henson's own efforts to carve out an economically viable space for the community of fugitives with which he was affiliated. This space was made, tended, and itself transformed through the iterations of his narrative. More importantly, perhaps: it failed. Later editions find Henson after Dawn looking for the means to support himself, his family, and a new community. The textual evidence may point to an identity subsumed to that of a fictional character, but this is one reason to look to the edges and the performative moments in the textual evidence. Iterations make it impossible to simplify the story: they force us to look for transformations or change over the course of Henson's life and the nineteenth century, to see what kinds of new media and remediation he is willing to use and work with. We also get a glimpse into the afterlife of the abolition movement, and a deepened understanding of African American writing and performance in a transnational context. Such moments illuminate motives that make the text more reflective than transparent, more mirror than window.

Looking at Henson's narrative still, to some degree, follows the model of reading established by the multimedia exhibition at the World's Fair. A series of audiences, old and new, find the text of the exhibition directed at themselves. If it is possible for critics to find what they are looking for in Henson's story, despite the fact that there is no stable version, no single edition, media, or format that can stand alone, perhaps this very instability points us back to consider what it is that we are looking for, what kind of resistance or appropriation we hope to find, and whether the terms critics use at such moments might be productively reconsidered. Henson may have been a fugitive slave,

but that was not all he was. He was African-American for the first part of his life, but also a fugitive in Canada for many years, and a frequent traveler to Europe and the U.S. His story was a fugitive slave narrative, but it became something else too, a story that says as much about public desire and the ways history is written and told as it does about Henson himself. Ought we take a lesson from the mirrors, the multiplicities, of silk dresses, narrative editions, performances, and texts? Henson's story situates the individual in the story of his life but resists the effort to find or define him.

Thinking beyond the link between textuality and authenticity, or past the effort to frame publication as always and only a form of resistance, moves us, in Henson's case, to account for the provisionality offered by a series of revisions and textual witnesses. Pursuing Henson through the various forms of media he navigated does not take us further away, but rather brings us closer to a history of authorship and publication for his narrative. The difficulty of confining Henson within any single nation, genre, or medium causes productive frustration, pointing to a methodological lapse that has led to frequent simplifications of his story and that caused it to be largely overlooked despite its tremendous provocations and its close connection with the bestselling reform novel of the nineteenth century. Henson challenges us to reorient a critical sense of reform to take account of provisional configurations of contingencies, leading us to a consideration of publication that extends beyond the framework of print and expands the definition of authorship within a broader field of representation and reform.

If abolitionist speech records based claims to accuracy on the correspondence between representation and reality, Henson's story adds another dimension, in that he

was confronted with the expectations produced by an evolving set of correspondences between representation, reality, and fiction. In chapter one, I discussed phonographic reports as structures of mediation that worked to convey voice, event, and physical presence in print. This effort, I argue, represented an argumentative tactic on the part of abolitionists, in which print became an apparatus of verification and its interpretation as a threat depended on the success of its invocation of physical and aural presence. In chapter two, Henson's story provides an example of how this structure of mediation—the correspondence between representation and reality—was revised through a situation of radical intertextuality after the Civil War. The tension between Henson's modes of representation and reflection in his narratives and his speeches suggests that the animation of voice and presence in print was joined and transformed by the spirit of a popular fictional character and the forms of public desire that demanded of that spirit a material presence. In the next chapter, I shift back to a movement that began before the Civil War, one that speaks to the dynamics of mediation and authenticity introduced in both previous chapters but introduces a new twist. Representation, authorship, and truth claims all found new forms of expression in the reconfigurations of spirit and media required by the sudden emergence of the voices of the dead.



### Chapter 3. Voices of Revisionary History: Printed Witnesses of Modern Spiritualism

It's fancying, fable-making, nonsense-work—  
What never meant to be so very bad—  
The knack of story-telling, brightening up  
Each dull old bit of fact that drops its shine.  
One does see somewhat when one shuts one's eyes,  
If only spots and streaks; tables do tip  
In the oddest way of themselves: and pens, good Lord,  
Who knows if you drive them or they drive you?  
- Robert Browning, "Mr. Sludge, the Medium"

In 1907, some years after Josiah Henson died, his British editor John Lobb (who had become a spiritualist) published a book called *Talks with the Dead*, in which he claimed that both Henson and Harriet Beecher Stowe had returned as spirits to speak through human mediums. Lobb included a description of visits by Henson's spirit, subtitled "'Uncle Tom' Appears," and followed it up with a description and a spirit photograph of Stowe, pairing the two visually and semantically even in the spirit world (32). Lobb's brief biographical note about Henson in this entry condenses the account given in Henson's narrative, with much less emphasis, interestingly, on the association with Uncle Tom: "Was for forty-two years a slave, escaped to Canada October 1830, was an exhibitor of black walnut-lumber in the Great Exhibition in London, 1851" (32). But after this note, Lobb continues the biography to give a new episode, this time past the point of death and burial, writing that:

My old friend the Rev. Josiah Henson, whose forty-two years' slave life was used by Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe for her immortal work 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,' has been a frequent visitor at the seances where I have sat, and he invariably put in an appearance at the ordinary circles, and at the public services where I officiate. Clairvoyants often remain to inform me of his presence, and many an encouraging

message he sends to me of his constant help. (32)

Henson's reemergence in spirit form to encourage Lobb in his pursuits represents the apex of editorial and fraternal association, a new spin on a relationship that had helped to create both the image of the author and the terms of authenticity that guided assertions of correspondence to Stowe's novel in Henson's narrative. Henson's repeated appearances in Lobb's presence and in his publications even after death hover somewhere between haunting and appropriation, constituting a mode of fellowship and publicity comprehensible only within the parameters of a nineteenth-century belief in the possibility of spirit communication.

Lobb's book was a late invocation of the presence of spirits that had become a defining component of the belief system of spiritualists in the United States and England. As early as the 1850s, Americans had begun to see the return of the spirits of the dead and their communication through spirit mediums in a phenomenon that came to be known as modern spiritualism. The movement gained popularity in both the U.S. and England, waning briefly in the wake of the American Civil War but picking up again in the 1870s. Many professing to have been affected by spiritual influence embraced their roles in spirit communication, becoming speaking, writing, drawing, and healing mediums. Spirit mediums and their spiritualist associates practiced and published, asserting that spirit wisdom would lead humanity into a new and more progressive, harmonious era. The terms of affinity developed by spiritualists tapped into nineteenth-century conversations about the location of literary and spiritual inspiration, as well as the scientific and physiological dimensions of human connection. As Lobb's invocation of

Henson suggests, spiritualist circles and séances offered a way to communicate with deceased friends, relatives, and famous figures, resurrecting the words and opinions of the dead but also restructuring the protocols of speech, publicity, and authorship around acts of communication between spiritual and material worlds.

In previous chapters of this dissertation, acts of editing and transcription have formed the bases for rethinking conceptions of authorship in relation to abolitionist speech and inscription. Authorship in these abolitionist speech and publication events is both distributed, in the sense that it consists of many acts of production and revision by multiple people in different media, and performative, in that it is represented as the creative or descriptive action of a single individual. The association between Henson and Lobb provoked textual revisions and republications of Henson's narrative and brought Henson back to England to speak and circulate among prominent English figures late in the century. But Lobb's revelations in *Talks with the Dead* restructured the terms of his relationship with Henson, spiritualizing their connection and that of Henson and Stowe. The temporality of revelation—the ability to speak for, with, and *as* even after death—introduces a new challenge to thinking about the mechanics of authorship, authenticity, and collaboration in the nineteenth century. If Henson's body acted as the guarantor of inscription and authenticity during his life, Lobb's spiritualist description invokes authenticity in the absence of his body after Henson's death. This dialectical play between the body and the absence of the body animates bids for authenticity in modern spiritualism, creating a dynamic that mimics (with the spirit medium's body as stand-in) but also departs from the equivalence between the body and the author that functions as

authenticity in abolitionist contexts. Henson's appearance as a spirit in Lobb's book extends the relationship between Henson and his editor. The new terms of Lobb's role in this relationship still have him creating a printed surrogate for Henson's body, but this time in the absence of Henson himself. If authenticity for Henson added fiction to the equation, shifting the emphasis from a correspondence between reality and representation, spiritualism exploded the boundaries of time and space, reimagining what could be eligible to constitute "reality."

This chapter returns to the question of who or what is, to use Robert Browning's term, "driving" pens in the nineteenth century, by looking at what it means to be influenced or silenced by spirits. Inspired speech and writing functioned as a kind of dislocation for spiritualists: though the words that spirit mediums emitted were affected by their own intelligences, the role of the "speaker" was supposedly split, leaving neither spirit nor medium entirely in control. This slippage or contest is visible in the printed texts produced by spiritualists in nineteenth-century America. In this chapter I draw on spiritualist performances, publications, and literary productions to consider what happens to the concepts of authorship and publication when the speaker is assumed to be separate from the body speaking. Where is agency located in spiritualist publication events? What can spiritualist documents tell us about how spiritualists made convincing cases that the words they published were composed by the spirits of the dead?

Like abolitionists, spiritualists constructed multi-vocal texts that worked hard to cultivate authenticity by creating the impression of a single identifiable authorial voice. Reporters and editors were important figures for spiritualist texts, as they were in the

phonographic reports of anti-slavery meetings in chapter one and the editions of Henson's narrative in chapter two. But in spiritualism, the speaker and the author had to be distinguished, producing a new spin on the notion of distributed authorship. Representing spirit communications in print required spiritualists to establish a convincing boundary between human speaker or writer and spirit author even as they depicted the violation of the physical boundaries of the human. They accomplished this by deploying a variety of practices that acted as cues of authenticity for nineteenth-century readers, from frontispieces, title pages, and facsimiles of signatures, to intertextual and biographical references and echoes of literary style.

Though they often found themselves classified as marginal figures, spiritualists did not want to be an isolated group. They wanted to proselytize and participate in the broader political, literary, and religious conversations going on in America. So they resurrected positions of political, literary, and spiritual subjectivity that held some historical authority and that were recognizable to most Americans, and used them to respond to current questions. Seeking to establish legitimacy and agency through the invocation and revision of voices from the past, spiritualists cultivated a self-authenticating mode of publicity that used multiple kinds of mediation, rendering inspired speech and inscription in print, to revive the voices of history and bring them to bear on a nineteenth-century present.

Spiritualists expressed a variation of the radical individualism developing in other areas of nineteenth-century American society, in that they resisted organization and relocated the potential for revelation, or the capability of receiving words and knowledge

from a spiritual realm, in any human being, even as they provided a model for collaborative composition and insisted on the permeability of the body and the mind to spirit influence.<sup>86</sup> As critics have suggested, this wasn't entirely compatible with the ideal of the romantic author.<sup>87</sup> But neither was it a bid for anonymity, or the dissolution of authorship: spiritualist claims to credibility depended on the verifiable figure of an author. Print was made to perform and verify this authorship. Putting pressure on the capacity of print to capture and represent even as they stretched this capacity, spiritualists resisted the urge to render print as a disembodied, spiritless process. Their manipulation of bibliographical codes was central to the process of conjuring spirit-authors in print. Spiritualists created multivocal texts by publishing communications in the form of dialogues, providing publication histories in introductory and concluding materials, and discussing and describing the body of the medium in conjunction with the messages of the spirits. Spiritualist accounts in America envisioned a public sphere open to spirit participation and lines of national affiliation renegotiated by vast spirit and human collectives that redefined what Benedict Anderson conceptualizes as national time—a synchronous imagining of collective affiliation or interest—by situating the printed

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<sup>86</sup> For a discussion of the role of individualism in modern spiritualism, see Braude.

<sup>87</sup> For discussions of how spiritualism complicated authorship and subjectivity, see Lardas Modern, Galvan, and Gitelman. In *Secularism in Antebellum America*, Lardas Modern casts spirit influence as a dislocation of the invisible influence or metaphysics of secularism, a dislocation that he argues conceals actual invisible forces at work in society and attenuates the possibility of human agency. Gitelman situates spiritualism within a larger discussion of automatic writing and its relation to authorship and inscription—mapping, for instance, the terms of visibility, accuracy, and “noise” with which “new” forms of inscription and technology were articulated against changing notions of authorship and agency in the late nineteenth century—in *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines*. Galvan expands on Gitelman's discussion in *The Sympathetic Medium*, describing the literary trope of the female medium and the gendered refractions of authorship that such a subject position provoked. See also Price and Thurschwell, eds.

documents that inspired such imaginings at the intersection between spiritual and material worlds.

As in the case of Henson's story, the study of the effect of spiritualism on authorship, authenticity, and print has broader implications for the way literary critics have talked about American literature. Critics looking for authenticity in the connection between body and inscription have interpreted that connection in ways that do not always account for the separation of spirit and body introduced by spiritual revelation in the nineteenth century. As some critics have discussed, spiritualism also demonstrates a corollary to the forms of inspiration and originality preoccupying prominent literary figures of the time.<sup>88</sup>

I begin the chapter by discussing two prominent forms of mediumship: trance speaking and spirit writing. I then look at how spirit communication was articulated as literary and political revision. I conclude with a meditation on spiritualism's potentials for rethinking disciplinary boundaries. Ultimately, I argue that spiritualism drew on and revised nineteenth-century print, performance, and literary conventions to declare the authenticity of spirit communication and to authorize revisions of literary and historical voices. Yet because it deployed signs of authorship—handwriting, facsimile signatures,

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<sup>88</sup> See Richards on Lizzie Doten, Edgar Allan Poe, and the forms of literary inspiration. See also McGarry. This overlap may explain the interest of several authors in spiritualism: according to McGarry, Walt Whitman attended a spiritualist conference in 1857, soon after publishing the first two editions of *Leaves of Grass*, and there expressed interest in becoming a spirit medium (167-170). The newspaper article she refers to, from *The Spiritual Age*, does not list first names, so the figure in question is only referred to as "Mr. Whitman," and may or may not have been Walt. Whitman did change the title of one of his "Chants Democratic" to "Mediums" in the 1871 edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Frederick Douglass went to several spiritualist gatherings, as did Sojourner Truth; and Harriet Beecher Stowe was what Braude refers to as "a serious investigator" (27). R. J. Ellis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., have traced Harriet Wilson's career as a spiritualist lecturer in Boston, and William Cooper Nell demonstrated a quiet commitment to spiritualism. Spiritualism also inspired a number of literary accounts and critiques, as I discuss further in this chapter.

frontispieces, and title page attribution—even as it depended on the separation of the spirit and the body, it left those signs ambiguous.

## **SPIRITUALISM IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA**

Lobb's description of Henson's return to England as a spirit was a late manifestation of a much larger spirit-communication phenomenon that began in earnest in 1848, after a rapping sound in a farmhouse in Hydesville, New York, was reputed to be the work of the spirit of a peddler who had died in the house. The rapping and its source were discovered by two sisters, Kate and Margaret Fox, and their report signaled the beginning of an extended series of conversations with the dead.<sup>89</sup> These conversations formed the basis for a loosely organized movement known as spiritualism that became hugely popular in America and England over the course of the nineteenth century.<sup>90</sup> Major American figures, from the politician John Calhoun, recanting his former proslavery views, to dietary reformer Sylvester Graham, advocating new eating habits, came back and spoke or wrote through human mediums. Spiritualism took many different forms, from rapping to trance speaking to spirit writing to spirit drawing, often involving spirits communicating through the body of a human medium. The method of

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<sup>89</sup> Other sources of spiritualism have been discussed in histories of spiritualism. In an early and encyclopedic history published in 1870, Emma Hardinge Britten writes that spiritualism was a manifestation of all ages, but traces its specific development in America back to mesmerism and animal magnetism. Historians have posited a variety of points of origin and influence for spiritualism, including the publication of Andrew Jackson Davis's *Principles of Nature* in 1847, the Shaker movement, Quakerism, and Africanist and Native American religious practices. See Buescher, Kucich, and Brooks. For the ways in which spiritualism, including the early work of Andrew Jackson Davis, drew on and departed from Universalism and other forms of Protestant Christianity, see Buescher and Schmidt.

<sup>90</sup> The movement reached its height in America in the 1850s and the 1870s. Many critics note that spiritualism was notoriously resistant to organization; efforts to create national or regional associations largely failed. Spiritualism was loosely organized in the sense that it involved a wide variety of beliefs and practices organized around communication with the dead. See Kerr, Braude, and Buescher.



communication was referred to as the “spirit telegraph,” a nod to both Morse’s electric telegraph and the claim by many mediums that Benjamin Franklin’s spirit had drawn on the structure of Morse’s invention to develop technology (involving magnetism and electricity) in the spirit world that allowed spirits to communicate with humans.

By the 1850s, spiritualists regularly were talking to famous figures like William Shakespeare, Napoleon Bonaparte, John Quincy Adams, and the Apostle Paul. Descriptions by American spiritualists of their mediums and spirit circles were particularly likely to feature the spirits of the founding fathers, each with strong opinions about slavery and the current state of the country. Spirits provided glimpses into their individual progressions through the spheres of the spirit world, expressed regrets for misbehavior in their mortal lives, and assured believers of universal salvation and spirits’ desires to stay in contact with loved ones even after death.<sup>91</sup> Many spirits prescribed a new vision of the nation, working from an apparent consensus in the spirit world to advocate harmony, peace, and freedom and to reinterpret the claims advanced in the U.S. Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.

Observers of the movement now and in the nineteenth century alike speak with some astonishment of the vast amount of print generated by spiritualist writers, mediums, editors, and publishers. The movement penetrated all levels of society and all

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<sup>91</sup> Most spiritualists, drawing on the writings of Emmanuel Swedenborg, conceived of the spirit world as consisting of seven concentric spheres, through which spirits moved in a process of progressive development.

geographical regions of the U.S. Believers numbered in the millions.<sup>92</sup> One contemporary account in the *North American Review* noted with disbelief the apparent truth of the claim made by spiritualists that in the 1850s, nearly a book a week was coming out about spiritualism.<sup>93</sup> The influx of spiritualist print caused reactions ranging from scorn to dismissal to dismay in those opposed to the movement. As one detractor wrote, “the late increase of their pamphlets, books, periodicals, circles, conferences, mass meetings, general conventions, &c., &c., appear rather as a flood about to deluge the community with this spiritualism.”<sup>94</sup> The overlap of spiritualism with reform movements limited its popularity in the South, though groups of spiritualists did operate in most of the southern states, including Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, and Tennessee.<sup>95</sup>

The practice also caught the attention of some of the major literary figures of the time. Despite the general skepticism with which spirit manifestations were viewed by writers of the American Renaissance, literature testifies to the effect spiritualism had on writers’ imaginations. The new mode of religious practice provided subject matter for literary production across genres, from Nathaniel Hawthorne’s novel *Blithedale Romance*

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<sup>92</sup> Contemporary accounts estimated between two million and five million believers in the U.S. Buescher writes that modern scholars estimate 1.5 million believers in spiritualism during the period of its greatest influence, the decade before the Civil War, when the U.S. population was about 30 million (x-xi).

<sup>93</sup> See “Modern Necromancy,” in which the author writes: “We do not think the following paragraph from the ‘Address’ of the ‘New England Spiritualists’ Association’ an overstatement.” The paragraph from the ‘Address’ reads as follows: “It is computed that nearly *two millions* of people in our nation, with hundreds of thousands in other lands, are already believers in Spiritualism. No less than twelve or fourteen periodicals are devoted to the publication of its phenomena and the dissemination of its principles. Nearly every succeeding week brings through the press some new books treating exclusively upon this subject. Every day, and much more than daily, lectures upon Spiritualism are given in the presence of audiences quite respectable as to both numbers and character” (“Modern Necromancy” 512). Kerr attributes the *North American Review* article to A. P. Peabody (8).

<sup>94</sup> H. Jones, qtd in Campbell, 12.

<sup>95</sup> For discussions of spiritualism in the South, see Britten, pp. 403-443, and Schoonmaker.

to Herman Melville's short story "The Apple-Tree Table," to James Russell Lowell's satire in verse, "The Unhappy Lot of Mr. Knott." Harriet Jacobs lived in Rochester when spiritualism was at its height, and a number of critics have argued for the effect of spiritualism on her narrative.<sup>96</sup> Spiritualism also captivated a number of believers and literary figures in England. Robert Browning, a selection from whose "Mr. Sludge, the Medium" begins this chapter, wrote this satirical poem based on Daniel Home, a popular medium in England, in 1864.<sup>97</sup>

In recent years, spiritualism also has captured the critical imagination.<sup>98</sup> The movement has been discussed in relation to women's rights, abolition, and other reform movements; political and ideological formations in the U.S.; transnationalism and literature; psychological theory and phenomena; religious history; and media studies and early confluences of humans with technology.<sup>99</sup> Historian Robert Cox argues that spiritualism was very much a product of nineteenth-century social and historical contexts, in that it represented a reaction to "social stresses, ranging from the increasing pace of

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<sup>96</sup> See, for instance, Kucich, Chapter 1.

<sup>97</sup> For discussions of the development of spiritualism in England, see Oppenheim, Owen, and others.

<sup>98</sup> Scholars of religion have noted spiritualists' adaptation of the Universalist belief in widespread salvation; scholars of American culture have pointed to the reform politics and the consolation practices built into the movement, as well as its transatlantic influences; media scholars have found it a fruitful site for thinking about the ways conceptions of technology informed other social and spiritual developments at the time. See Braude, McGarry, Bennett, and Sconce, respectively. For a provocative recent invocation of spiritualism's implication in secularism in America, see *Lardas Modern*.

<sup>99</sup> See Braude for spiritualist overlap with abolitionism and the women's rights movement; McGarry for a discussion of spiritualism and political formations in the nineteenth-century U.S.; Bennett on the structural consistencies of spiritualism and nineteenth-century literature; Kerr and the Goldfarbs on literary responses to spiritualism; Moore on spiritualism and psychology; Guitierrez on philosophical precedents; Schmidt, on the place of spiritualism in re-enchanting acoustics; *Lardas Modern*, on spiritualism as a metaphysical avatar of secularism; Cox, on spiritualism and affect; Galvan, on the literary trope of the female medium within nineteenth-century networks of communication; and Sconce, on spiritualism as a manifestation of the technological uncanny.

geographic and social mobility and the fallout of industrialization, urbanization, immigration, ‘modernization,’ and democratization to the extension of market relations, religious diversity, and the sinuous careers of religion and science and of class, race, and gender relations” (17). Spirits also offered solace to mourners. As Werner Sollors has pointed out, spiritualism effectively relocated the emotional focus of grieving from death and loss to spirit life and new forms of communication (“Dr. Benjamin Franklin”).

Technological innovations that revolutionized the mechanisms of communication in America were central to the forms spiritualism took in the antebellum period. A spate of mid-century inventions and a perception of the potentials of electricity inspired by the telegraph prompted visions of the séance as “spirit battery,” and mechanical and electrical experiments by spiritualists attest to the importance of technology to the terms of progress expostulated by believers.<sup>100</sup> Spiritualism itself was, as many critics have noted, articulated in terms of the telegraph and compared to other electronic technologies of the time. The process of spirit communication was framed as new; though spiritualists argued that precedents appeared throughout history, the operations of *modern* spiritualism differed from previous methods of communication because they depended on inventions and manipulations of electricity to bring the spirit world into contact with the material one. Spiritualists also would extend a “spiritualizing” of technology and mediation by drawing on the development of photographic techniques in the later part of

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<sup>100</sup> For one of the most spectacular of these, see John Murray Spear’s *New Motive Power*, a perpetual motion machine referred to by some as a messiah machine, powered by an act of ritualistic birthing and nursing by human mediums and projected to be capable of reproduction (of miniature machines like itself). See Buescher, *The Remarkable Life*, pp. 96-104. See also Lardas Modern’s discussion of what he refers to as Spear’s “fucking machine,” pp. 293-301.

the century with the popular and fraudulent work of William Mumler, who ran a profitable business in spirit photographs.<sup>101</sup>

Still, in some ways thinking about spiritualism strictly in relation to new technologies is a distraction that buys too thoroughly into the reformers' own rhetoric. The technology that ultimately did the most to promote the movement was an older one, though like others in the process of being rejuvenated. Print provided a vehicle for spirit manifestations that took the events in spirit circles (a notoriously delicate setting, which disbelievers could disrupt) out of the parlor and into the hands and homes of the public. Trance speakers published reports of lectures in pamphlets and newspapers. Facsimiles of spirit handwriting could furnish proof of spirit-authorship at the front of books produced by writing mediums. Volumes of spirit poetry and spirit messages circulated and inspired reviews. Spiritualist newspapers formed in a number of major cities, and though many of them were short-lived, some—like the *Banner of Light*—stayed in business for nearly half a century.<sup>102</sup> Even major periodicals acknowledged the movement, though they often mocked and criticized its practitioners.<sup>103</sup> Print eventually became the mode of historiography for the movement with the appearance of several works chronicling the

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<sup>101</sup> Sollors argues that images like Franklin's galvanic battery in *John Quincy Adams* were "suggestive of the Spiritualists' attempt to harmonize national destiny and reactions to mechanization in American life, and to assuage, perhaps, the fear that telegraphs and batteries, graphite pencils and gaslight might transform modern man himself into a machine" (461-2). See also Kaplan on William Mumler. Spirit photographs relied on double exposures and other techniques to show lights, shadows, and occasionally faces and figures of spirits in photographs.

<sup>102</sup> The *Banner of Light* was in operation from 1857 to 1907. See Mott, *A History*.

<sup>103</sup> See Mott's discussion of spiritualism and periodicals in *A History*, pp. 206-210. Horace Greeley's *Herald* was one exception to this; though Greeley never explicitly endorsed spiritualism, he was kinder to the movement than other editors, and expressed support for the Fox sisters.

history and development of spirit manifestations, including Emma Hardinge Britten's *Modern Spiritualism* in 1870.<sup>104</sup>

Circulating outside of spiritualist gatherings and beyond the medium's voice, gesture, and affect, printed documents produced by spiritualists became the material proof—objects of evidence—that an encounter had occurred between the material world and the spiritual one. Print publication became a site for the construction of an extended narrative of dislocated authorship. For such documents, the publication history and transmission processes involved in the documents' own production were important as proof of spiritual encounter. Spiritualists leveraged pre-existing signs of authorship and engaged in collaborative projects that bridged spiritual and material worlds, distributing the forms of agency involved in textual production. The form this takes can be seen in two popular forms of spirit communication: trance speaking and spirit writing.

### **SPEAKING IN TRANCE**

According to spiritualists, spirits manifested themselves differently in different media. “Psychical” manifestations included both trance speaking, or the use of a medium's body, including vocal cords, by a spirit while the medium was in trance, and spirit writing, or control of the medium's hand by a spirit to produce handwritten messages.<sup>105</sup> In some circles that had speaking and writing mediums, both could happen

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<sup>104</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle also published a two-volume history of spiritualism in 1926.

<sup>105</sup> Kerr categorizes standard modes of spirit communication into “physical” or “psychical” forms. Physical forms included alphabetical rappings, table movements (“table-tipping”), and other external sounds like accordion or guitar music played by unseen hands. Psychical communications, by contrast, were revealed directly through an “organism” or medium, and included clairvoyant visions, messages dictated by spirits

simultaneously.<sup>106</sup> In a model of distributed authorship more akin to those of previous chapters, lectures by spiritualist speakers sometimes were reported phonographically and often appeared in books, pamphlets, or spiritualist periodicals.<sup>107</sup> These reports of trance speaking events represent a complicated, multimedia mechanics of authorship and publicity. The words of the spirit and the movements of the body are related in these accounts, but spirit inspiration undermined the idea of a single oratorical “self.” Both body and print become performances of identity. In contrast to abolitionist contexts, which depended on the conjunction of authorship and the body, the proofs of spirit authorship operated at the point where the body of the medium was rendered separate from the author of the spoken or written words. I discuss two formal cues to this process as it was represented in print: spiritualist reports are punctuated by gestures, and they frequently appear with framing devices that describe the history of their publication as a multimedia process.

One example is that of spiritualist medium and Boston reformer John Murray Spear, who delivered a series of messages from the spirit of John Murray in 1853.<sup>108</sup> The messages were prepared for publication by Simon Hewitt, an abolitionist, temperance

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controlling the medium’s hand and pen (“spirit-writing”), and utterances by spirits utilizing the medium’s voice (“trance-speaking”) (5).

<sup>106</sup> See Edmonds, et al.

<sup>107</sup> One popular example of this was a set of lectures titled *Being a Series of Twelve Lectures Delivered before the New York Conference of Spiritualists*, by Joel Tiffany, in January, 1856, reported phonographically by publishers Graham and Ellinwood. Spiritualist poet and noted utopian figure Thomas Lake Harris is another example of transcription at work: instructed to stay in bed, Harris “did, eating but little, and in bed he wrote, or rather dictated to his amanuensis, what appeared in his publications” (Britten 216).

<sup>108</sup> Spear was a prison reformer and an abolitionist before he converted to spiritualism. For the extraordinary story of his life, including his reform career, his conversion to spiritualism and construction of a messiah machine, and his subsequent involvement in a series of utopian movements, see Buescher, *The Remarkable Life*. See also Lardas Modern, Epilogue.

advocate, and former Universalist minister who also wrote a preface to the volume.<sup>109</sup> The introduction to the published messages recounts the process by which they were generated. Soon after an initial appearance by Murray through Spear's daughter, in which Murray warned Spear that the latter soon would receive a lengthy communication, "the following brief word was written by Mr. Spear's hand, in the usual way: -'I will teach thee to-day, at three o'clock. Have a reporter present, that the words I speak may be carefully recorded. JOHN MURRAY'" (Hewitt 48). Using multiple media (Spear and his daughter, in speech and in writing) and setting an appointment in writing for a discourse to be given in speech, the spirit Murray is represented as staging a communication that builds in its own method of record and publicity. The account describes how Spear followed the instructions written by his own hand: "At the appointed time, in company with several friends, Mr. Spear became seated in his chamber, a phonographic reporter having been engaged to record what might be said."

The appointment proved successful, as the spirit proceeded to deliver a series of messages through Spear. In the eighth message, titled "Bondage" and criticizing the listener or reader's dependence on custom, as well as the institution of slavery, the spirit digresses to thank the recorder: "I wish to renew my expression of gratitude to the kind friend who has so faithfully, so carefully, and so patiently recorded the words which I have spoken. Her reward will come to her in due season; and it will in a future time afford her great satisfaction that she had been an instrument, so important, in advancing the truths which I desire to communicate" (Hewitt 137). The form of publicity at work in

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<sup>109</sup> For more on Hewitt, see Buescher, *The Other Side*, pp. 186-192.



Murray's messages involved not one but two human "instruments," both distinct from the author, and both employed simultaneously to transfer spirit words to paper. The publication of the messages involved still another person: Hewitt, whose name is also listed on the copyright page.<sup>110</sup>

The authoritative "I" of the messages is established by John Murray's prominence on the title page and his picture, which assumes an authorial position as a frontispiece to the book. The introduction pairs a biography of Murray with an account of Spear's development as a medium. But the separation is also enacted within the account itself, as the authorial, spiritual "I" constitutes itself as separate from the medium by speaking directly to him. Murray's messages conclude with a specific address to Spear, in the course of which the spirit uses the body of the medium to illustrate his points. Bracketed insertions mark the medium's movements: "[Mr. Spear here struck his foot violently.] That foot, my young friend, is to go up and down on your earth; and as you need strength, so shall that foot, as I now press it, receive the aid you need. And these hands [here the speaker's hands were raised] are to work, *work*, WORK, as you shall find labor to do" (167). The emphasis of the address is performed through typography in these messages. A series of expressions involve this structure of repetition in standard text, italic, and small caps, presumably to represent increasing levels of emphasis on the part of the speaker. But the bracketed insertions also punctuate the text of the message with gestures, directing the reader back to the body of the medium. Murray speaks to Spear with Spear's

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<sup>110</sup> Hewitt wrote a preface for the volume, and the title page further describes his role in its production: "Carefully prepared for publication, with a sketch of the author's earthly life, and a brief description of the spiritual experiences of the medium. By S. C. Hewitt."

own body, implying both his control and the existence of two distinct spirits, a speaker and a medium who would encounter the words of the message as well as the bracketed resignifications of his own body in the writing of the reporter.

Mediums spoke in trance in private as well as public settings. In a pamphlet titled *Voltaire in the Spirit World*, published in New York and undated, G. Sweet wrote an account of messages dictated by the spirit of Voltaire through his wife, medium Elizabeth Sweet.<sup>111</sup> In the preface Sweet sets a private scene for the initial manifestations: he and his wife are sitting in a room by themselves when a spirit arrives and begins to speak through Mrs. Sweet. The spirit declares itself to be Voltaire and delivers an initial communication. After several subsequent visitations, the spirit advises the Sweets that a description of experiences in the spirit world will be forthcoming.<sup>112</sup> G. Sweet writes of the experience of capturing this description that “as he necessarily had to speak slowly to enable me to write it down, it took three sittings, of about one hour each, on three different evenings, to finish it” (i-ii). As the pronoun shift to from “she” to “he” indicates, Sweet describes his wife’s voice as having been effectively transferred to Voltaire. The process of “controlling” the vocal chords involves the ability to slow speech such that it might be recorded. But the process of control takes a strange turn. In the preface Sweet states that he has made no corrections or alterations to the messages and adds that “whatever disconnection or want of smoothness there is in it, may perhaps be attributable to the interruptions which occurred during its delivery, (as Mrs. Sweet had to nurse her

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<sup>111</sup> The Library Company estimates that this pamphlet was published in 1855.

<sup>112</sup> This is a topic of much interest in spiritualist communications. For other examples of spirits describing the spirit world, see Stiles and Edmonds and Dexter.

infant, and talk for the spirit at the same time)” (ii). Was Voltaire nursing the baby? Or does the word “interruptions” suggest that this bodily activity interjected itself into the words of the spirit in moments where the medium reclaimed her control over her body, shaping the substance of the messages? Critics of spiritualism cited the mundane nature of many spirit manifestations as reason to be skeptical. But the act of spirit communication here combines with a particularly domestic image to provide a telling contrast between body and spirit. Spirit communication is domesticated in this description, but the interruption also suggests the cross-purposes at work, as Mrs. Sweet reclaims her body to nurse her child.

The accounts of the spiritualists suggest that publication was a priority for spirits, and it necessitated cooperation between spirit and material worlds. Such was the case for Judge John Edmonds and Doctor George Dexter’s *Spiritualism*, a popular two-volume production featuring the spirits of Emmanuel Swedenborg and Francis Bacon that came out in multiple editions.<sup>113</sup> The account is more or less a dialogue, featuring extended question and answer sessions and discussions between Edmonds and Dexter and the spirits. Edmonds and Dexter’s spirit circle faced an added complication, because it paired a writing medium (Dexter) with a speaking medium (Mrs. Sweet). The composition process is described as follows in a preface co-authored by Edmonds and Dexter:

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<sup>113</sup> The first volume was published in 1853, and Kerr calls Edmonds and Dexter’s work “the decade’s most popular treatise on the subject” (44). The California *Pioneer* noted that “Everybody has read at least one of the two volumes on Spiritualism published in New York in 1853-55, by Judge J. W. Edmonds and Dr. George T. Dexter” (qtd. in Mott, *A History*, 208). Likely much of this popularity had to do with the sound reputations of the collaborators; Edmonds, in particular, had worked in public office and played a prominent part in policy for many years. For more, see the introduction to Edmonds et al. and Lardas Modern, chapter 4.

When the revelations were given through the Doctor, he, in the first instance, wrote them down in pencil; when they were given through Mrs. S., they were written down in short-hand by the Judge; and when given through the Judge, they were written down by the Doctor or Mr. Warren. But in all instances they were reduced to form, and written out in full afterward by the Judge, as they now appear. So that in all cases it is him that is speaking in the first person singular, except when the spirits are speaking. (iv)

The point of view is important in this volume, and in light of the complication that spirit communication raises, must be explained in some detail with reference to the various processes of inscription at work. As this account shows, the record of the communications given in this context had been a collaborative process from the beginning, and the account self-referentially discusses its own revision throughout, as Edmonds and Dexter and others from their spirit circle discuss, revise, and extend the messages with the assistance of the spirits.<sup>114</sup>

In Edmonds and Dexter's account, too, the narrative is interrupted at times to allow for the actions of the bodies of the mediums. One example of this accommodation features Edmonds, Dexter, and the Sweets. Mrs. Sweet "became influenced by what was evidently to us a new spirit" (234). The size of the typeface throughout Edmonds and Dexter's book varies to distinguish between the words of the spirits and the words of the mortals, and this incident is no exception.<sup>115</sup> Mrs. Sweet shoves Edmonds away, and moves to the other side of the room. Edmonds writes that "I did not at all understand it, when it

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<sup>114</sup> Some spirits were less inclined than Edmonds and Dexter's visitors to collaborate on revision. Medium Charles Hammond, discussing his spirit writing, explains in the introduction to his book of messages by the spirit of Thomas Paine that, "With the subject matter of this book, I was wholly uninformed, not knowing even the first word until my hand was moved and wrote it. When written I have often found the sentiment to contradict the convictions of my own mind. This has led me sometimes to suggest amendments, but I have uniformly been unfortunate in that respect" (Buescher, *The Other Side*, 88).

<sup>115</sup> I maintain the distinction here for the sake of clarity.

was written through the Doctor's hand: Let your will be firm, yet *mild*, Judge, and will gently its true manifestation." This provokes the following extraordinary exchange:

I then walked up to the spirit as manifested in her, and stood in front of it, looking steadily at it. It told me, with a good deal of vehemence, to go away. I replied, No; I can't do that. I must know who you are, and what you have come here for.

After looking for an instant steadily in my eye, it sank on the floor at my feet, and embraced my knees. It wept, crawled upon the floor, and finally lay prostrate. At this moment it was written through the Doctor:

Speak to the spirit, Judge, kindly, and ask who it is.

I did so, and it arose to a sitting posture, and looking at me, said:

I am not obliged to tell you my name.

It was then written:

In the name of God, Yes. Hand to the Judge.

This was handed to me by the Doctor, and when I read it, I said to the spirit, You must tell me your name and purpose. It is in the name of God I demand it. (234)

The spirit, finally subdued, gives Edmonds the name Tom Jones, and Edmonds recognizes it as the name of a man he had once condemned to the death penalty for murder. Jones begs Edmonds's forgiveness for his behavior, then leaves Mrs. Sweet's body to make room for another spirit.

The cast of characters that makes up this dramatic scene of reconciliation is a complicated one. The Judge remains himself. Mrs. Sweet, a speaking medium, is occupied by Tom Jones, and so throws the pronouns of the conversation into confusion. The Doctor, a writing medium, is being controlled by an unidentified spirit, likely

Emmanuel Swedenborg.<sup>116</sup> The orderly nature of previous messages, which distinguish spirit comments from mortal comments by changes in typeface but also by including the name of the spirit at the end of the message, gives way on this occasion to utter ambiguity. The Judge is at a loss after Mrs. Sweet shoves him—“I did not at all understand it”—but instructions from the unidentified and authoritative spirit writing through the Doctor are forthcoming. Once the Judge, following instructions, evokes the authority of God, temporarily transferred to him in the form of a note in writing by the Doctor’s hand that is not the Doctor’s handwriting, the revelation of identity is secured. The subsequent conversation falls into a familiar spiritualist pattern of a spirit expressing regret for actions done in life.

The confusion of the scene results from both spirit communication and its failure. What one might take to be the typical signs of identity—the physical body, the voice—are disconnected in this encounter from the speaker. The resurrection of the Judge’s past in this account takes the physical form of the speaking medium and the uncanny words of the man he sentenced to death. Thrust into a similar state of confusion by the lack of labels, adrift despite the typographical distinctions that distinguish spirit from mortal, the reader is forced to reckon with the fact that identity is as much a matter of time, electricity, and specific conjunctions of individual histories as a stable or fixed connection between mind, body, spirit, and speech or inscription. But the rendering of identity is as much at issue here as identity itself. If the constellation of factors that

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<sup>116</sup> “Swedenborg” and Bacon are the most frequent spirits to visit the Doctor; the message prior to this one was written by Swedenborg.

constitute identity seem to be reconfigured, the representation of this reconfiguring in print pushes the limits of the medium and the genre. Neither typography nor dialogue nor placement on the page can clarify the confusion of spirit influence that attends this scene. The question of who is speaking or writing is effectively separated from the question of authorship.

If the spirits complicated identity and the representation of identity in print, they also complicated romantic notions of authorship, even as they depended on them. Spiritualist publications and mediums made claims to authorship by particular spirits, but they simultaneously disrupted and manipulated the signs of identity that could make such claims believable. As the writing of the Doctor suggests, another example of this disruption was the rendering of spirit writing in print.

### **THE WRITING OF THE SPIRITS**

Spirit writing appeared in spiritualist publications in the form of handwriting facsimiles deployed as proofs of spirit authorship. Frequently associated with character or individual personality in the nineteenth century, handwriting acted as a marker of both authorial identity and authenticity.<sup>117</sup> As Meredith McGill has argued in “The Duplicity of the Pen,” print was one of the things that could make the authenticity of handwriting subject to manipulation. For McGill, the appearance of handwriting in print contexts presents a complex site for the staging of authenticity that ultimately reveals the

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<sup>117</sup> Some historians have maintained that handwriting didn't just mark, but in fact generated notions of identity. See *Handwriting in America*, a cultural history of handwriting, in which historian Tamara Thornton writes that handwriting “embodied, regulated, and generated notions of the self” (x).

mediatedness of the printed text. The *play* of authenticity is what is at work, against the anonymity of an American literary marketplace, and that play depends on the fact that handwriting in a print context is itself mechanically reproduced.

The facsimiles that spiritualists used as evidence simultaneously depended on and revised notions of handwriting as the marker of the individual. For spiritualists, autographs became signatures not of an individual body, but rather of an individual *spirit*. The capacity of the body to write in multiple hands acted as evidence of the effective separation of body from “author,” a prerequisite for the veracity of the account. It also emphasized the role of mediation. Spiritualist constructions depended on an abstraction of the physical act of writing, performing authorship through handwriting while simultaneously dissolving the connection between handwriting and the body holding the pen. Authorship becomes a paradox under these circumstances—collective *and* individual, human and spiritual, embodied and disembodied, singular and reproducible.

An early example of spirit writing associated with modern spiritualism was that of Isaac Post, a Quaker abolitionist and friend of the Foxes.<sup>118</sup> Though initially skeptical of the idea of spirit communication, Post soon became a believer and a writing medium, and he produced a book in 1852 called *Voices from the Spirit World* that became, according to Cox, “standard fare for [Spiritualist] seekers of the 1850s” (7). This book includes messages from such illustrious figures as Ben Franklin, Elias Hicks, and Thomas Jefferson, and in it Post describes his development as a writing medium as follows: “I

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<sup>118</sup> For intersections between spiritualism and reform, see Braude, Carroll, Castronovo, Kerr, Robert Nelson, and many others.



have found my pen moved by some power beyond my own, either physical or mental” (iii). Post wrote that “One evening, while attending a meeting, a friend read a sentiment, purporting to be signed by sixty-two spirits, whose names were read. My hand was moved to write, that each of those spirits would gladly give me a short communication, to which I assented, and found them each waiting his time in regular order” (IV). Now that the messages were rendered in print, readers could read the words of these famous spirits “as they have written with my hand.”

The displaced agency of Post’s description is characteristic of the accounts of writing mediums, usually included in the prefaces of works by spirit authors and sometimes expanded in accounts by the spirits themselves. At the front of the 1853 messages by the spirit of Murray through Spear, for instance, is the following explanation by Hewitt: “The mediumship of Mr. Spear may be said to have fairly commenced on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March, 1852. Previously to that, nothing intelligible was communicated to him, or to others through him; although his hand had been many times moved *involuntarily*, and his mind deeply impressed by some unseen power, entirely foreign to his own consciousness. On the day above specified, Mr. Spear’s hand took the pen, and began writing the following communications” (27-8). Spear’s hand, disassociated from Spear’s “self” or consciousness, picks up the pen and produces a communication from the dead. Death becomes a spatial rather than a temporal phenomenon, and the hand with the pen becomes deviant not because of its singularity, but in spite of it. Like the voice speaking, the hand writing suddenly points to multiple authors, rather than one, and the game of “authenticity” becomes more complicated.

Spirit writing and spirit autographs became a common feature of the practice of spiritualism in America. Edmonds and Dexter included facsimiles of spirit writing as an appendix to the first volume of *Spiritualism*. Britten's *Modern American Spiritualism*, the most authoritative nineteenth-century history of the movement (and one still frequently cited by critics) included a page of spirit autographs at the back, written by medium E. P. Fowler and reprinted for Britten's book from an article in the *Spiritual Telegraph*.<sup>119</sup> As Britten writes of these autographs in the text of *Modern American Spiritualism*, in 1852 Fowler had located on his table a document with the writing, "Peace, but not without Freedom," signed by many of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, which he interpreted as a reference to the national controversy over slavery (Kerr 34).

Spirit writing, like other manifestations, provided ample opportunities for the humorist.<sup>120</sup> After the writing and Fowler's story were reproduced in the *Spiritual Telegraph*, humorist Lewis Gaylord Clark seized the opportunity to write in an August 1852 issue of the *Knickerbocker* that after reading about Fowler's experience, he himself had found on his table (which had just got done rapping) a document, "in a fair and

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<sup>119</sup> The appeal of such editions may have been partly a product of autograph collecting, which had become a popular hobby in the U.S. by this time. A wide interest in collecting autographs of famous figures makes it likely that many people were familiar with some of the signatures included in spiritualist texts as samples of spirit writing. Historian Steven Gelber writes that the "original American autograph collector" was William Buell Sprague at the beginning of the nineteenth-century, but that the hobby become popular (leading to the rise of an autograph market) by the middle of the century. Gelber reports that "All through the second half of the nineteenth century "autographmaniacs" followed Sprague's lead by besieging important people for their signatures on letters and in autograph albums" (60). Thornton notes that autograph facsimile albums were available by mid-century in cheap editions, and that collectors often analyzed such autographs for signs of character (86). The popularity of Edgar Allan Poe's "Autography" series also speaks to a public interest in signatures. For more on that series and autographs in general, see Thornton, as well as McGill, "The Duplicity of the Pen."

<sup>120</sup> Perhaps the first example was Lowell's "Mr. Knott," but a series of humorists in the nineteenth century found in spiritualism much to be mocked. For more, see Kerr, Chapter 2.

transparent ‘hand-of-write,’” that turned out to be a verbatim report of a spirit convention (176).<sup>121</sup> The report notes twice in the first two paragraphs that the meeting “was very fully attended,” and it features Benjamin Franklin as chair and John Hancock as secretary. Edgar Allan Poe makes an early appearance as an inebriated attendee, until he falls out of an eight-hundredth-story window, is retrieved by a watchman and is sent off to the Milky Way.

Clark’s satirical report picks up on many of the peculiarities of spiritualism. An account of an interaction between Franklin and Mather gives a sense of the whole:

[BENJ. FRANKLIN.] ‘Since we came here, strange things have come to pass in the lost planet, which we all know, gentlemen, is composed of the grossest and most material dirt. (*Applause.*) The spells of those who mutter, poor imbecile witches, magicians, *et id omne genus*, had for a long time been dispelled, and the explosion of the Salem witchcraft had put an end to the same.’

COTTON MATHER (*without rising from his seat*). ‘Good!—good!’ (177)<sup>122</sup>

The sedentary Mather assents to Franklin’s association of modern spiritualism with a revival of the same trouble that had led to earlier manifestations of witchcraft. After questioning the fact that any spirit would want to communicate with earth, and receiving continued support and applause from the audience, Franklin gets to his main topic:

BENJ. FRANKLIN. ‘To come to the point, gentlemen, our signatures have been forged to a piece of writing.’

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<sup>121</sup> Kerr identifies the author of this piece as Clark; no name is attached to the article. See *Mediums*, p. 34.

<sup>122</sup> Fictional renditions of spiritualism frequently alluded to Mather and other Puritans to construct a not-so-subtle and often critical history for the “manifestations.” See Melville, “The Apple-Tree Table,” Brownson’s *The Spirit-Rapper*, and James Russell Lowell, who included in one of his lectures the note: “Turning over the yellow leaves of the same copy of ‘Webster on Witchcraft’ which Cotton Mather studied, I thought, ‘Well, that goblin is laid at last!’—and while I mused the tables were turning and the chairs beating the devil’s tattoo all over Christendom” (qtd. in Kerr, 28). See Kerr, pp. 28-30.

(BENJ. FRANKLIN *here held up a copy of the 'Spiritual Telegraph,' with a facsimile of the signatures of those present. JOHN Q. ADAMS smiled benignantly when he looked at his, and said that his 'hand used to tremble in that manner during his old age in the flesh, but that in his present immortal youth he wrote a good stout hand.'* JOHN HANCOCK *said that they had done full justice to him. The members of the Convention declared that the signatures in general were remarkably correct, and calculated to deceive.*) (177-8)

Franklin concludes with a set of resolutions on “a shining, transparent parchment-sheet, like gold-beaters’ skin in a balloon, seen against the declining sun, inscribed with characters of light,” that states the signatures to be a forgery by evil spirits, claims spirits have no desire to return to earth, and recommends “brother SANDS” to “carry these resolutions to the earth, to be there imprinted in the Knickerbocker Magazine, to warn our fellow-men against a set of vagabond spirits” (178).

Clark’s “convention” riffs on several aspects of spiritualism. Claims of fully attended meetings were characteristic, and often true: abolition and spiritualism overlapped in part because abolitionists could claim the vast audiences that would attend spiritualist events.<sup>123</sup> Poe, Franklin, and Hancock were common spirit visitors, and the process of inscription that Clark describes for Franklin’s resolutions mimics descriptions of the documents of the spirit world, which often featured ethereal scrolls and letters of fire.<sup>124</sup> Most interesting about the account for our purposes, however, is Franklin’s discussion of the signatures that appeared on Fowler’s table. Adams’s smile presumably relies on the paradoxical fact that the imitation handwriting is tied to his mortal body, in

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<sup>123</sup> See Braude, pp. 56-81.

<sup>124</sup> Sollors writes that “No religious, philosophical, theoretical, or spiritual mind and no Puritan divine or national father figure appeared as often in the new Spiritualists’ visions and writings as did the spirit of, as Robert Dale Owen put it, ‘our own practical and unimaginative Franklin’” (460-61). See Stiles for scrolls and letters of fire.

that it represents his shakier writing late in life, rather than the youthful writing he has been restored to in the spirit world.<sup>125</sup> The “justice” done to John Hancock is a reliable imitation of his iconic signature, and the convention’s agreement that the signatures are both “correct” and “calculated to deceive” implies that this fraud is particularly dangerous, in that it is a product of a “remarkable” imitation that is simultaneously and paradoxically both correct and incorrect. The spirits characteristically recommend publication, situating Clark himself in the authoritative position of spirit medium as well as author.<sup>126</sup>

Clark’s account is a mocking one, but it does suggest some of the anxiety that spirit writing inspired in relation to questions and markers of identity and authorship. An example of this is an account purportedly by the spirit of John Quincy Adams, who makes his most extended appearance in *Twelve Messages from the Spirit John Quincy Adams through Joseph D. Stiles, Medium*, an 1859 spiritualist account interspersed with anti-slavery appeals. *Twelve Messages*, which describes Adams’s movement through the spirit world, offers a provocative example of the way that spiritualists fused richly imaginative revisions of history with an acute awareness of the possibilities of print. The preface to *Twelve Messages* provides a lengthy description of the process of its creation. Originally composed by Joseph Stiles, writing-medium and printer by trade, the account was then copied and revised by him in trance. Next, it was taken by the editor (Josiah Brigham, an acquaintance of John Quincy Adams in life, to whom the messages are

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<sup>125</sup> Spirits, according to at least one account, had spirit bodies that were more or less facsimiles of their material bodies, and could even change clothes. See Stiles.

<sup>126</sup> The overlap between medium and author has, of course, a very long history, going back to invocations to the muses.

directed) to be proofed by a third party (Allen Putnam, a Harvard-educated lawyer and spiritualist) before going on to the publisher and the printer to be stereotyped.

The volume begins by offering evidence in the form of spirit-writing. As proof of authorship by John Quincy Adams, Brigham includes a series of reproductions of the medium's writing while in trance. These he juxtaposes with facsimiles of original handwriting by three of the spirits that had written through Stiles: John Quincy Adams, Abigail Adams, and George Washington. Brigham claims that the evolving stability of the handwriting attributed to John Quincy Adams reflects the spirit's increasing capacity to control the medium. Many spiritualists were prone to attribute variations in style, either the style of handwriting or the style of the narrative, to the act of mediation itself. Reasons offered were that the medium was not "passive" enough to keep his or her own views from seeping into the thoughts or the prose of the occupying spirit or that the spirit had not perfected the act of controlling the medium.

In print, the matter becomes one of original (of which the "fac-simile" handwriting becomes a proof) versus imitation: Putnam, in his reviser's preface, notes the unlikelihood of prolonged imitation of distinctive handwriting to the extent demonstrated by the manuscript. The process of extended imitation would tax the body, and challenge the conception of handwriting as an unconscious and genuine expression of self. That one style of handwriting could be reproduced by multiple hands is unthinkable—unless the "self" is the spirit, and the "body" the medium. The assumption that handwriting is a clear and readable signifier of identity becomes the means by which both inscription and authorship become a spiritual rather than a physical phenomenon. Handwriting becomes

reproducible, in the sense that the same handwriting can be produced by two different people, by means of a temporary conjunction of body and spirit. It also becomes the grounds for a distinction of body from inscribing spirit-author.

*Twelve Messages from the Spirit John Quincy Adams* is a bizarre, multivocal projection of nationalist feeling and history into the spirit spheres. The book is nothing if not collaborative, but its appeals rest on its claim to a single, identifiable author that sits at the temporally vexed intersection of American history, an American present, and the spirit world. Disrupting the uniformity of the printed page, the handwritten segments evoke even as they challenge the embodiment and the authenticity associated with handwriting. The intersection of spirit with medium draws together the ghostly hand of a former author and famous American figure, now deceased, with the living but vacant hand of the medium. Time might not work exactly as one would expect in this account, but history is an important factor. The intelligibility of John Quincy Adams depends on two things: the convincingness of spirit mediation and its bibliographical codes, and the reader's familiarity with John Quincy Adams as a popular figure from national history.

For this book it is the reproducibility of handwriting across human "media" that is necessary for this evidence to be convincing. Interestingly, it is the reproducibility of handwriting in *print* that becomes the selling point. The book was promoted on the appeal of its "uniqueness," an appeal that was tied to both the handwriting of famous figures and the facsimile reproductions. An ad for *Twelve Messages* in the *Liberator* of January 7, 1859, notes that the messages were "written in the peculiar handwriting of Mr. Adams." A separate paragraph asserts that "This unique work contains the autographs of

Mr. Adams, Mrs. Abigail Adams, and George Washington—first, as recorded by themselves when in the body—and second, as written by them through mediumistic agency.”

The handwriting that appears at the front of *Twelve Messages* is a *twice*-mediated phenomenon. The handwriting attributed to a specific spirit-author is mediated, first by the body of the medium, and second by the engraver or lithographer and the printing process. Although the editor invites the reader to visit his house and inspect the original manuscript, the printed text ultimately depends on the willingness of its reader to accept the authenticity associated with handwriting (in other words, that handwriting can *not* be reproduced) by agreeing to the transparency of these signatures’ mediation (in other words, that mediation reproduces things *differently*, in a way that does not challenge their nonreproducibility). The appeal of handwriting reproduced in print authorizes the proof of handwriting reproduced by a human, by arguing that such reproduction does not challenge the singularity or authentic value of handwriting.

The uncanny displacement of personhood, temporary or otherwise, in the spiritualist medium finds a parallel in the production of the text itself, in the revision process and the combination of stereotyped print with multiple facsimile signatures, all in different hands (different styles of handwriting) but by the same hand (the medium’s hand), which has been evacuated of stable individual identity. The mediated text defies that specificity in ways more complex than the mere separation of print from author, inasmuch as it is designed to act as reproducible proof of specific embodiment and integrated authorial identity. But Brigham concludes his exhibition of originals and



spiritualist facsimiles with the “original” original: the facsimile handwriting of Stiles himself. And the object is, ultimately, not to make the human medium transparent, but rather to foreground him. Allen Putnam, in his reviser’s preface to *Twelve Messages*, notes that, while “in most of their communications spirits get embarrassingly blended with their mediums,” in this case the distinction between Stiles and John Quincy Adams stays refreshingly clear.

A review published in the *Liberator* on January 7, 1859, faults the account in John Quincy Adams’s *Twelve Messages*—but not for the facsimiles, which the reviewer finds convincing: “To be empowered to write several hundred manuscript pages, in close resemblance of the peculiar chirography of that venerated statesman, is as remarkable as it is inexplicable by any recognized law of the human mind.” It is rather, the reviewer writes, the *internal* evidence that fails: addresses from various spirits in the spirit-world are

all expressed in the same fanciful and imaginative style, as unlike that which characterized the writings of those strong and comprehensive minds, when in the flesh, as possible. To believe them to have been dictated by the persons referred to must require extraordinary faith, and to us implies the loss of sound critical judgment. The external evidences in favor of the super-mundane origin of this volume are certainly striking and unique; but if these are not sustained by its internal evidences...then they are of no special weight, however difficult it may be to account for them.

The process of puzzling through exactly how handwriting has been mediated here and what that means for self-consistency proves too much for this reviewer, who throws up his hands and resorts to the safer mode of establishing authorial identity through literary aesthetics, based on a study of style.

This response speaks to and pushes further McGill's point that handwriting in print contexts functions differently, drawing on discourses of authenticity and authorship while simultaneously troubling them. The notions of the self and the author generated through spiritualist facsimiles of handwriting disrupt even as they reinforce the conception of handwriting as tied to the self, for they attempt to prove that the self is not identical to the body; the written word is always a mediated phenomenon. This, like the speech of trance speakers, poses a dilemma. If the spirit is separable from the body, how can handwriting ever be a trustworthy indication of identity? What *is* identity, if it is always constituted by and through media?

Spiritualist texts like *Twelve Messages* called the function of the author into question, even as they depended on the concept of authorship to be believable. Provability often happened at the intersections of media, as publishers adapted print methods of encoding authorship and authenticity to associate the texts with their famous spirit authors. The spirit in the text draws attention to the conventions of print, exposing the print as well as the human medium. What does the frontispiece mean? Who is the author, anyway? Print, too, becomes uncanny in spiritualist texts. Reviewers like the one in the *Liberator*, troubled by the disjunction created by spirit and medium, turned to literary criticism to establish a more secure foundation for authorship that could, apparently, penetrate even the densest haze of mediation. Such reviews suggest that literary constructions of authorship as identifiable displays of form or style worked in tandem with bibliographical codes to convince readers of or against the validity of spiritualist documents. In the next two sections, I move to the literary or stylistic codes

that signify authorship and consider their invocation by spiritualists as further evidence of spirit influence.

### **LIZZIE DOTEN AND LITERARY REVISION**

If an interpretation of style convinced the reviewer of Stiles's account that spirit authorship was unlikely, formal and stylistic interpretations sometimes landed reviewers on the side of the spirits, or at least the poetry they were reported to have written through mediums. In 1863, a volume by Elizabeth Doten, titled *Poems from the Inner Life*, included poems credited to the spirits of Edgar Allan Poe, Robert Burns, and William Shakespeare. Doten's discussion of inspiration in the preface informs her revival of literary voices from beyond the grave. The complex process of the "inner life" that she describes combines the specificity of spirit communication with a more transcendental sense of inspiration or attunement with the universe. The product is a theory of literary influence that underwrites a combination of resurrection and revision in her poetry. Doten's visitations by literary greats extend the field of poetic experience into the spirit world. The imaginative construction of this world provokes a series of revisionary poems that Doten credits to specific spirit-authors. But the "inner life" is a field of acoustics, and Doten's depiction of the process of creative listening that comprises mediumship spiritualizes the senses and renders still-active voices out of the silence of death and on to the printed page.

In her initial "A Word to the World," Doten begins her meditation on inspiration. Drawing on a spiritualist rhetoric of the particular sensitivity of the spirit medium based

on physical organization, she writes: “My brain was fashioned, and my nervous system finely strung, so that I should inevitably catch the thrill of the innumerable voices resounding through the universe, and translate their messages into human language, as coherently and clearly as my imperfections would allow” (viii). Early in life Doten turned, she writes, to her inner life and the cultivation of her spiritual nature, and the inspirations that resulted were several. She was guided by “strange and invisible influences” both general and particular (ix). Cultivating a complex sense of inspiration, Doten argues that her natural poetic tendencies and the influence of the spirits are not incompatible, nor does the former render the latter a fraud: “It is often as difficult to decide what is the action of one’s own intellect and what is spirit-influence, as it is in our ordinary associations to determine what is original with ourselves and what we have received from circumstances or contact with the mind of others” (xi). Doten’s theory of influence turns us back to the question of who is speaking, for the inspiration that she describes situates the author as perpetual spirit medium. The medium here represents a specifically temporal phenomenon: the authorial self in time functions as a locus of circumstances and voices from past and present, and the works she produces out of this subject position are composites whose origins are never easy to place or to isolate as the creations of a single individual.

Still, Doten’s vision of inspiration is not a promiscuous merging of individuals. She writes of the influence of disembodied intelligences that:

Under such influences I have not necessarily lost my individuality, or become wholly unconscious. I was, for the time being, like a harp in the hands of superior powers, and just in proportion as my entire nature was attuned to thrill responsive

to their touch, did I give voice and expression to their unwritten music. They furnished the inspiration, but it was of necessity modified by the nature and character of the instrument upon which they played, for the most skilful [sic] musician cannot change the tone of a harp to the sound of a trumpet, though he may give a characteristic expression of himself through either. (xii-xiii)

Like other spiritualists of the time, Doten carefully maintains the boundaries and stylistic peculiarities of the individual, but suggests such boundaries are permeable to impression or influence by spirits. The spiritualist poet is inspired *and* writes, the poem is simultaneously copy and original, and the expression she gives to the “unwritten music” of the spirits is as much her own as theirs.

Critic Eliza Richards argues that in her poetry Doten purposefully steps outside of the romantic genius model, rendering the generation of her poems a conversation as much as a composition. In the case of spiritualist poems, Richards maintains that the medium acts as both author and copyist, and “because continuity between spirit and medium marks the act of poetic generation, attribution is both impossible to establish and irrelevant” (121). Still, as Richards goes on to acknowledge, Doten’s volume, like other spiritualist publications, does not dismiss authorship, but rather compounds or distributes it. It also remediates many of the poems. *Poems* proceeds in stages, and each of the verses attributed to a specific spirit was originally part of a broader speech event. Several of the poems in Doten’s collection, collected in “Part I,” were written before she became a public speaker. Though they appear under her own name, she writes, “How far I have ever written, independent of these higher influences, I cannot say” (xvi). The second part of the volume includes poems “given under direct spirit influence before public

audiences” (40). Doten writes that for many of the poems she could not “obtain the authorship, but for such as I could, the names are given” (40).

Given as public performances, the poems in the second section often are occasional, and many of the headnotes are reprinted from reports of the performances that appeared in newspapers and periodicals. Each poem reflects the theme of spiritualism, often featuring death and the spirit’s progression into the spirit world. One poem, titled “Hope for the Sorrowing,” was delivered at the funeral service of Mr. Henry L. Kingman, of North Bridgewater, Mass., November, 1862.<sup>127</sup> Another, “The Eagle of Freedom,” responds to the Civil War by cheering on the Eagle that might rend the “war-cloud” that hides “our broad banner from sight” (64). The poem reminds its readers that “The souls of your heroes rest not in the grave,” articulating an image that doubles as imperialist vision and republican afterworld in which “rising Republics, like nebulae, gleam / Wherever the stars of your nation shall beam” (65).

The occasional and performative quality of the poems by spirit authors restructures authorship as a temporary phenomenon, or a conjunction of spirit and medium that occurs at a specific point in time and in relation to a specific audience. Many of the poems were given at the conclusion of lectures by Doten, and many were addressed directly to members of the audience who had lost loved ones. One example is “Birdie’s’ Spirit-Song,” composed by the spirit of the daughter of the chairman. Birdie’s poem situates the spirit in the audience, even as her words are delivered through the

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<sup>127</sup> Mediums often gave addresses by the spirits of the dead at their own funerals. Doten’s poem features the spirit assuring the mourners that “Death is not a dreamless sleep,” to which the narrator on behalf of the mourners responds that “we will weep no more!” (56)

medium: “Fresh from the Summer-land, / Father I come and stand / Close by your side.” The presence is invisible and comforting: “You cannot see me here, / Or feel my presence near, / And yet your ‘Birdie’ dear / Never has died” (73). The use of a pet name reserved for a child cues the emotional participation of a particular audience member, who in the words of Doten hears two voices, rather than one. The association of the poem with the purported author is secured through this affective identification with the familiar name and the comfort offered by the communication and the imagined proximity of a familiar if invisible presence.

Authorship is cued in other ways in these poems, sometimes by invoking individual histories. In some cases such histories are supplemented by intertextual references to the works associated with the spirits when they were alive. Such is the case in one poem composed by spiritualist Achsa W. Sprague, who the headnote indicates had died almost a year prior to Doten’s performance of the poem at the end of a lecture on March 22, 1863. In the poem, titled “My Spirit-Home,” Sprague describes her experience of the spirit world. Her identity is performed through several markers of individuality: the spirit references specific experiences from her life and includes a quote from Sprague’s poem “Waiting at the Gate,” which begins with the words “I wait, I wait at the golden gate.”<sup>128</sup> In Doten’s version, the spirit says “No longer ‘I wait at the golden gate,’ / For the angels have let me in” (77). Sprague’s spirit returns to her earlier verse to update the poem, reopening the narrative and relieving the poet-narrator from the perpetual “wait” or the uncertainty of her first iteration. This revision simultaneously reassures the

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<sup>128</sup> The poem, “Waiting At The Gate,” is dated 1859. See Sprague, 234-235.

audience of the certainty of life after death, integrates poet and narrator, and situates her on the other side of the boundary figuratively represented by the golden gate, and marks the permeability of that boundary by giving her a voice after death.

The potential for revisability was structurally consistent with spiritualist beliefs, which cast the individual in an ongoing process of development through the spheres. Detached from the timeline of the individual's mortal life, poetry could be perpetually recursive, the final intentions of the author infinitely revisable.<sup>129</sup> If spirit communication allowed poetry to catch up with Sprague after her death, it sent Shakespeare back to rework some of his more pressing questions in verse through Doten. The first of the poems attributed to Shakespeare, titled "Life," also builds on an abundance of intertextual references to his plays. The poem begins by writing back against the famous soliloquy from *Hamlet*, with knowledge gained from beyond the grave:

"To be, or not to be," is not "the question;"  
There is no choice of Life. Ay, mark it well!—  
For Death is but another name for Change.  
The weary shuffle off their mortal coil,  
And think to slumber in eternal night.  
But, lo! the man, though dead, is living still;  
Unclothed, is clothed upon, and his Mortality  
Is swallowed up of Life. (86)

This revision of Hamlet's appeal answers the question—but not, as Shakespeare's spirit notes, the question Hamlet asks. Shifting the emphasis from Death to Change, Doten's spirit deals not with the matter of dreams, but that of spirit, and thereby constitutes a new vision of what flesh is heir to. Mortality, "swallowed up of Life," persists to be "clothed

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<sup>129</sup> Causing endless vexation for editorial efforts. One wonders whether to be glad or sorry that Whitman's spirit never returned to continue revising *Leaves of Grass* in perpetuity.



upon,” and the rest of the poem spins out the trope of “garb,” recasting Shakespeare’s plays in light of a spirit world that has moved from speculation to established fact—or from one form of imagination to another. This spirit world renders powerless those characters that plot death in the plays. The revision makes light work of “poisoned cup,” “dagger’s thrust,” or “sting of deadly asp,” for “This mortal garb may be as full of wounds / And bloody rents as royal Caesar’s mantle; / Yet that which made it man or Caesar liveth still” (87). Love turns out to be the currency of death, and Shakespeare reflects upon his own initial formulation in *Hamlet* in updated verse: “What most consummate fools / This fear of death doth make us!” (87)

Conscience, in this model, is the opposite of the problem, its best part, or the perception it might produce of an afterlife, lacking: “Thus *Ignorance* makes cowards of us all, / And blinds us to our being’s best estate” (88). Fear of death gives way, as Shakespeare speaks from a new region of knowledge, to the spirit’s certainty in everlasting life. But Shakespeare’s spirit goes on to trace the wounds and rents visited upon the mortal garb by sectarianism, bigotry, superstition, “wealth, place, and precedence” (89). Using his own words and works to profess spiritualist preoccupations with anti-sectarianism and to criticize doctrine, Doten revises Shakespeare’s poems and recasts his “mortal coil” as temporary garb, in which are left inscriptions of the evils of a particularly nineteenth-century material world.

Spirit and medium achieve closer temporal resonance when the allusions and revisions of Doten’s poetry continue into a series of poems by the spirit of Edgar Allan Poe. The introductory note to a poem titled “Resurrexi” states that the poem was given

impromptu at a Boston lecture, and published initially in the *Springfield Republican*. Whatever the circumstances of the poem's production, the reviewer notes that it is "wonderful as a reproduction of the singular mode and alliteration of Poe's style" (104). "Resurrexi" is a story of Poe's ascension to the spirit world, but it begins with a brief account of the process of his dictation through mediums.<sup>130</sup> This, Poe's spirit states in the second stanza, is the second time he has attempted to communicate poetry; the first time was through a male medium.<sup>131</sup> The headnote says that this is "an allusion to a previous poem that purported to come from the spirit of Poe, which was published several years since, and attracted much attention" (104). The referential building of authorship through various mediums and outside of death that happens here creates an extended framework of identification that underwrites the Poe-like "rhythm and sonic echoing" of the poem (Rudy 174).

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<sup>130</sup> The complete stanzas read as follows:  
Once before I found a mortal  
Waiting at the heavenly portal—  
Waiting but to catch some echo from that ever-opening door;  
Then I seized his quickened being,  
And through all his inward seeing,  
Caused my burning inspiration in a fiery flood to pour!

Now I come more meekly human,  
And the weak lips of a woman  
Touch with fire from off the altar, not with burnings as of yore;  
But in holy love descending,  
With her chastened being blending,

I would fill your souls with music from the bright celestial shore. (105)

See Jason Rudy's discussion of this poem in *Electric Meters: Victorian Physiological Poetics*, pp. 173-4. See also Richards, pp. 107-48.

<sup>131</sup> Poe's spirit was a popular visitor among spiritualists. This might have been one of a number of mediums, but most likely was a reference to Thomas Lake Harris's publication of poems credited to the spirit of Poe in the *Herald of Light* in July 1857. See Carlson and Mott, *A History*, 210.

The *Springfield Republican* reviewer of “Resurrexi” dodges the question of spirit inspiration, stating that “Whatever may be the truth about its production, the poem is, in several respects, a remarkable one” (104). An 1864 review of *Poems from the Inner Life* published in the *Maine Farmer* makes a similar point:

Without undertaking to pronounce upon the genuineness of the spirit inspiration which the author claims for these poems, we are constrained to testify to the remarkable power of expression and beauty of thought which characterize them. Their origin and the circumstances under which they are given to the world have nothing to do with the merit of the poetry, nor the truthfulness of the moral and spiritual lessons they teach. It is a book well worth reading. (“Editor’s Table” 2)

Left with a plethora of styles seemingly consistent with the authors whose spirits are credited with their composition, the reviewers lack the mode of analysis that aided the reviewer of *Twelve Messages* in detecting deception. As a result, the reviewers leave the question an open one, and the significance of the volume as a literary work is ultimately detached from the question of authorship.

The final poem by Poe’s spirit is titled “Farewell to Earth,” and it appears after a phonographic report of the lecture Lizzie Doten gave prior to reciting the poem. The lecture, titled “The Mysteries of Godliness” and delivered on Nov. 2, 1863, in Clinton Hall (NY), acts as an extended introduction to the poem. In it Doten argues that the mysteries of Godliness are within, stating that “The most of God that you can know is through your own souls” (189).<sup>132</sup> She describes Jesus and Edgar Allan Poe as mediums,

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<sup>132</sup> The Emersonian echo in this is not accidental. After Emerson delivered the lecture “Character,” Doten responded to critics with a defense of Emerson, interpreting Emerson’s claim as a prophecy that “the Christianity of the churches—their traditional opinions and religious creeds—must finally yield to those intuitions of the Inner Life” (qtd. in *The Oxford Handbook of Transcendentalism*, ed. Joel Myerson). For the strain of radical individualism in spiritualism, see Braude. For a reading of that strain as a manner of

but specifies that the latter was not a medium in the specific terms of modern spiritualism: rather, “He was a medium for the general inspiration which sets like a current of living fire through the universe” (147). Doten claims in her lecture that Poe has developed in the spirit world to the point of no longer needing to communicate with the mortal world. She says that he has conquered the particular passions and individual energies that obsessed him and that he is now willing to express his will more generally as part of a greater will. “He can still minister, as an Everlasting Truth and living power, to the needs of Humanity,” she says, “but as Poe, the individual, he is willing to be forgotten. His personality, as far as human recognition is concerned, can end here” (157).

Doten thus imposes an end to authorship, but she does not premise this end on the close of a mortal life. Instead, she cites a development of a higher wisdom in the spheres, a wisdom that renders an individualism subject to “human recognition” unnecessary. Poe’s willingness to vanish from the archives suggests that individual authorship is a function of a human world that depends on the currency of recognition to secure the boundaries of the individual.<sup>133</sup> Doten herself moves away from this model in the first section of *Poems*, by refusing to provide the names of specific spirit-authors but arguing that she herself is never fully independent of external sources of inspiration.

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submission, see Lardas Modern. For a discussion of the intersections of Unitarianism and spiritualism, see Buescher, *The Other Side of Salvation*.

<sup>133</sup> This disparity between human and spirit worlds is visible elsewhere in spiritualist writings; many mediums claimed, for instance, that spirits didn’t typically use names. The spirit of George Fox writes, in one 1862 text, that “In dictating the former little work, entitled ‘Communications from the Spirit World, by Lorenzo Dow and others, through a Lady,’ we were minded not to append the names of the spirits, immediately communicating; but, we find men require the sanction of a name to make gook [sic] teachings palatable. We do not object to gratifying their innocent desires, and therefore, we say to our medium, that she may affix ours to these Essays; and, when her first work is republished, she may, also, insert the names of the authors of those little Essays, if men desire it. We know there is nothing, really, in a name, but that is a step in advance the world has yet to take” (*Further Communications* vi).

The model of the inner life that Doten develops in her *Poems from the Inner Life* is a model of literary inspiration that makes room for the invisible presence and communication of spirits. The imperative to look inward is one that is visible in a variety of forms in the nineteenth century, and among other things it shows the influence of the Quaker concept of inner light on the development of modern spiritualism in America. But the multiple voices that develop in Doten's poems and public performances suggest a restructuring of authorial power and definition specific to spiritualism, even as it partakes of broader nineteenth-century structures of composition and inscription. The influence of the spirits is located in and subject to the form of specific speaking events, and the audience plays a part in determining which spirit will impress the medium.

In the preface to *Poems from the Inner Life*, Doten writes that "I do not indulge in the conceit that this little work has any important mission to perform, or that it will cause any commotion in the literary world" (xxv). She encourages the reader, however, to attend to his or her inner life. "The Spirit-World is not so distant as it seems, and the veil of Materiality which hides it from our view, by hopeful and untiring aspiration can be rent in twain. We only need listen earnestly and attentively" (xxvii). The voices of the inner life have great potential to speak to issues pressing to the reader's present day, and Doten concludes the sentiment by bridging the spirit and material words through citation with a quote from the poetry of living nineteenth-century poet Josiah Gilbert Holland: "As a popular author has beautifully said, 'Silence is vocal, if we listen well'" (xxviii).<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Holland was a novelist and poet from Massachusetts who helped to found and edit *Scribner's Monthly*. This line comes from a segment titled "Preface:"

Silence is vocal if we listen well;

## PRINT IN THE SPIRIT OF THOMAS JEFFERSON

If the poets returned to write new poems and revise old ones, the founders of the United States also came back through spirit mediums with the desire to edit their creation, and with much to say about mismanagement and the way their plans for the country were being thwarted. A fictional account once again offers a testament to the frequency of such re-visions. In 1863, Thomas Jefferson was summoned as a spirit to the hastily convened circle of none other than Petroleum V. Nasby, the incorrigible, Confederate-sympathizing, poorly-spoken minister dreamed up as Civil War satire by journalist David Ross Locke. Nasby's letter, reprinted in *The Nasby Papers* (1864), is titled "Communes with Spirits." Nasby begins as a typical spiritualist might, save the orthography: "Ther is sumthin plesent in the idee uv bein in communicashen with them ez hav gone before, as it may be reznable supozed that frum their stan-pint they kin see things in a more clearer lite than we who is encumbered with clay" (53). Nasby invites a medium to visit his flock, and, in an effort to enlighten several "Abolishnists present," calls for "Tomus Jefferson." Jefferson, much to Nasby's disappointment, refuses to profess allegiance to the Democratic Party, calling it "a mizable bastard, born uv John C. Calhoon, and that old hag, Stait Rites, and a low-lived whelp it is." Nasby, dismayed, asks Jefferson if he would really have the listeners "support a Abolishn war fer the perpus

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And Life and Being sing in dullest ears  
From morn to night, from night to morn again,  
With fine articulations; but when God  
Disturbs the soul with terror, or inspires  
With a great joy, the words of Doubt and Faith  
Sound quick and sharp like drops on forest leaves;  
And we look up to where the pleasant sky  
Kisses the thunder-caps, and drink the song. (8)

uv freein niggers?” In response, “The sperit rapt out with awful distinknis, ‘We hold these trooths to be self-evident that awl men is created ekal...’” Nasby immediately stops the medium, stating that “I knew the sperit wuz not Tomus Jefferson, but a imposter, hevin heerd a Abolishn preacher use the same langige at a 4<sup>th</sup> uv Guly selebrashen.” Nasby goes on to try Andrew Jackson, Thomas Hart Benton, and Stephen Douglas, and in each case is forced to stop the medium mid-message. He finally gives up with a dismissal: “Its my privit opinyun that thers nothin relyable about it. Hed the sperits bin reely them uv Jefferson, Jaxon, and sich, they woodent hev talkt so much undilootid niggerism.”

Locke here uses this caricature of spiritualists to mock Nasby’s pro-slavery sentiments. Many of the spirits represented in spiritualist literature demonstrated an anti-slavery orientation, and they often were inclined to draw quotes from the Declaration and the Constitution. “The national dimensions of modern Spiritualism,” Werner Sollors writes, “were enhanced by a whole variety of Founding Father spirits who often endorsed the abolitionist or other reformist leanings of their mediums” (479). But what spiritualism provided was a space for revision of the voices of the past, or their input on matters of current importance to the country, and Nasby’s dismay reflects the fact that spirits nearly universally spoke on behalf of liberty and in favor of individual freedom.

Jefferson was only one part of a larger spiritualist tendency to resurrect the spirits of the founding fathers. Writing through spirit medium Isaac Post, for instance, Jefferson joins a number of other spirits, including George Washington, in discussing how his own views have changed in the spirit world: “you see I now condemn that wish [sic] I

practiced, or rather encouraged others to do, I saw not then that the true way to revolutionize a country, was to preach the right, to live the right, and always by example to lead aright, and changes would surely come” (*Voices* 101). Jefferson goes on to criticize the press for political sectarianism and to suggest strategies for reformers, including, in an echo of Post’s own Quaker beliefs, an appeal to avoid the use of force. Other spirits professed more extreme revisions of their previous beliefs through Post. The spirit of George Washington writes that John Calhoun, James Polk, and Andrew Jackson were among the spirits who expressed regret for their beliefs and actions in the material world. Calhoun’s spirit writes through Post that “I looked with astonishment upon the delusion with which my mind had been filled. The powers with which I had been favored, had been worse than wasted; I should have been a leader in good, instead of evil; I should have been foremost in promoting liberty, instead of slavery” (88).

These resurrections and revisions of the voices of the politicians and particularly the founders of the country often were tied to criticisms of the nation and suggestions for new directions it might take. As literary critic Bret Carroll writes, “In the tradition of the Puritan jeremiad, [spiritualists] imagined Franklin, Jefferson, and especially Washington accusingly pointing their disembodied fingers at the later generations who inherited the nation they had fought to establish” (38). Perhaps the most ostentatious example of Jefferson’s spirit delivering a jeremiad was *Twelve Discourses on Government: Purporting to have been Delivered in Boston, Mass., December, 1853, by Thomas Jefferson, Of the Spirit World; Throughout John M. Spear, Medium*. This short volume was published by the community press in Hopedale, and includes a preface by Hopedale



founder Adin Ballou, in which Ballou states that neither he nor the medium should be held responsible for the opinions expressed in the messages.<sup>135</sup>

Ballou writes in the preface that the messages that make up the volume were delivered through John Murray Spear, recorded by a scribe, and subsequently read to a group at Hopedale, who after hearing them recommended publication under the editorship of Ballou. A committee was formed for publication of a first edition consisting of two thousand copies. Ballou writes that his editorial intervention has been minimal: “With very slight Grammatical corrections, never changing the sense, he has left the language of the reporting scribe just as he found it, however variant from his own taste. He deemed it his imperative duty to let the public have such peculiar and extraordinary communications, as nearly *verbatim et literatim* as the nature of the case would seem to allow” (Jefferson III-IV). As in other spiritualist documents, the discussion of the publication history and the claims to a verbatim report combine with the disclaimers of the medium and the editor to relocate the authority of these messages to the spirit of Thomas Jefferson.

Following the preface is a brief introductory essay about the phrenology and physiology of Thomas Jefferson, taken from *The Phrenological Journal*.<sup>136</sup> The essay carefully reads Jefferson’s physical characteristics into a statement about his personality, follows him through his accomplishments in a brief biography, and concludes with a recapitulation of the inscription on his gravestone. A few pages later, Jefferson’s spirit

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<sup>135</sup> Hopedale was a Christian and socialist community founded in Massachusetts in 1842.

<sup>136</sup> For discussions of the relationship between phrenology and spiritualism, see Cooter, Oppenheim, and McGarry. See also Lardas Modern, Chapter 2.

comes roaring out of the grave to confront the reader with an abundance of exclamation points:

Damnably! absolutely damnably to think! Why, the scoundrels, they deserve to be shut up in pits of everlasting infamy! To think of our struggle, our perils, and then to see, after a lapse of seventy years' experiment, what it has all come to! I have no sort of patience with the infernal scoundrels! To pervert the things which were said and done, in such a rascally way, is absolutely infamous! I had no manner of doubt, but in a short space of time, every man would, to say the least, own himself. (15)

The spirit's dismay at the direction of the nation and his self-recriminations ("I myself," he writes, "should have immediately emancipated every one who was under my control") quickly turn to a manifesto of revolution and a blueprint for a new government. He addresses the listener or reader frequently and directly as a representative of the ailing political body, and in discourse three, warns of impending doom: "Things are growing worse and worse with you. You are sinking deeper and deeper in infamy. Instead of raising other nations up to a high point, by your example, you are bringing them down lower and lower...You have fallen from a greater height than any other people ever fell before; and unless you are checked in your downward course, you will go to perdition" (24). Jefferson advocates for revolution—by force, as necessary, having apparently changed his mind after writing through the Quaker medium Post—and then the establishment of a new government structurally modeled after the human body and formed under the driving principles of Truth, Love, and Wisdom.

Jefferson's spirit states in his final discourse through Spear that the new government he envisions "will be, as it were, a city on a lofty eminence. It will be a guide

to others, and especially to newly organized nations” (59).<sup>137</sup> But in order for the city on the hill to be a positive and not a negative guide, changes must be made, and it is in fact the *revised* version of the nation that Jefferson situates on a “lofty eminence.”

*Twelve Discourses* thus brings the spirit of Thomas Jefferson back through anti-slavery medium John Spear to advocate for change in nineteenth-century America, using formal and discursive structures critics have described as central to the literature of early America.<sup>138</sup> Jefferson’s regret for his own behavior in life begins his appeal to his reader to act on behalf of reforming the nation. Despite the disclaimer of the preface, Jefferson and his medium shared a number of views, and the spirit’s words suggest the kinds of revision imagined through spiritualist publications. Through spiritualism, the voices of founding fathers, like the voices of poets, could be adjusted to respond to developments in the nineteenth century. Spiritualists thus enlisted aid from the spirit world to lend authority to their words and to address what they saw as the problems troubling the nation, and the publications that resulted represented an effort to open the field of political discourse to the living inspiration of the spirits of the dead.

## CONCLUSION

In *Flight to Canada*, Ishmael Reed spiritualizes theft and appropriation to project for Josiah Henson a mode of revenge against Harriet Beecher Stowe. Theft and appropriation had already become a matter of spirit in 1907, however, when Lobb

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<sup>137</sup> In “Dr. Benjamin Franklin’s Celestial Telegraph,” Sollors argues that spiritualists furthered the vision of America as the city on a hill, and that this privileged state was authorized both by spirits of Indians and by Benjamin Franklin, a frequent visitor to spirit circles, as well as other founders.

<sup>138</sup> See Bercovitch.

brought Henson's spirit back to authorize Lobb's and Stowe's uses of his story. The title of the entry about Harriet Beecher Stowe in Lobb's *Talks with the Dead* is "Mrs. H. B. Stowe Comes Back to be Photographed," and it includes a spirit photograph of Stowe. Lobb writes that Stowe was a medium and a spiritualist, and quotes a claim often associated with Stowe that "I did not write 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,' it was given to me, it passed before me" (33).<sup>139</sup> The description of Stowe as a spirit medium overstates the case, though she was interested in and investigated spiritualism. Lobb's invocation of her mediumship here points to a theory of authorship, inspiration, and editorial production informed by the terms of spiritual inspiration that developed in relation to modern spiritualism.<sup>140</sup> For spiritualists, the printed text reflected a confluence of authorial voices, for whom "writing" was an activity associated with regular invocations of spirit—channeling, as it were, or a mediumship involved in literary production. Like Henson's authoring of revenge by invoking the spirit of Byron, and Quickskill's writing of Uncle Robin's story as voodoo-satire, these spiritualists' investment in confluent agency refracts and plays upon individualist conceptions of authorship, not as functional categories, but as matters of belief.

Daphne Brooks has argued that "the spiritualist imagination mirrored that of its

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<sup>139</sup> The much-cited quote of Stowe—"I did not write it. God wrote it. I merely did His dictation"—has been attributed to the preface to an 1879 edition of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but the words do not appear in the preface to a copy of the 1879 edition available on [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org). It is possible they come from another edition, but it seems more likely that the source of the quote is a second-hand report, written by Annie Fields and published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1896, of an account by a sea captain of his meeting with Stowe late in her life. See "Days With Mrs. Stowe." Fields later republished the account in her *Life and Letters of Harriet Beecher Stowe* (1897). See also Parfait, who writes that that anecdote was "first recounted by Annie Fields in the late nineteenth century" (178).

<sup>140</sup> This construction is also notable in relation to Stowe's subsequent fight for her rights to adaptations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and changes in copyright law in the courts. See Homestead, Best, and McGill on *Stowe vs. Thomas* (1853).

literary counterpart,” stating that if Anglo American literature was haunted by an Africanist presence, spiritualism also was haunted by the echoes of Africanist religious practices (16). The joint problems of authorship and theft informed both spiritualism and literary production in the mid-nineteenth-century. The transformation of the body through the presence of multiple spirits provided an analog to the presence in print of multiple voices, or of multiple presences in the body of the book. Forms of displaced authorship proliferated through invocations of divine influence or editorial intervention.

Spiritualist visions of a spirit world closely connected to their material reality rewrote the narrative of history into messianic time, enabling the revision and the appropriation of historical voices.<sup>141</sup> Spiritualist newspapers combined current events and tales of the living with the voices and the writing of the dead. The nation in the nineteenth century was a ghostly one, and not just because it was imagined. Nationalism became a form of identification that operated across the divide between spirit and material worlds, and the revisionary dictates of the spirits through American spirit mediums reinforced national identity.<sup>142</sup> Affiliation operated outside of the constraints of time, but continued to observe the patterns and the precedents of history. Clusters of spirits in the spheres brought Joan of Arc and Napoleon Bonaparte into conversation with John Quincy Adams, Mary Magdalene, and your recently deceased child, parent, or husband.

Spirit communication showed itself to be a product of its era, and the biases and blinders of the spirits matched closely those of the media whose bodies they used to

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<sup>141</sup> For Benjamin’s distinction between messianic and empty homogenous time, see “Theses” in *Illuminations*, pp. 253-264.

<sup>142</sup> For a discussion of what he calls “necro citizenship,” or the ways a nineteenth-century obsession with death abstracted the considerations of politics and the forms of national identification, see Castronovo.

communicate. Reformers called on the authority of spirits to advocate reform, imagining a public sphere that stretched into the spirit world, collapsing linear time and reactivating voices from the past by presenting them anew in printed documents. Records of spirit writing and trance speeches vexed the framework of authorship as a matter of self or bodily consistency, unsettling publication histories even as they depended on them, and dislocating the signs associated with the author in the printed text. Such texts troubled nineteenth-century notions of authenticity. Like the poet of Whitman's "Song of Myself," the literary, political, and religious documents published by spiritualists contained within themselves a multitude of voices, appealing for a change in the way Americans behaved.

Is modern spiritualism a historical phenomenon, or a literary one? Historians and literary critics alike have discarded this question in favor of situating spiritualism within its historical, political, literary, and religious contexts. But the question was one that spiritualists themselves often presented to readers puzzled by spirit manifestations and the questions they raised about truth, identity, authorship, and the body. Adin Ballou was one of the first to assert the historical significance of spiritualism, independent of the question of valid spiritual influence:

This speaking in foreign languages, and entering into communication with beings who have departed more than a thousand years since, speaking and writing in their own languages, is one of the most sublime phenomena in nature; and if, upon critical examination, it shall appear that these mysterious manuscripts, and eloquent utterances, are truly from the source from which they purport to come, they will make a grand addition to the wonders and beneficent gifts of the Deity, which continually excite our admiration and reverence. Yet if these phenomena relating to language are merely the fantastic play of imagination, and not true spiritual manifestations, they are still interesting facts in the constitution of man. (256)

Ballou's description of the linguistic components of spiritualism emphasizes the interest of the movement to a world of language, as well as one of history.

The challenge that spiritualism presents to criticism today parallels the challenge it presented to the nineteenth-century nation, but that challenge also consists of a series of opportunities to think differently about such "facts" as who is speaking and the construction of authorship in nineteenth-century America. Characterized by the exercise of authorship through multiple voices and across a variety of inscriptions and speeches, spiritualism, like abolitionism, consists of publication events that combine media and push against the boundaries of the "text" and the "author." Like documents published in abolitionist contexts, spiritualist documents worked to invoke particular authors and to distinguish their voices from the variety of editors and media engaged in establishing or reviving their subjectivity. But the absence of the body, and its surrogation by the body of the medium, formed the foundation for authenticity and revision in spiritualist print. Paradoxical in its displacements, suggestive in its resurrections, spiritualism persists as a matter of both literary and historical importance, as do its many voices in print.

Like abolitionism, spiritualism tested the boundaries of media and representation. Built around the possibility for transformation, these movements exerted pressure on the forms of authorship and authenticity at work in the nineteenth century. But what do these resurrections and reconfigurations teach us about mainstream literary history? In the next chapter, I bring the conclusions of the previous three chapters to bear on a broader critical conversation, looking at the intersections of media with authorial, editorial, reportorial, and spiritual practices in relation to two well-known figures of American literary history.

Critical reading methods inspired by the media conjunctions of reform and attuned to transformation, revision, and juxtaposition create new visions of U.S. literary history. In the discussion that follows, I show that Sojourner Truth and Walt Whitman shared an imagination of print and the spirits that animated it, an imagination that, like the visions of reformers, built into representation the possibility of revision, even as it acted as a commentary on the forms of fixity and authority that shaped the terms of speech in nineteenth-century America.



## Chapter 4. Echoes in Print: Rereading Walt Whitman and Sojourner Truth

On June 22, 1881, Elisa Seaman Leggett wrote a letter to her old friend Walt Whitman, prompted by a visit from Sojourner Truth.<sup>143</sup> The letter largely consists of a reminiscence of an earlier visit by Truth that Leggett introduces with the note: “I wonder if you know anything about Sojourner Truth, an old col’d woman, known to be 100 years of age.”<sup>144</sup> Apparently assuming the answer would be no, Leggett proceeds with more information, writing that Truth remembered soldiers of the Revolutionary War, that her father’s mother was “a squaw,” that she “is a majestic, tall, thin person, with an eye fevery at times, at others, tender and pitiful,” and that she “can neither read or write, but she has a powerful voice.” Leggett goes on to mention Truth’s involvement with the prophet Matthias (“Do you remember him, in New York?” Leggett asks Whitman: “You were a little boy then”). She writes about Truth’s time in the Northampton community, her anti-slavery and women’s rights activities and contacts, her meeting with Lincoln, and her lecturing career.<sup>145</sup> Leggett also writes that Truth “will not have the Bible read to her except by children,” and that she was dismissive of a recent translation of the New Testament.<sup>146</sup> Truth says, according to Leggett, that

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<sup>143</sup> For a description of Elisa Leggett and her relationship with Whitman, see Kreig.

<sup>144</sup> This letter is transcribed and printed in Donaldson, pp. 242-246.

<sup>145</sup> Matthias was Robert Matthews, a businessman and carpenter who became a religious figure and developed a cult-like following in New York. Truth lived with Matthias and others in a community that dissolved after accusations of adultery and murder. Truth later joined the abolitionist-founded Northampton Association of Education and Industry in Northampton, Massachusetts, where she met Garrison. Truth met Lincoln during a visit to Washington, D.C. in 1864. For more, see DeLombard, Mabee, Washington, and Painter.

<sup>146</sup> Possibly the English Revised Version, published in 1881.

the history belongs to past ages. We have outgrown the history, but the truths that Christ gave can't die. Thinks there ought to be Scriptures written of what God has done ever since the times of the early creation and Moses—Scriptures telling of railroads, and telephones and the Atlantic cable. She sees God in a steam engine and electricity. (244)

After this background (which occupies several paragraphs), Leggett gets to the stated purpose of the letter: to tell Whitman about an occasion in 1864 that pertained to him.<sup>147</sup>

On this occasion, Truth was visiting Leggett and overheard her reading *Leaves of Grass* aloud to her children. In the letter, Leggett describes the incident:

Presently I was surprised to hear Sojourner, in a loud voice, exclaim, "Who wrote that?" I turned, and there in the doorway she stood, her tall figure, with a white turban on her head, her figure and every feature full of expression. Immediately, she added: "Never mind the man's name. It was God who wrote it. He chose the man to give his message." After that I often read it to her. (245)

Leggett then adds some information about Truth's recent activity in Kansas, and concludes the letter with the comment that "Her voice is still powerful" (246).

This letter is a strange document: it is constructed around a reminiscence, in 1881, about an exchange that happened in 1864, and yet in its extensive description of Truth it seems to want to convey more than this. Reiterating the myth of Truth's age (she likely was born near the end of the eighteenth century), Leggett goes on to discuss Truth's history, establish a link between her experience and Whitman's (placing them both in New York at the time of the Matthias scandal), and expound on Truth's relationship to God and her thoughts about the Bible, finding in Truth an appeal for a new Scripture that corresponds to new developments and technologies likely to echo Whitman's own

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<sup>147</sup> The length is characteristic of Leggett, who could be somewhat long-winded in her letters to Whitman. See Donaldson.

resistance in his poetry to the history told in books.<sup>148</sup> The latter, though Truth notably credits the new technologies of the nineteenth century to God's rather than any human agency, sets up the anecdote Leggett relates about *Leaves of Grass*, which situates Truth as listener and admirer of Whitman's poetry.

Worth noting in this account, however, are the terms of Truth's engagement, as they are represented by Leggett. The poems in *Leaves of Grass*, like the railroad and the steam engine, Truth credits to God. After stating an initial desire to know the author of the lines, Truth answers her own question. "The man" is not important, for he is only a medium: "It was God who wrote it." We are not told whether Leggett insisted on Whitman's role as author or not in response to this, but we do find out that she continues to read *Leaves of Grass* to Truth.

We have followed speech and its records through unruly audiences in abolitionist newspapers, fugitive slave narratives vectored by bestselling novels into transnational lecture tours, and the revisionary sounds and inscriptions of spirit-authors. In this chapter I return to what seems like familiar ground, though with a play on the disruptive spirit of "familiar," for I argue that speech and its transcription pose difficulties for authorship and representation that ultimately lead to a set of similarities between two well-known figures of nineteenth-century American history: Walt Whitman and Sojourner Truth. The letter from Leggett to Whitman, one of the few points of contact between Whitman and Truth, despite marked parallels in their geographical trajectories over the course of the century,

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<sup>148</sup> See, for instance, from "Song of Myself" (1855): "You shall no longer take things at second or third hand...nor look through the eyes of the dead...nor feed on the spectres in books." Whitman's engagement with the past is, of course, more complex than this, but the significance of the present moment resonates in both Truth's comment and Whitman's poetry.

takes up several of the complex structures of authorship I have raised in previous chapters: the poet as medium; the poem as spoken; the report of Truth's words by her white friend.

Whitman's response to Leggett's letter (if he wrote one) has not been found, but Whitman did mention Truth briefly in a letter to his friend Richard Maurice Bucke in 1889:

they have evidently great inward intestinal agitation & unsettledness in Great Britain, (we too here in America, but our belly is so large)—then the unsettledness on the Continent too—as dear Mrs G[ilchrist] said we are all “*going somewhere*” indeed—I suppose the dyspeptic Carlyle would say, “Yes, to hell”—But per contra old black Sojourner Truth was always saying “God reigns yet I tell you”—(369-70)

Whitman draws on Truth's words in his letter to Bucke as a rejoinder to Carlyle, situating her at the end of a series of quotations, actual or imagined, set into conversation to respond to the state of things in Great Britain and America. The tense associated with each of these quotes is revealing—Gilchrist “said,” Carlyle “would say,” and Truth “was always saying.” What Truth was “always saying,” there is no record of her having said—but Whitman's performance of her statement in this letter speaks to a knowledge of Truth (the familiarity of repeated encounter) even as Whitman assumes the authority to ventriloquize her words.<sup>149</sup>

Juxtaposing these two accounts—the first, a report of Truth hearing Whitman's poetry read aloud, and rejecting the idea of individual authorship; the second, Whitman ventriloquizing Truth—produces a strange sort of interchange, patches of a conversation

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<sup>149</sup> For other acts of ventriloquism and mimicry at work in the nineteenth-century, particularly among the lower-class white men that Whitman identified with, and a discussion of the forms of desire that inspired a great deal of popular interest in such acts, see Lott.

between two figures whose paths never crossed, though their biographies are parallel in several interesting ways.<sup>150</sup> Their paths rarely cross substantively in critical conversations, either, and it is worth thinking about why. I do not wish to approach this in terms of the familiar explanations or differences between these two figures that might come to mind—the black female preacher and orator and the white queer male poet; the illiterate former slave and the self-educated former printer; the lecture circuit and the American Renaissance. Rather I want to suggest that Truth often ends up on political and ideological sides of conversations about American literature and Whitman on literary and aesthetic sides. Value, in the first case, is frequently described as a matter of historical revelation and diversity; in the second case, as a matter of literary style and technique. One contributing factor to this bifurcation is the historical evidence available for each figure, and the way that authorship relates to it. Scholars are accustomed to question the records of Truth, but are less systematically prone to doing so for Whitman. The record is questioned most frequently at the point of Whitman’s queerness: this is a topic on which it seems we cannot trust the author.

The question of trusting the author, or assuming the non-transparency of the text, takes different forms in relation to these two figures. In relation to Truth, it becomes a matter of mediation, or multiple authors. Without inscription clearly generated by her, everything is knowledge gained second hand, as it were.<sup>151</sup> But inscription in the form of distinctive, identifiable handwriting authorizes many of Whitman’s words, and so when

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<sup>150</sup> For a discussion of the parallels in their movement and biographies, see Kreig.

<sup>151</sup> For a discussion of some of the complications of this fact in relation to rhetorical analyses of Truth’s speeches, see Logan, *With Pen and Voice*.

we are skeptical it is in moments when we expect the poet not to be self-identical, or when social norms and proscriptions mean that the words or the speech may differ from the actions or identity or “self” of the speaker. In the case of these two figures, the “self” is a carefully cultivated fiction, or series of fictions, revised over the course of the nineteenth century. Like Josiah Henson, Truth and Whitman knew of and in some cases helped to create the fictions, but they were co-created in their own time by colleagues, friends, readers, and listeners. Today, critics continue to participate in the creation and the revision of these fictions of self, working to channel the voices of the past much like spirit mediums. And as in spiritualism, what is at stake is often an invocation of “authenticity.” It is in the interactions between analysis and archive that this sense of continuity or personal contact that we call authenticity comes into being.

In previous chapters, I have talked about different ways in which inscription constituted truth, accuracy, or authenticity for nineteenth-century audiences, setting the terms by which speech, writing, and print were understood in the nineteenth century. The dynamics of interdependence between the literary and reportage or factual prose description, dynamics on which the literary market thrived in the nineteenth century, would surface again in the realism of late nineteenth-century writers like Henry James and William Dean Howells. But the question of how critics today read printed and written texts from the nineteenth century emerges as a function of the same dynamics of truth and inscription, and it turns out there is something both of politics and of habit in the times and ways critics have chosen to question the author.

Whitman the avid inscriber; Truth the powerful orator: what happens when we put them in the same critical space? In this chapter I argue that thinking about these two figures together casts new light on the questions of who is speaking, how that speech is reported, and what it matters for American literature. Speech records give us a place to talk about both Whitman and Truth, beginning with common assumptions about them and moving out to new visions that feature Truth as poet and print theorist and Whitman as orator, and then again to both as agonistic readers constantly negotiating the uneasy divide between speech and print. This re-vision of Truth and Whitman as genre-shifting historical and literary figures asks us to challenge critical expectations and the way that evidence has shaped them. In rethinking the self-evidence of inscription and the naturalness of authenticity, we shift to understanding authorship as a dynamic relationship among speakers, authors, publishers, and marketplaces, rather than a privileged category of subjecthood or creative production—a stubbornly persistent critical category that has tended to reinforce separate reading practices for a canonical white male poet and an illiterate black female poet-orator.

#### **“I FEEL AT HOME HERE”: LOCATING TRUTH**

Sojourner Truth paired speech and print in a volatile combination, from her early years as a preacher and acolyte to her later work on the lecture and reform circuits. Like Josiah Henson, Truth published new versions of her narrative multiple times over the course of the nineteenth century. The first edition of *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (1850) came after the success of *The Narrative of Frederick Douglass*, first published in 1845.

Truth's decision to publish her own narrative prompted her to dictate her story to Olive Gilbert, an acquaintance from Northampton. Gilbert wrote the text in the first person, quoting Truth copiously but leaving space for her own editorializing and interpretations, which often took the form of generic antislavery statements. A second edition of the *Narrative* appeared in 1853, printed by Edward O. Jenkins in New York.

In 1870, Truth's longtime friend James Boyle gave her the stereotyped plates that had been used to print the 1853 New York edition.<sup>152</sup> Truth used these to have several more editions of her *Narrative* printed after the Civil War. These new editions, which combined the text of the earlier narrative (printed from the original plates) with a large amount of additional material, were edited by Frances Titus, Truth's friend and travel companion.<sup>153</sup> In an 1875 edition, Titus appended to Truth's narrative a preface and excerpts from Truth's scrapbook, which Truth called her "Book of Life." Titus included these excerpts with some editorializing, more than doubling the size of the book. In 1878, Titus added a preface, ambiguously signed "The Author." The *Narrative* was reprinted in 1881, and after Truth's death in 1883, Titus published a final edition with a memorial chapter.

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<sup>152</sup> The 1875 edition of Truth's narrative included a quote from Mrs. Lewis Fairbrother describing the gift of the plates: "James Boyle made Sojourner a present of the stereotype portion of her "Narrative," which includes the first 128 pages of this volume" (264). Many critics have mistakenly asserted that these plates were first used to print the 1850 edition, based on the note to the reader that appears at the front of the 1875 edition: "*THE first 128 pages of this work are reprinted from stereotype plates, made in 1850. This will account for the style of the Preface, and portions of the Narrative, which were especially adapted to those dark days of oppression*" (iii). Washington writes that "Some time in 1853, the *Narrative* sold out of its first printing. Sojourner's friend James Boyle, now a New York City preacher, patent medicine distributor, and physician, purchased the plates of the *Narrative* and financed a second printing identical to the Boston 1850 edition" (258). But stereotyped plates appear to have been made for a new 1853 edition, as the typesetting differs from the 1850 edition.

<sup>153</sup> For a discussion of Truth's connection to Titus, see Mabee, pp. 200-208.



Authorship is a difficult term when applied to the product of Truth's collaborations, as many critics have noted, and the note "Printed for the Author" on the title page of the first edition gives no specific information about author or publisher.<sup>154</sup> The printer's imprint is clear, however: issued in 1850, this version was printed by James B. Yerrinton, who also printed the *Liberator*. If we cannot say with absolute certainty which parts of Truth's story are her own words, we can trace her interactions with Yerrinton and her influence on the manufacture of the narrative as a book. Truth had been referred to Yerrinton by William Lloyd Garrison, whom she had met during Garrison's visits to Northampton. In a letter to Garrison dated August 28, 1851, Truth requested 600 books, specifying the shipping method—"My last box cost me \$7.00 It was nearly half full of paper & shavings—Don't send so much next time I don't like to pay transportation on it." Though Yerrinton financed the printing, Truth was concerned and persistent about paying him back. In the letter to Garrison, she asked how much she still owed Yerrinton for printing, and requested a list of payments so she could be sure of what remained to be paid: "Please send Mr. Yerrinton's [sic] bill in full & all receipts upon it" (Stetson and David 206). Like a number of fugitive and freed slaves on the lecture circuit, Truth carried her narrative with her and often sold it at the end of her performances. The timing of these performances lent some urgency to her 1851 letter to Garrison. "Don't *fail to send the books without delay*," she wrote: "I may get out of books before they arrive—Pack them tight—Send by the most speedy safe conveyance." Attentive to the effect of

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<sup>154</sup> The 1853 edition revises this to "Published for the Author."

the book's binding on her sales, Truth told Garrison "Dont get any more books bound—I cant sell the bound volumes."

As this publication history suggests, Truth was an active participant in the construction of the narratives that circulated about her. Jeannine DeLombard has provided an early example of such activity during the Matthias scandal and in relation to Gilbert Vale's *Fanaticism; Its Source and Influence, Illustrated by the Simple Narrative of Isabella* (1835). Truth (then Isabella Van Wagenen) took the initiative to produce that text and its authorizing framework, approaching Vale and convincing him to publish her side of the Matthias story and procuring written statements of character from former employers. Even before her work as a reformer and lecturer, Truth understood both the impact print could have and the means of producing it in a way that would be convincing to a reading audience. As her later publication of her narrative and her letter to Garrison indicate, she would subsequently use this understanding to participate in the production and circulation of her narrative and to supplement her work on the reform circuit.

Truth's publication of her narrative reflects her attention to circumstance and audience, and the effect of audience and recorder on the form of her words is visible in both the editorializing by Gilbert and the additions by Titus. This dynamic informed her public performances, as well as the production of her narrative. On September 7, 1853, Truth spoke at a Woman's Rights Convention held at Broadway Tabernacle in New York City. A report of the event was later incorporated into the first volume of the *History of Woman Suffrage*, published in 1881 by Fowler and Wells, and edited by Elizabeth

Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage. The first part of Truth's speech is represented in that volume as follows:

SHE SAID: Is it not good for me to come and draw forth a spirit, to see what kind of spirit people are of? I see that some of you have got the spirit of a goose, and some have got the spirit of a snake. I feel at home here. I come to you, citizens of New York, as I suppose you ought to be. I am a citizen of the State of New York; I was born in it, and I was a slave in the State of New York; and now I am a good citizen of this State. I was born here, and I can tell you I feel at home here. I've been lookin' round and watchin' things, and I know a little mite 'bout Woman's Rights, too. I come forth to speak 'bout Woman's Rights, and want to throw in my little mite, to keep the scales a-movin'. I know that it feels a kind o' hiss'in' and ticklin' like to see a colored woman get up and tell you about things, and Woman's Rights. We have all been thrown down so low that nobody thought we'd ever get up again; but we have been long enough trodden now; we will come up again, and now I am here. (116)

This report varies notably from a contemporary report of the event, published the day after the convention in the *New York Daily Times*. The *Times* report represents the same words in this way:

She said: It is good for me to come forth to see what kind of spirit you are made of. I see some of you have got the spirit of a goose and a good many of you have got the spirit of snakes. [Great applause and cries of "Go on"—"That's the style"—"Show your pluck"—"Give it to them;"] during which that young scape-grace in the gallery called for a "small fry." I feel at home here. [A venerable old gentleman occupying a front seat, said, "So you ought"] I was born in this state. I've been a slave in this State, and now I'm a good citizen of this State. [Vociferous demonstrations of applause] I was born here, and I can tell you I feel to home here. [Queer man under the gallery: That's right. Make yourself at home, you're welcome; take a chair] I've been looking round and watching things, and I know a little might 'bout Women's Rights, to. [Applause, and cries of "Go it lively; you'll have a fair show."] I know it feels funny, kinder funny and tickling to see a colored woman get up and tell you about things and woman's rights, when we've all been trampled down so't nobody thought we'd ever git up agin. But we have come up, and I'm here. (Fitch and Mandziuk 113-4)

The variation between this report of Truth's words and the speech as it appears in *History of Woman Suffrage* would not come as a surprise to Truth scholars. Those relying on

evidence from Truth's speeches and public performances, as well as her narrative, have long been vexed by the mediation of all the records representing her, mediation that has rendered even some of Truth's most famous lines suspect. The *History of Woman Suffrage*, for instance, also features an account by Frances Gage of Truth's most famous speech, delivered at a Woman's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, in 1851 and later quoted widely as representative of Truth's power and style. Gage's account features a line—"Ar'n't I a woman?"—that Carlton Mabee and Nell Painter have demonstrated almost certainly was not said by Truth in that speech. And in fact, the accounts of Truth's speech at the Akron convention suggest Gage made several other changes in her description of the event, which was written from memory twelve years after the occasion and shaped to fit the context of women's suffrage and Gage's own interests.<sup>155</sup>

What I want to suggest about these excerpts is less that the effects of editorial interventions on Truth's words take a number of different forms—a point that scholars have developed at some length—but rather that what appears in the difference between these reports is as much an effect of concentration, a striving for univocality in the historical record, as an effort to rewrite Truth's speech.<sup>156</sup> Missing from the *History of Woman Suffrage* version of the speech (and at least one of the other reports published soon after the convention) are the contributions of the audience. Does the speech mean something different without the sound of the audience that Truth is responding to? The

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<sup>155</sup> See Mabee, pp. 67-82. For a discussion of the way Gage staged her own (white) womanhood in this account by setting up Truth as a contrast, see Zackodnik.

<sup>156</sup> For a discussion of the way Truth's invocation of Esther and Haman varies across descriptions of this speech, see Zackodnik, pp. 111-116. For Truth's invocation of Africanist traditions in this speech, see Peterson, pp. 54-55.

three characters that join Truth in the *Times* account—the “young scape-grace,” the “venerable old gentleman,” and the “queer man under the gallery”—add drama to the account, but do they change the meaning of the speech? What’s more, does their presence in the account detract from the power or the presence of Truth’s own voice?

I argued in chapter one that the eventfulness of speech was important to phonographic speech reports, which drew on the imagination of physical and aural presence to influence an audience of readers. In the chapters since, however, time has become a more central component of mediation. We saw the complexities of a half-century of editing, in Henson’s case, and a multivocality that reimagined the structure of time altogether, in the case of the spiritualists. Here, in this account of Truth’s words, we see two different listening practices at work, in the form of one report that attends to the event, and another that attends to the words of the speaker. But we can also interpret the form of the first report as a product of its role in the broader history of the women’s rights movement, as it appeared in the volume documenting that movement, edited by Stanton, Anthony, and Gage. If the commotion of the moment may have represented “news” for reporters at the time, the historians of the women’s rights movement had less use for the sound of audiences, and more interest in privileging the extraordinary words of an individual activist. The “spirit” of the audience, which Truth herself describes, ceases so vocally to animate the record.

Scholars have begun, in relation to Sojourner Truth, to think about how to read her narrative as a series of multi-authored texts. Such readings range from efforts to locate Truth’s “authentic” voice or presence through the representations by her white

amanuenses to readings of the narrative as a collaborative myth or symbol-making enterprise. The *Narrative*'s comparatively unusual plot line (the better part of it focuses on Truth's conversion and religious experiences) and composition history has rendered it, like Henson's narrative, somewhat less likely than other fugitive or ex-slave narratives to be discussed within considerations of that genre.<sup>157</sup> Critics have begun to return to the text, however, in recent studies discussing it in terms of the multiple voices that it includes. Xiomara Santamarina, John Ernest, and Joan Humez all take this approach, finding in contradictions between Gilbert and Titus's voices and Truth's the space for productive analysis, and advocating the text as the site of, as Ernest describes it, "contending histories" (483).

For Ernest, a cue to the complexity of finding voice in the fluid text of Truth's narrative is the construct of "home." He argues that domesticity informs Gilbert's initial representations of Truth and that nationalism structures Titus's later representations. Truth, he contends, resists both these narratives by claiming to reside in the house of God, and ultimately pivots the narrative and its revision around that sense of "home." But in the speech quoted above, Truth shows the versatility of her sense of "home." Stating "I feel at home here," she asserts both her belonging within the specific speech event and her composure in the face of her detractors. The "here" of her words expands as she creates a specific narrative of belonging, a nativeness that grows from birth, through slavery, to citizenship. This belonging seems obvious, she seems to say—"I was born in this state"—but "belonging" turns out to be a difficult word, premised on self-ownership

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<sup>157</sup> Important exceptions are Foster and Starling.

and undermined by slavery, as the next sentence indicates: “I’ve been a slave in this State.” Slavery’s attempted disruption of the logic of Truth’s belonging failed with the abolition of slavery in New York, and “now I’m a good citizen of this State.”<sup>158</sup> Truth goes on to reconstruct the narrative without slavery: “I was born here, and I can tell you I feel to home here.” Truth’s defiance of the hostility of the audience takes multiple forms in this speech, moving from the audience’s “spirit” to a narrative of her belonging and its disruption by slavery, to a reiterated assertion of the historical situation, to which the audience represents a challenge: “But we have come up, and I’m here.” History, suffering, and belonging form the center of Truth’s presence as she constructs it through this speech. The house of God invoked in her *Narrative* required specificity in front of this audience, and Truth grounds her belonging in her relation to a specific transformation in the history of the State and the performative moment even as she criticizes the spirit of the disruptive listeners, several of whom become speakers in the *New York Daily Times* account.

In this particular speech record, the reporter’s attention to the sounds and actions of the audience results in an omission. A line by Truth that appears in the first account—“I come to you, citizens of New York, as I suppose you ought to be.”—is replaced in the *Times* account by the words of the “venerable old gentleman:” “[A venerable old gentleman occupying a front seat, said, ‘So you ought’]” (Fitch and Mandziuk 113). This happens again later in the speech: what is presented as Truth’s line “I come forth to speak

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<sup>158</sup> Peterson reads this moment as an instance of Truth “bas[ing] her claim of citizenship on the fact of having been a slave” (55).

‘bout Woman’s Rights, and want to throw in my little mite, to keep the scales a-movin’” is replaced in the *Times* report with the line “[Applause, and cries of ‘Go it lively; you’ll have a fair show.’]” Truth’s first line, replaced in the *Times* by the “venerable old gentleman,” adds a challenge to the vision of home she presents to the audience. She, like the audience, is a citizen of New York—but their behavior provokes her to question their belonging, both there at the convention and as citizens: “as I suppose you ought to be.” An echo of Truth’s “ought” appears in the “ought” in the venerable old gentleman’s line, seemingly authorizing her assertions of belonging, but the substitution tells a story not just about the way Truth articulates belonging differently for herself and her audience as a direct response to the behavior of the audience, but also about Truth’s presence in the report of her own speech. Before its version of the speech report, the *Times* includes a summary paragraph that describes the situation as “a perfect storm of applause, hisses, groans, and undignified ejaculations,” and includes comments ostensibly critical of the audience—but sacrificing no part of the description of their “unmannerly, unhandsome” conduct. The work of listening is on display in the difference between these two accounts, and in this case multivocality seems to produce an erasure of Truth’s words, even as the audience she responds to is brought to life.

What does authenticity mean, as it is invoked in these two speeches? Do we seek the authenticity of the speaker, the audience, or the event? This speech record in both its versions suggests that when it comes to Truth we need to think about the authenticity of speech as not necessarily or exclusively rooted in her subjectivity—her blackness or her femaleness, or even her conception of herself as a citizen—but rather as a contingent



structure, constituted socially and through the acts of multiple speech recorders, each of whom is culturally and historically conditioned to hear a slightly different speech. The authenticity of Truth's belonging and its construction in relation to the audience varies depending on whether the reporter attends to the audience or to the speaker. In her narrative, Truth may make a case for her residence in the house of God, but in this speech record, belonging and citizenship is a matter of the particular dynamic between speaker and audience represented through and by the mediated text.

Truth and the myths associated with her have also found a home in the work of twentieth-century critics. A series of biographies of Sojourner Truth have been written in the past 30 years, and many of them take up what Nell Painter calls the "symbol" of Truth—her appropriation into feminist contexts and the quotes and speeches that have become identified with her. Truth's career as a lecturer has tended to dominate discussions of her history, and key quotations and stories associated with her largely are drawn from speech reports and accounts by others, including Harriet Beecher Stowe's essay "The Libyan Sibyl," published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1863. Mabee argues that Stowe's essay was one of the major factors in Truth's initial notoriety, but as both Painter and Mabee point out, several of the facts presented in "The Libyan Sibyl" and some of the main quotes and speeches associated with Truth likely are products of what they describe as invention, misremembering, and misrepresentation. If invention signals the way that fact and fiction fused in descriptions of Truth, misremembering and misrepresentation suggest an authentic "real" behind the mediation. Mediation's effect on Truth's legacy is apparent in many of the things for which she has become famous: her

“Arn’t I a woman?” line, written by Frances Gage in her recollection of Truth’s 1851 speech at a Women’s Convention in Akron, Ohio; her baring of her breast to an 1858 audience that questioned her gender, recounted in a letter by abolitionist William Hayward; and her comment to Frederick Douglass, described in Stowe’s essay: “Frederick, is God dead?”—a phrase that also was inscribed on her gravestone by Frances Titus after her death.

These reports formed part of the myth that developed around Truth during the last half of her life. Truth’s longevity was another part of the myth, one perpetuated by Titus in the later narratives and, occasionally, by Truth herself. Later feminist and activist causes would take up the myth of Sojourner Truth, revising some parts and perpetuating others. At the end of her biography, Painter discusses the stakes of what she calls the “symbol” of Truth—resistances to its revision and the emotional resonance of what have become commonplaces of Truth’s resistance and her representativeness as a strong African American presence in nineteenth-century America. What constitutes “home” for Truth continues to evolve beyond her death, as it did for Henson and the voices of the past summoned by spirit mediums, reconfigured in relation to the desires and interests of a series of twentieth- and twenty-first-century audiences.

#### **“A DOUBLE-EDGED SONG”: TRUTH’S POETICS OF PRINT**

The image recent scholarly considerations of Truth have given us is more nuanced than the symbol that Painter discusses at the end of her biography. Today, Truth is discussed as orator, preacher, reformer, and voice or presence (recoverable or not) in her

own story.<sup>159</sup> She can be found in literary critical and historical considerations as co-creator of her *Narrative*, itinerant preacher, anti-slavery or women's rights activist and lecturer, and fugitive slave. Discussions often focus on her powerful voice and presence, her mediation, her involvement in political and communal interests, and her representativeness as an African American reformer. She is discussed in terms of literacy and mediation: her narratives are increasingly dealt with in complex and interesting ways, and discussions of authenticity have turned to the ways that those very discussions can inform more careful consideration of critical terms and interests. Deeper historical analyses expand even as they draw on some of the same material that informed the symbol. Drawing the story of Truth's role in her own printed representations forward from DeLombard's study of the Matthias scandal, I argue here for a re-vision of Truth as poet and critical observer of and participant in an evolving nineteenth-century print marketplace.<sup>160</sup>

In the 1878 version of *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*, which included a new preface by Titus and omitted an earlier preface written by Garrison in the antebellum period, two new leaves were included between the first part of the narrative, reprinted from the 1853 plates, and the "Book of Life" section that Titus had introduced in 1875. One of these pages consists of a portrait of Truth; the other, one of her songs, titled "The Valiant Soldiers." A note accompanying the song identifies the tune as "John Brown,"

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<sup>159</sup> Fitch and Madzuik are early instances of the focus on Truth as orator. Their rhetorical analysis of Truth's speeches features a collection of several of the speech reports in the appendix. Peterson and Piepmeier have discussed Truth's stage presence and rhetorical tactics, as have her biographers.

<sup>160</sup> For DeLombard's discussion of Truth's leveraging of print in the Matthias scandal, see *Slavery on Trial*, ch. 2.

and conveys to the reader the following information: “The following song, written for the first Michigan Regiment of colored soldiers, was composed by *SOJOURNER TRUTH* during the war, and was sung by her in Detroit and Washington” (126). This song speaks from the perspective of the black soldiers, combining a fighting declaration in the present with a vision of a future without slavery: “We are going out of slavery we are bound for freedom’s light; / We mean to show Jeff Davis how the Africans can fight” (126). Two of the causes that Truth would take up after the war appear in the song. Concerns that would lead her to advocate for the procurement of wages and the establishment of land in Kansas for freedmen are described in the lines: “They will have to pay us wages, the wages of their sin; ... / They will have to give us house-room, or the roof will tumble in, / As we go marching on.”

The songs that she sang and composed form a part of Truth’s legacy, and the publication of this one as a bridge in her *Narrative* speaks to their significance.<sup>161</sup> Truth’s performances frequently included songs, and as “The Valiant Soldiers” indicates, she composed some songs for specific occasions, creating a range of aural poetry that borrowed popular airs as vehicles for distribution. As Carla Peterson points out, “A postbellum review in a Kansas newspaper...commented that in her public speaking Truth demonstrated that ‘she has a poetic element in her nature, and has several times given forth her thought in spontaneous rhyme’” (48).<sup>162</sup> Performance was not the only means for distribution of the poems and songs, however, nor was spontaneity the only pace of

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<sup>161</sup> For a discussion of revisions and the ambiguities of authorship in relation to a popular Civil War song, see Hutchison.

<sup>162</sup> Peterson cites this review as one instance of Truth’s use of “rhythmic discourse” that links her to African and African-American oral cultures and traditions (48).

production. Truth had songs printed and sold them at lectures in the same way she did her narrative and her photographs. Mabee writes that, at one early antislavery meeting near Boston, “she sold flyers of some of her ‘home-made’ songs, with the words printed out, for five or ten cents a piece” (222).<sup>163</sup> The songs also made it into newspaper reports of her public performances.

Over the course of her life Truth both monitored printed texts and showed skepticism about them and the people who read them to her. Erlene Stetson and Linda David argue that “We can identify the two crucial elements in the print culture that served as a conduit into Truth’s ears and a vehicle for the words she spoke to circulate in the world beyond her immediate audience. These were the Bible and newspapers” (3). Accounts of Truth’s speeches suggest she often mentioned stories and quotes from the Bible. The manner in which she wanted it read to her, however, was important. As Leggett mentioned in her letter to Whitman, Truth was skeptical about her readers. In the 1850 edition of the *Narrative*, Gilbert wrote of Truth that

I had forgotten to mention, in its proper place, a very important fact, that when she was examining the scriptures, she wished to hear them without comment; but if she employed adult persons to read them to her, and she asked them to read a passage over again, they invariably commenced to explain, by giving her their version of it; and in this way, they tried her feelings exceedingly. In consequence of this, she ceased to ask adult persons to read the Bible to her, and substituted children in their stead. Children, as soon as they could read distinctly, would re-read the same sentence to her, as often as she wished, and without comment;--and in that way she was enabled to see what her own mind could make out of the record, and that, she said, was what she wanted, and not what others thought it to

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<sup>163</sup> Mabee notes that “Among her fourteen songs, only three were known to have been printed on flyers, presumably for her to sell” (227). Painter also writes that “Beginning to make her way at antislavery meetings, she would sell sheets printed with her original song lyrics for 5-10 cents each. She prided herself on an early autonomy: ‘I was selling songs; for I always had something to pay my way with. Nobody paid me, for I was a free agent, to go and come when I pleased’” (197).

mean. She wished to compare the teachings of the Bible with the witness within her; and she came to the conclusion, that the spirit of truth spoke in those records, but that the recorders of those truths had intermingled with them ideas and suppositions of their own. (108-9)

Consistent with what Frances Smith Foster has described as a “hermeneutics of suspicion,” Truth’s skepticism points to her awareness of the multiple forms of mediation she was dealing with.<sup>164</sup> As Stetson and David note, this passage suggests that “Truth was a sophisticated listener who grasped how difficult it is to get a straightforward reading” (4). Acts of inscription and acts of decoding operated according to the same principles in the nineteenth century. If reporters heard different versions of her songs and speeches, readers also presented text through an interpretive lens. Figures both illiterate and literate had to reckon with what difference it made who was writing and how that writing was happening, not least as a function of who was reading or listening and how they were reading or listening.

An account from a postbellum speech event suggests that Truth extended this suspicion to the record of her own words. In 1867, on May 9 and 10, Truth spoke at a series of Equal Rights Association meetings in New York City. After the meetings were over, Truth came to spend some time staying with Elizabeth Cady Stanton and her family. Stanton wrote to the editor of the *New York World* about the visit. Her report includes the comment that:

The morning after the Equal Rights Convention, as the daily journals one by one made their appearance, turning to the youngsters of the household, she said: “Children, as there is no school to-day, will you read Sojourner the reports of the

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<sup>164</sup> *Witnessing Slavery* xxiv. Foster draws and reinterprets this phrase from work by Katie G. Cannon and Vincent L. Wimbush.

Convention? I want to see whether these young sprigs of the press do me justice.”  
 (“Sojourner Truth” 927)

The children may not have been as prone to interpret the Bible, but in this case they did offer opinions on at least one of the representations of Truth:

“I think,” said one of the group, “the press should hereafter speak of you as Mrs. Stowe’s Lybian Sybil [sic], and not as ‘old church woman.’” “Oh, child, that’s good enough. The *Herald* used to call me ‘old black nigger,’ so this sounds respectable. Have you read the *Herald* too, children? Is that born again? Well, we are all walking the right way together.” (927-8)

David and Stetson write that “How Truth related to printed accounts of herself reveals much about her awareness of her public image and much about the extent to which she controlled it” (6). Some critics, comparing reports of Truth to reports of speeches by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, have postulated that reporters were more willing to report speeches by Truth than speeches by other black women because Truth was illiterate and unable to correct their reports of her.<sup>165</sup> This account of Truth’s investment in her own representations suggests that the story is more complicated, and that Truth was far from a passive bystander when it came to reports of her speeches and songs.<sup>166</sup>

But a look at the speech records from this event shows that there may have been a particular side of her public image Truth was concerned about. A phonographic report of the occasion by Henry Parkhurst, eventually published as part of the official proceedings, includes an account of Truth reported as follows:

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<sup>165</sup> See, for instance, Terborg-Penn.

<sup>166</sup> Logan makes a similar assertion based on Truth’s speech, which was often represented in reports as dialect. Citing a quote from Fredrick Douglass that Truth “cared very little for elegance of speech or refinement of manners” and “seemed to please herself and others best when she put her ideas in the oddest forms,” Logan argues that Truth “may have been more in control of the ways in which her speech was represented than at first presumed” (*With Pen and Voice*, 21).

Now I think I will sing a little bit. I sung the other night, and my singin'—well, they can't put things down on paper as we speak, though I speak in an unknown tongue. (Laughter.) Now, what I sing they ain't got it in the right way—not in the way I meant it. I am a kind of poet—what do you call it that makes poetry? I can't read it, but I can make it.

You see I have sung in the anti-slavery meetin's and in the religious meetin's. Well, they didn't call anti-slavery religious, and so I didn't call my song an anti-slavery song—called it religious, so I could make it answer for both. (Great laughter.) Now I want the editors to put it down right. I heard it read from the paper, but it don't sound as if they had it right.

Sojourner then sang her song. (“Proceedings” 68)

In this speech Truth, referring to the report of an earlier speech and song that had been published in the *World* on 10 May 1867, stresses that there is one thing in particular the newspaper people must get right: her song, and so she repeats it. Dodging the challenge Truth issues to accurately record her, Parkhurst omits the words of the song from his report altogether.

Another account of the second part of this event appeared in the New York *World* on 14 May 1867. This account represents the last part of Truth's speech as follows:

they can't put things down on paper as we speak, though I speak in an unknown tongue. (Laughter.) Now, what I sing they ain't got in de right way—not in de way I meant it. I am a kind of poet—what do you call it that makes poetry? I can't read, but I can make it.

#### A DOUBLE-EDGED SONG

You see I have sung in the anti-slavery meeting and in the religious meetings. Well, they didn't call anti-slavery religious, and so I didn't call my song an anti-slavery song—called it religious, so I could make it answer for both. (Great laughter.) Now I want the editors to put it down right. I heard it read from the paper, but it don't sound as if they had it right. (“Woman Suffrage”)

The reporters of this speech are tasked with reporting speech in an “unknown tongue,” both a jibe at the reporters and a reference to speech directed to God rather than to a



human audience. Truth authorizes this speech as poetry, demanding the effort of transcription even in the impossibility of comprehension.<sup>167</sup> She polices the transcription of her speech here in two ways: first, by declaring herself a poet, providing reporters with a context for incomprehensible speech that would be familiar to them. “I am a kind of poet,” she says—and a poet particularly concerned about how her poetry appears in print. She is a poet, but she is also a reader: she informs her listeners that she is, in fact, an audience for the published version. This creative process involves an exchange, a careful listening on both sides.

This account in the *World* shows that Truth’s demands for an accurate report and careful listening failed, but they did produce a dialogue. The heading “A DOUBLE-EDGED SONG” here refers to Truth’s description in her speech of the multiple uses of her song—anti-slavery and religious—but it could just as well refer to the song itself, and its report, which initiated a conversation between Truth and the *World* reporter. In a paragraph that appears after the last part of the speech, in the space where the song should be, the reporter added the following:

Being thus plainly admonished of the necessity of accuracy, THE WORLD reporter undertook to verbatimize the song again, but Sojourner, as she good-naturedly admitted, does speak in an unknown tongue, and the difficulty of reporting her prose is ten times multiplied in the task of getting down her poetry. The report already published is about as near to it as can be secured, except that some sepulchral printer has substituted “graves of bliss” for “waves of bliss” in the last verse, for which Truth will please accept our sympathy.<sup>168</sup> (“Woman Suffrage”)

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<sup>167</sup> It is worth noting the resonance between these words by Truth and Whitman’s “I too am untranslatable,” a phrase from “Song of Myself” that remains the same across all editions of *Leaves of Grass* (see 1855, p. 55; 1856, p. 99; 1860, p. 104; 1867, p. 94; 1872, p. 95; 1881, p. 78; and 1891, p. 78).

<sup>168</sup> The verses of Truth’s song are reported in the 10 May 1867 issue of *The World* as follows:

We are goin’ home—we had visions bright  
Of that holy land, that world of light,

Acknowledging Truth's demands, the reporter here responded in print by humorously depicting a failure of representation, drawing on Truth's own words and her

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Where the cold and dark night of time is passed,  
And the morning of eternity is come at last;  
Where the weary saints no more shall roam,  
But dwell in their peaceful and sunny home;  
Where the light celestial gems our crown,  
And the graves of bliss are dashin' roun'—

Oh-h-h-h!

Oh, that beautiful home;

Oh-h, that beautiful world.

We are goin' home; we soon shall be  
Where the sky is clear and the soil is free;  
Where the victor's song floats from the plains,  
And the anthems of serfs and glorious strains,  
Where the sun [rolls?] down his brilliant flood,  
And beams on a world that's fair and good;  
And the stars that shine on nature's dome,  
Will sparkle and dance from their spirits home.

Oh-h-h-h!

Oh, that beautiful home;

Oh-h, that beautiful world.

There tears and sighs, which here are given,  
Will change for the glad songs of heaven;  
There beauteous forms will sing and shine,  
A guarded well by the hand Divine;  
Pure love and friendship will be [jined?],  
Waiting before that princely band;  
And the glory of God, like a molten sea,  
Will bathe that immortal company.

Oh-h-h-h!

Oh, that beautiful home;

Oh-h, that beautiful world.

The ransomed throng they see and bless  
The holy city of gorgeousness;  
The verdant earth and angels' choir,  
The flowers that never winter wear;  
The conqueror's song it sounds afar  
As wafted on the ambrosial air;  
Through endless years we then shall prove  
The depths of a Savior's matchless love.

Oh-h-h-h!

Oh, that beautiful home;

Oh-h, that beautiful world. ("Female Suffrage")

representation of herself as a defense. This dialogue across speech and print, a nod from the reporter to the fact that Truth was likely to encounter the new report, points to Truth's reading and recognition of the way she could influence her own mediation, even as a more accurate version of the song remained unprinted. One wonders whether to take the reporter's humor as a good-natured admission of his own failure or as a jab.<sup>169</sup> In either case, the correction that he offers applies not to an error that happened in the transformation from speech to inscription, but rather to one that occurred in the transformation from handwriting to print, revealing a further level of mediation with the figure of the "sepulchral printer" substituting "graves" for "waves." In this exchange Truth achieved a small correction, an admission of failure, and a recognition on the part of the reporter (and, accordingly, a broader audience) that she policed her representations in print.

Truth did indeed have this new report in the *World* read to her when it was published, as Stanton's account makes apparent. Her reaction to the reporter's note is not mentioned in Stanton's description. But her response to the report does show that song was an important part of her performances for Truth, and that she had a preference not only for writing her poetry and performing it in song, but also for how song should look on the printed page. Stanton writes of Truth that:

The *World* seemed to please Sojourner more than any other journal. She said she liked the wit of the *World's* reporter; all the little texts running through the speeches, such as "Sojourner on Popping Up," "No Grumbling," "Digging Stumps," "Biz," to show what is coming, so that one can get ready to cry or laugh,

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<sup>169</sup> The physical descriptions of Truth that accompany the speech, which make some fun at her expense, probably suggest the latter.

as the case may be—a kind of sign-board, a milestone, to tell where we are going, and how fast we go. The readers then call her attention to the solid columns of the other papers, and the versification of the *World*. She said she did not like the dead calm. She liked the breaking up into verses, like her songs. That is a good thing; it gives the reporter time to take breath and sharpen his pen, and think of some witty thing to say; for life is a hard battle anyway, and if we can laugh and sing a little as we fight the good fight of freedom, it makes it all go easier. (927)

Discussing this passage, David and Stetson write that “Truth experienced the presentation of print in terms of her own oral presentations” and that she “had a shrewd eye for dramatic format” (7). But notable here is the fact that *The World* represents Truth’s entire speech on the page as if it were poetry; rather than the “dead calm” of unbroken columns of type, the paper breaks up the segments of the speech “into verses, like her songs,” including headings like that which introduces the “double-edged song.”

... and one of her fingers was chopped  
 on by her cruel master in a moment of anger.

SOJOURNER TRUTH ON “POPPING UP.”

Sojourner, having deposited her hood and likewise the intricacious bag containing her rations, “shadows,” and other “traps,” came forward good-naturedly and said: Well, things that past a good while, there’s no use over-calung them again. Old things is passed away, and all things are become new. (Applause and laughter.) I was sitting and looking around here—I’ve been to a great many convocations, a great many meetings in the course of my life time—in forty years, and I’ve heard a great many speeches, but I have heard a great many answers made in the anti-slavery meetings. A half dozen would pop up, some pop up here, some there. But in this meeting there has been nobody to pop up. (Laughter and applause.) Nobby to gain-say.

BLOOD.

Well, Sojourner has lived on through all the scenes that have taken place these forty years in the anti-slavery cause, and I have plead with all the force I had that the day might come that the colored people might own their soul and body. Well, the day has come, although it come through blood. It makes no difference how it come—it did come. (Applause.) I am sorry it came in that way. We are now trying for a liberty that requires no blood—that would snail have their rights—but rights from you. Give them what belongs to them; they ask it kindly, too. (Laughter.) I ask it kindly.

DIGGING STUMPS.

Well, there was women there had a house as well as I. They taxed them to build a road, and they went on the road and worked. It took ‘em a good while to get a stump up. (Laughter.) Now, that shows women can work. If they can dig stumps they can vote. (Laughter.) It is easier to vote than to dig stumps. (Laughter.) It don’t seem hard work to vote, though I have seen some men that had a hard time of it. (Laughter.) But I believe that when women can vote there won’t be so many men that have a rough time getting to be poets. (Great laughter.) There is danger of their...

New York  
 N. Carol.  
 Ohio  
 Oregon  
 Pennsylv.  
 Rhode Is.  
 S. Carol.  
 Tennessee  
 Texas  
 Vermont  
 W. Virg.  
 Wisconsin

—Real

Alabama  
 Arkansas  
 California  
 Connecticut  
 Delaware  
 Florida  
 Georgia  
 Illinois  
 Indiana  
 Iowa  
 Kansas  
 Kentucky  
 Louisiana  
 Maine  
 Maryland  
 Massachusetts  
 Michigan  
 Minnesota  
 Missouri  
 Nebraska  
 Nevada  
 New Hampshire  
 New Jersey  
 New York  
 North Carolina  
 Ohio  
 Oregon  
 Pennsylvania  
 Rhode Island  
 South Carolina  
 Tennessee  
 Texas  
 Vermont  
 Virginia

Figure 1: A report of Truth's speech at an Equal Rights Association meeting, published in the *New York World* on 14 May 1867.

Truth's appreciation for white space in this description, a commentary on the record of a speech in which she declares herself to be "a kind of poet," suggests that this self-definition is important to her. The verse form fits the substance and style of her performance, and this form she conceptualizes both in terms of space on the page and in terms of time and breath—not hers, but rather the breath of her human recorders in the audience (or, perhaps, a shared breath between speaker, reporter, and reader)—"it gives the reporter time to take breath and sharpen his pen, and think of some witty thing to say." The image of transcription Truth offers here relies on both the versification of speech in print and the creative role of the reporter, for whom Truth wants to create the space and the pace of the poet. This space is the space for thought, for song, and for laughter, a pause in which the "hard battle" of life can become the "good fight" of freedom.

What becomes visible in Stanton's account is an aesthetics—an aesthetics that inadvertently collides, in this case, with Truth's politics. Directly after the discussion of the layout of the *World*, Stanton describes the following exchange between Truth and the children:

"But, children, why did you not send for some of those wicked Democratic papers that abuse all good people and good things." "They are all here," said the readers in chorus. "We have read you all the Republicans and the Democrats say." "Why, children, I can't tell one from the other. The millennium must be here, when one can't tell saints from sinners, Republicans from Democrats. Is the *World* Horace Greeley's paper?" "Oh, no; the *World* is Democratic!" "Democratic! Why, children, the *World* does move! (927)

A conversation ensues about Greeley's views, free trade, and women's rights. But Truth's mind is obviously still on the previous discussion, for after some further conversation, she takes the first opportunity to segue back to the question of representation and the *World*:

“Speaking of shadows,” said Sojourner, “I wish the *World* to know that when I go among fashionable people in the Church of the Puritans, I do not carry ‘rations’ in my bag; I keep my shadow there. I have good friends enough to give me clothes and rations. I stand on principle, always in one place, so everybody knows where to find Sojourner, and I don’t want my shadow even to be dogging about here and there and everywhere, so I keep it in this bag.” (927)

This is likely to be a response to the way that the *World* reporter introduced her speech: “SOJOURNER, having deposited her hood and likewise the miraculous bag containing her rations, ‘shadows,’ and other ‘traps,’ came forward good naturedly.”

This reference is to a commonplace associated with Truth, who became well known for her statement: “I sell the shadow to support the substance.”<sup>170</sup> Acting as a caption to many of her photographs, spiritualizing the metaphor of circulation, and frequently appearing in her letters, this phrase refers at different times to the sale of her photograph and her narrative. But in the version of the phrase she uses in this response to the *World* account, Truth expands on the specifics of her philosophy, constructing the distribution of the narrative in relation to herself, bringing the listener's attention back to the matter of her bag, the reporter's misinterpretation of it, and what distribution represents for Truth. For if her shadow can be sold, it must also be controlled: if the substance stands on principle, the terms of movement for the shadow are constrained.

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<sup>170</sup> For a discussion of Whitman's use of “shadow” and “substance” in the 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, see Moon, who argues that Whitman uses the terms to revise the major assumptions of Christian typology (pp. 125-70).

“Everyone knows where to find Sojourner”—her political affiliations are clear—and so one might take this comment, seemingly in passing, to reflect her discomfort with the previous discussion of her appreciation for the appearance of her speech and her song in the Democratic *World*. The speech and the song are part of the shadow, and Truth concludes her discussion with the children at Stanton’s house about her representation in the papers with the following comment:

I’ll tell you what I’m thinking. My speeches in the Convention read well. I should like to have the substance put together, improved a little, and published in tract form, headed ‘Sojourner Truth on Suffrage;’ for if these timid men, like Greeley, knew that Sojourner was out for ‘universal suffrage,’ they would not be so afraid to handle the question. (928)

Does this declaration signal a decision to create her own printed space for her speeches and songs, a space in which there need be no clash between aesthetics and politics? The shadow must be turned to substance, put together and kept from “dogging about” into newspapers of the political opposition, its representation causing confusion about Truth’s own political stances. Framed as a declaration of intent by Sojourner herself, rather than encompassed within the (possibly biased, and certainly uncontrollable) pages of a newspaper, Truth’s speeches and songs in tract form would be reappropriated into sovereign printed space. The form of the tract and the form of the verse could combine as a statement of political intent freed from the possibly biased context, erasures, and misrepresentations of the page of a Democratic newspaper like *The World*.

This account suggests Truth’s attention to form, both the generic and the physical forms that her songs and speeches would take. It also suggests that she thought about the relationship between form and politics, recognizing that her recasting of the reporter into

a creative space in which listening and writing could merge would not prevent her songs from disappearing from the record or appearing in an organ whose political stance was not consistent with her own. Truth's designation of print and photograph as her "shadow" spiritualizes print within the terms of the nineteenth-century marketplace she chooses to navigate, expressing her notion that print was a mediated thing, separate from the "substance" or the human spirit it both echoed and sustained.

There is, of course, an invisible observer in this account of Truth's response to the representations of herself in print: Stanton herself. Was Stanton at the table with Truth and the children, or was she watching from a distance? Did she contribute to the conversation about Truth's representation? This letter to the editor of *The World* is titled "Sojourner Truth on the Press." What is the purpose of the letter? Is it to describe, as Leggett does, an amusing incident having to do with Truth's reaction to *The World*? Does it remind the reporters and the readers of *The World* that Truth is an audience for their reports, or is it intended to convey Truth's opinions about her representation? Stanton concludes her letter with a report of Sojourner's exiting phrase from the discussion with the children: "Now I must go and take a smoke!" Here Stanton herself enters back in to the discussion, adding a line of commentary: "I tell you in confidence, Mr. Editor, Sojourner smokes!" (928) The joke here of "in confidence" in this public letter is supplemented by a postscript that is both humorous and a reminder of Truth's situation as a black woman: "She says she has been sent into the smoking-car so often she smoked in self-defense—she would rather swallow her own smoke than another's." In this we read an echo of the resistance Truth imagines through her intention to publish her speeches in



a tract: the conditions of mediation and the record being subject to the same conditions of oppression that have sent Truth too many times to the smoking car, self-defense dictates the creation of one's own terms of space, air, and mediation.

Was Truth aware that Stanton was recording this incident? Did she ask her to send the letter? Or did Stanton record it later? Can we be certain the incident happened at all, or was this an attempt like Gage's to reproduce Truth herself for the *History of Woman's Suffrage* volume? We do know that Truth continued to deploy print and handwriting throughout her life to achieve a variety of ends, both financial and political. Carla Peterson has argued that Truth's collecting of signatures in her scrapbook, a collection reproduced in print in the 1875 and later editions of her narrative, signifies a kind of gathering or community making activity, wherein signatees inscribed themselves or *wrote* themselves in relation to Truth. Reprinted as part of her narrative, such signatures offered a display and an expansion of Truth's network, while also appealing to the authenticity handwriting evoked for many at the time.<sup>171</sup> The reproduction of these signatures in print is reminiscent of the spiritualist signatures, and suggests that here as elsewhere authenticity functioned across media, in this case authenticating Truth's narrative and her identity as a well-connected reformer by presenting one community—the one produced through the signatures—to another, a reading audience for whom the signatures represented an event or a meeting between Truth and the famous figures whose names she collected. Another surprise appears on the last page of the 1884 edition

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<sup>171</sup> For a discussion of the changing relationship between handwriting and authenticity in nineteenth-century America, see Thornton. See also McGill, *Culture of Reprinting*.

of *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*, published with a memorial chapter after Truth's death on November 26, 1883. On the last page of this chapter, and the last page of the final nineteenth-century edition of Truth's narrative, appears a song: the same song that Truth wanted reported correctly in the *New York World*. Described as "Sojourner's Favorite Song," this song, included in the printed space of Truth's narrative only after her death, serves as both memorial and reminder of the multiple meanings of "home" for Truth.<sup>172</sup>

Truth's response to *Leaves of Grass*, described in the letter from Leggett to Whitman, signals her sense of authorship as spiritual. In a world that produced countless refractions of her words, in which reproductions of her poetry and of the stories about her were equally subject to the vagaries of a reporter, the uncontrollability of reprinting, and the politicization of publication, authenticity became a matter both of spirit and of self-defense. Authorship for Truth was as much a matter of securing some control over the conditions of production as it was of ensuring correct reports, and it was somewhere in the negotiations over printing, publishing, funding, form, and content that authenticity was created or invoked. For Truth, who had a particularly complicated relationship to the conditions of authorship in nineteenth-century America, the answer to who the author of *Leaves of Grass* was meant little. Combining her faith with a functional acknowledgement of the conditions of poetic production, this statement seems consistent with the multiple layers of meaning visible in much of Truth's language, and itself serves

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<sup>172</sup> The song that appears in the *Narrative* is different in several details from the song reported in the *New York World*. See pp. 31-32 of the Memorial Chapter in Truth's *Narrative* (1884).

as a double-edged commentary on the way that print and speech mediated the relationship between spirit and authorship in the U.S.

**“LECTURING (MY OWN WAY)”: SPEAKING WHITMAN**

If Sojourner Truth has established a presence in literary criticism as public speaker and mediated authorial voice, Walt Whitman has earned quite the opposite distinction. A monument of poetic self-making, prone to constant self-revision, heavily invested in the print production of his poetry, embracing the democratic masses but rarely speaking in front of them, responsible for a vast number of jottings, manuscripts, and annotations, Whitman has taken on a hyperauthorial presence in American literary criticism.<sup>173</sup> The familiar Whitman is a poet, a printer, a compulsive reviser, a poetic representative of democracy and the nation, a queer writer of songs that celebrate the body and America, and an imaginer of print-mediated publics through affective comradeship and the self-effacing text. But I show here that authorship for Whitman, as for Truth, was a distributed matter, an effort that involved various forms of creative and material production and featured Whitman as copyist, proofer, reader, and orator, as well as poet. For Whitman and Truth, these roles were no more distinct than the forms of media they were built on. If voice was essential to both print and presence in Whitman’s

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<sup>173</sup> Like Truth, Whitman has had many biographers, and even more critics. Established by F.O. Matthiessen as one of the major figures of what has become known as the American Renaissance, Whitman has become a central part of the American literary canon and a constitutive part of American history. Today his words act as national monuments, welcoming visitors to the main terminal of Reagan National Airport and adorning entryways to the Washington D.C. metro. Discussed as a paragon of democratic idealism, representativeness, individualism, and nature, he has been both domesticated as a national poet and invoked by writers worldwide. See Allen and Folsom.

poetry, print and poetry also played a central role in his imagination of his own work as a speaker and orator.

As part of a materialist turn in literary studies, Whitman critics have recently started to refocus attention on the various editions of *Leaves of Grass*. Such considerations often invoke Whitman's employment as a printer to talk about the way his composition practice was affected by his knowledge of printing and his close attention to page layout. Six editions of *Leaves of Grass* were published in Whitman's lifetime, varying drastically in size, structure, and content.<sup>174</sup> Some of the more interesting studies have considered the materiality of Whitman's publications in relation to the possible meanings of his practice of revision. Matt Miller has discussed Whitman's early generic experimentation, his repurposing of lines from prose notes into poetry, and vice versa. Michael Moon has discussed the revisions between editions of *Leaves of Grass* in conjunction with Whitman's interest in revising social and cultural attitudes, particularly about sex. As these two studies suggest, the wide range of Whitman's revision practices offers opportunities for both formal or aesthetic and political commentary. As Kenneth Price has recently written in relation to Whitman's "Blue Book," "For Whitman, to write a text was to want to rewrite it; to compose a poem was merely to begin an ongoing process" (682).

In another vein of Whitman criticism, scholars have also long debated Whitman's lifelong interest in oratory and the effects of that interest on his poetic style in *Leaves of*

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<sup>174</sup> Folsom has discussed the various editions, as well as Whitman's other publications, in "Whitman Making Books," and Myerson has compiled an extensive Whitman bibliography describing them. The number of editions of *Leaves of Grass* is disputed: see Myerson.

*Grass*.<sup>175</sup> Whitman's early notes on oratory make it clear that he imagined a lecturing career, one that he would later enact, at least in part, with his lectures commemorating the death of Abraham Lincoln. In this section I bring these two conversations together, arguing that Whitman's preoccupation with voice affected the way he thought about print, and that, like Truth, his lectures involved both poetry and prose, across multiple forms of inscription and speech. Looking at Whitman's early notes on oratory in conjunction with his Lincoln lectures, I argue that the poet imagines and enacts an alternate aural or "recitation" history for his poetry, a history that features the same kinds of composition and revision practices visible in *Leaves of Grass*. If Truth was imagining the appearance of her words and songs in print, Whitman was imagining the sounds and silences of an oratorical career that only partially materialized. If Truth read print and page space in terms of sound and breath, Whitman meditated on the absence of gesture and tone in print representations of speech. Both struggled to control how they were represented. Whitman's position as a former printer and literate white man increased his ability to achieve this control in many respects, but for both authenticity was a matter of presence, performance, interaction, and the multifaceted management of media, audience, and expectation.

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<sup>175</sup> Matthiessen is an early example of a critic who talked about the influence of oratory on Whitman, as well as Emerson and other figures of the American Renaissance. A debate between C. Carroll Hollis and Roger Asselineau raised the issue again later in the twentieth century: drawing on Whitman's early notes, Asselineau argued that the rules of oratory did not influence Whitman's poetic style. Hollis argued otherwise in his 1983 *Language and Style in Leaves of Grass*, in which he makes a strong case for the influence of oratory on Whitman and his poetry. Hollis spends the first chapter of this book discussing Whitman's early investment in oratory, and in the rest of the book he ties stylistic techniques like negation and cursus, visible in *Leaves of Grass*, to oratorical techniques and influence.

The focus on Whitman's revisions and his material practices has shifted the critical emphasis from creative, individual authorship or genius to the significance of Whitman's practices of repurposing and arrangement, but it has not yet provided the language to speak across or beyond the different forms of authenticity associated with Truth and Whitman, having to do with aesthetics and print performance, in the first case, and politics and oral performance, in the second. Nor have considerations of Whitman and oratory, which often bring their conclusions to bear on Whitman's poetry or his relationship to the other white male authors of his era, given us a way to talk about these two speakers and poets together. Shifting designations—thinking of Truth as poet, and Whitman as orator—turns out to be surprisingly easy, and I focus on Whitman's oratory here in part for this reason. But what I want to do more generally is suggest that these performances of print and speech, oratory and poetry, are ultimately inseparable and mutually constitutive for both of these nineteenth-century figures. In the end I want to move away from categories, thinking instead about practices of authorship and methods of reading that develop across genres and media, an approach more consistent with a nineteenth-century world in which speech and print were ubiquitous and intertwined modes of publicity-making. Focusing on the material text, its reception, and its revision, as well as its involvement with other forms of mediation, this method draws on recent scholarly trends to defamiliarize both Whitman and Truth, in order that we may see more clearly the many ways in which they navigated the forms of representation and publicity available to them.

Whitman's interest in oratory started early. In the 1850s, he made a series of notes on oratory and elocution, so many that his friend and literary executor Thomas Harned would write in an article on "Walt Whitman and Oratory" (published in the *Complete Writings* in 1902) that "It is quite evident that very early in life he gave much attention to the study of public speaking and had formulated a purpose to present his message in that way, before he adopted the plan of reaching the people through the medium of a printed book" (244-45). Whitman laid out in his notes the practical matters of lecturing, drafting a series of advertisements with specific information like the places he planned to travel, the topics and the cost (10 cents, at one estimate) of the lectures he planned to deliver.

Whitman's notes on oratory were published along with a number of other manuscripts in *Walt Whitman's Workshop*, a 1964 collection edited by Clifton Furness. In an endnote appended to his inventory of the notes, Furness wrote that:

A document indicating the seriousness of this intention to lecture was discovered at his death. It is written on both sides of a small piece of stiff paper intended as the front cover of a book which was to contain 'Walt Whitman's Lectures.' He had inscribed on this sheet: '15 cents. Walt Whitman's Lectures.' Then he announces: 'I desire to go by degrees through all These States, especially West and South and through Canada; Lecturing (my own way) henceforth my employment, my means of earning my living, subject to the work elsewhere alluded to.' (197)<sup>176</sup>

Of the lectures Whitman wrote the following in his notes:

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<sup>176</sup> Edward Grier also published transcriptions of Whitman's notes, and his transcription of this document (currently in the Trent Collection, Duke University) differs slightly from Furness's: "I desire to go, by degrees, through all These States, especially West and South, and through Kanada: Lecturing, (my own way,) henceforth my employment, my means of earning my living—subject to the work elsewhere alluded to." The next note is transcribed as follows: "Each Lecture will be printed, with its recitation; needing to be carefully perused afterward, to be understood. I personally sell the printed copies.—

Brooklyn, New York

1858.

Trade supplied by De Witt, 162 Nassau st. New York" (4:1437).

Each lecture will be printed with its recitation; needing to be carefully perused afterwards. I personally sell the printed copies.

BROOKLYN, NEW YORK; 1858

Trade supplied by De Witt, 162 Nassau Street, New York. (Furness 197)<sup>177</sup>

Whitman had written in his notes around this time of the need for a revolution in American oratory—the need to “change it from the excessively diffuse and impromptu character it has (an ephemeral readiness, surface animation, the stamp of the daily newspaper, to be dismissed as soon as the next day’s paper appears)” (Furness 34-5). The careful perusal Whitman imagines for the reader of printed versions of his lectures corresponds to this expectation of a changed mode of oratory. A printed reproduction would mimic the anticipated relationship between orator and physically present audience—a struggle in what Whitman referred to in his notes as an “agonistic arena”—by requiring a similar struggle in the relationship of the reader to the printed speech.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Robert deWitt was a publisher in New York who issued a series of cheap fiction titles between 1848 and 1877. See J. Randolph Cox, *The Dime Novel Companion: A Source Book*, 80-81. DeWitt had also published several lectures in the early 1850s with James Davenport, his business partner at the time. Two examples are Horace Greeley’s *The Crystal Palace and its Lessons: A Lecture* (1851) and *Romanism and Republicanism Incompatible: a lecture delivered in the Broadway Tabernacle, Monday Evening, April 5<sup>th</sup>, 1852*.

<sup>178</sup> Whitman copied this phrase from an 1857 address by Charles Nairne, excerpts of which were published in the *Christian Intelligencer* on July 2, 1857. The address was published in its entirety in pamphlet form later that year (Finkel 34). My argument about Whitman and agonism is indebted to *Culture of Eloquence*, in which James Perrin Warren discusses Whitman’s agonistic arena, which he describes as a space the poet imagined for the interaction between speaker and audience that could occasion cultural or linguistic reform. Noting the combination of speech and print that characterizes these intentions of Whitman’s to lecture, Warren writes that “Whitman imagines his lectures as delivering America a ‘programme’ that needs to be both heard and read, and the prospectus even suggests a price” (172). Warren argues that Whitman, with the “wander speaker” that he imagines in these notes, develops both a “figure of eloquence,” capable of revolutionizing oratory, and a new space for himself and his audience, which he calls an “agonistic arena,” and which ends up being applicable to both his writing and his plans for speaking. Though Warren makes a convincing case, one that I draw on here, it is worth noting that this interpretation is different from the context in which Whitman encountered this phrase: Charles Nairne, in a lecture read and annotated by Whitman, draws on Aristotle to oppose “agonistic” to “graphic” modes. See Finkel, pp. 38-9.



It is worth noting that poetry may have formed a part of Whitman's imagination of himself as orator even as early as these notes. The description of the printed version of the speech consists of two parts: each lecture *will be printed with its recitation*. This note suggests that what Whitman visualized likely involved at least some content in verse—what we might call a formal element of “Lecturing (my own way)” that combined performances of poetry with lectures or “lessons,” as Whitman also titled them in his notes. This structure of oral performance is consistent with both his lecture notes, which frequently included lines of poetry, and an “undelivered oration,” written during the Civil War, about “The Dead in this War.”<sup>179</sup> During the Civil War period, the idea of a lecture tour had occurred to Whitman again, while he was in Washington visiting soldiers in the hospitals.<sup>180</sup> Whitman wrote to his mother Louisa in 1863 that he was considering the idea of lecturing to earn money to sustain his hospital work.<sup>181</sup> The intention seems to have partially materialized in a draft of “The Dead in this War,” a composition in verse which appeared on a page under the words “Write a piece for address to Audiences— (Recitations,” and included horizontal lines that critic Karl Preuschen has postulated were intended to represent pauses in oral delivery.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> See Preuschen, “Undelivered Oration.”

<sup>180</sup> For more on this time of Whitman's life and his activities in Washington during the Civil War, see Genoways.

<sup>181</sup> See the letter from Walt Whitman to Louisa Van Velsor Whitman of 9 June 1863, in which Whitman wrote: “Mother, I think something of commencing a series of lectures & readings &c. through different cities of the north, to supply myself with funds for my Hospital & Soldiers visits—as I do not like to be beholden to the medium of others—“ Thomas Jefferson Whitman wrote back in a 13 June 1863 letter that “I have thought considerable of the idea that you speak of, that of your giving lectures I fear that you would not meet with that success that you deserve.”

<sup>182</sup> Some of the language about the skeletons and corpses of soldiers from this “recitation” appears in revised form in “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed” (Preuschen 151). In his transcription of this note in *Notebooks*, Grier writes that “WW's lineation has been respected because of the fact that, since the

Though it might convey the content and some of the complexity of the lecture-recitation combination, the printed version of the lecture in Whitman's early notes was not to be confused with the power of the voice, which for Whitman was to take precedence. Whitman writes in his antebellum notes on oratory:

Keep steadily understood, with respect to the effects and fascinations of *Elocution* (so broad, spacious, and vital) that although the Lectures may be printed and sold at the end of every performance, nothing can make up for that *irresistible attraction and robust living* treat of the vocalization of the lecture, by me,—which must defy all competition with the printed and read repetition of the Lectures. (Furness 33)

The privileging of the voice here is consistent with Whitman's effort to infuse the printed page with physical presence and the extended tropes of speech and song in his poetry. As in the poetry, the point and the vocalization come back to the specific speaker, though the move seems almost like an afterthought, or an expression of anxiety—"by me." The printed versions of the lectures are presented as a surrogate for the live occasion, issued to try to "make up for" the "*living treat*" of the speech itself.

But the printed substitute cannot compete, Whitman cautions himself here, in a move reminiscent of Douglass's sense of printed extracts as the "back-bone" of a speech.<sup>183</sup> What Whitman imagines is an event, one that happens multiple times in multiple towns, and one that involves print distribution as souvenir, reproduction, and

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MS is not only notes for a lecture but also for a 'recitation,' the style is markedly poetic" (1376). Several of the words also appear in a poetry manuscript at the Library of Congress titled "The dead of this war," and a number of the words from both verse and recitation wind up in prose form in *Memoranda During the War* (pp. 56-7).

<sup>183</sup> For a discussion of performance that figures a similar dynamic of perpetual and impossible substitution, see Roach. That Whitman is less concerned than Douglass about the printed version of the speech actually substituting for the speech itself likely speaks to both Whitman's inexperience and Douglass's more difficult position as a black lecturer.

advertising method: the printed speech becomes a cue to a practice of re-reading and an impetus to conversations about the speaker that would bring more people to the next lecture. The effectiveness of the advertisement depends on the *absence* of the voice, which can only be described, not experienced, in relation to the print—prospective audiences would have to attend the next performance to get the full effect.<sup>184</sup> Like Truth, Whitman imagines the printed and spoken versions of his lectures in relation to each other, using the juxtaposition to think through the relationship of print to speech and the relative importance of each. The “printed and read repetition,” the mechanical reproduction of the lectures, is both a necessary and a necessarily subordinate aspect of the public performance.

Though Whitman’s oratorical career did not materialize as he imagined in his early years, the poet’s interest in oratory persisted. His early lecture circuits were only imagined, and the drafts of lectures and recitations he produced destined to be adapted into printed pieces of prose and poetry rather than delivered in person, but his later years were marked by the repeated delivery of a lecture titled “Death of Abraham Lincoln.” This commemorative address was delivered at least nine and perhaps as many as thirteen times between 1879 and 1890. In it Whitman featured a vivid description of Lincoln’s assassination, adapted from an account that had previously appeared in *Memoranda During the War*, drawn from the experience of his companion Peter Doyle, who was at

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<sup>184</sup> For a corollary to this distinction between print and experience in the temperance movement, see Augst on the Washingtonians in “Temperance.”

Ford Theater when it happened.<sup>185</sup> Actualizing his early intentions for the formal structure of his public performances, Whitman concluded the Lincoln lectures with recitations or poetry readings, either of his own poems or of poems by other people. In both cases, he sometimes revised the poem from the original version. Furness would later write of Whitman that “He seems to have edited rather heavily most of the poems which he read in public,” and in the case of Anacreon’s “Ode XXXIII,” for instance, retitled “The Midnight Visitor,” which Whitman likely appended to at least one speech, he made a number of alterations to Thomas Moore’s translation.<sup>186</sup>

If thinking about Sojourner Truth’s readings of her own speeches in print stretches the bounds of oratory within which she is often regarded, reimagining Whitman’s oratorical career as both a space for poetic revision and an important expression of his orientation toward print allows us to read the Lincoln lectures as a form of poetic practice. And in fact, as Epstein writes, in the case of his 1887 Lincoln lecture, Whitman would address “the most distinguished audience that would ever hear him” (318-9). This New York performance brought out a crowd of literary, political, and corporate luminaries, from James Russell Lowell, William Dean Howells, and Mark Twain to General Sherman, John Hay, and Andrew Carnegie. To attendees, “it became clear that this lecture on Lincoln was a literary occasion of unique importance,” and the event was seemingly a success, inspiring positive reviews (Epstein 325).<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> For more on Doyle, see Murray.

<sup>186</sup> See Golden, as well as my discussion of another version of this poem below.

<sup>187</sup> Whitman often commented on the audiences at his lectures in his correspondence from the period. In one note to Harry Stafford after his 1881 lecture in Boston, Whitman wrote: “my Boston tramp, lecture, &c. turned out far ahead of what I had any idea of—it was not a very large room, but it was packed full (at

The archival vestiges of the Lincoln lectures take several forms, from tickets, to reviews in local papers (some of which Whitman wrote himself), to one of Whitman's reading copies, now held at the Library of Congress, which provides one look at the revisions he made to the lecture and to the poems he read at the end of it.<sup>188</sup> This reading copy, probably used for performances of the lecture between 1881 and 1889, exhibits Whitman's tendency to revise as well as his habit of collaging, which Matt Miller has described in relation to *Leaves of Grass*, though here "collage" itself becomes agonistic. Appropriating a book titled *The Bride of Gettysburg*, by J. D. Hylton (1878), a romance of the Civil War in verse, Whitman pasted together the endpapers, crossed out the text by Hylton, and covered much of it over with a combination of manuscript fragments and clippings from newspaper reports of previous Lincoln lectures, proof slips, and excerpts from *Memoranda*.<sup>189</sup> The book functioned materially to enhance reconfigurability: inserting and revising printed and handwritten segments, Whitman was able to shuffle in and out new and old material for revisions of each lecture.

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\$1 a head) & they say there never was a more *high toned crowd* collected in the town—full half were ladies, & I never saw finer ones—" (Miller 3:223).

<sup>188</sup> Based on the re-dating in the Lincoln lecture book, it seems likely to be the set of "notes" Whitman was using that are described in several accounts of the lecture: in the book Whitman notes "twenty two" years having past, which would put the date at 1887. Whitman gave the Lincoln lecture in 1879 (New York), 1880 (Philadelphia), 1881 (Boston), 1886 (Elkton, MD; Camden, NJ; Philadelphia; Haddonfield, NJ), 1887 (New York), and 1890 (Philadelphia). Most of the descriptions of Whitman's presentations (excluding those likely written by himself) describe him reading his notes quietly, with no gestures, to a silent and appreciative audience.

<sup>189</sup> Whitman had apparently met Hylton in early 1879, based on a letter from Camden lawyer James Scovel mentioning him and a calling card in Whitman's *Commonplace Book*. In a letter to Whitman on February 7, 1879, Scovel wrote: "Friday has come & gone—& no report as the dinner with the author of the, I fear, (abortive?) 'Bride of Gettysburg'...I wrote him that unless I wrote au contraire we wd be there on Gods Holy Day." It is unclear how Whitman had encountered the book, though this note seems to indicate that he and Scovel had discussed it: Hylton may have sent a copy before the meeting. Whitman would have been preparing to give his first lecture at the time of his meeting with Hylton in 1879, but based on the dates in the Hylton volume, it would seem to have been repurposed later; Whitman likely used this book for his lectures between 1881 and 1889.

Whitman revised the words for the opening part of the lecture in the reading copy multiple times, creating a chronology for the Lincoln lectures: though he included a report of his speech that starts “How often since that dark and dripping Saturday—that chilly April day, now fifteen years bygone,” he crossed out the word “fifteen,” replacing it with the phrase, written in gray pencil, “nearly twenty years,” Next, in red pencil, he wrote the words “over twenty,” and finally, in black ink, he crossed out both of these and replaced them with the original date of Lincoln’s assassination—April 15, 1865—and “twenty-two” years. Over subsequent pages Whitman adjusted the text of the lecture, revising tense and other details to manufacture a book that, in some ways, formed a counterpart to his early plans for a printed book of lectures. This volume is not exactly a printed book, however. Taking a mechanically reproduced book by Hylton, crossing out Hylton’s text and reconstructing from it a one-of-a-kind, reconfigurable mash-up of clippings and handwriting, Whitman made a book of his lecture material that functioned outside of the print marketplace.<sup>190</sup>

At the end of the reading copy are pasted in several poems, both by Whitman and by others, presumably possibilities to fill the space of “recitation” at the end of his lectures.<sup>191</sup> Many of these poems Whitman revised, both for content and form. In several

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<sup>190</sup> Whitman had engaged in this kind of reconstruction with other books: John Brainard’s *Occasional Pieces of Poetry*, for instance, and Henry David Thoreau’s *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*. See my “Walt Whitman’s Marginalia as Occasional Practice” and Mark Dimunation’s “Whitman and Thoreau Meet in Brooklyn.”

<sup>191</sup> In the introduction to his edition of *Memoranda During the War*, Basler writes: “The presence of the other poems would seem to bear no relation to the lecture, but suggests that Whitman may have used the volume also in giving ‘readings’ of his own and selections from other writers” (34). At least one example of Whitman doing a separate reading of Murger for a small group in Boston, in September 1881, is known (Baxter 719). Golden, following Furness, argues based on the placement of the poems in the book with the text of the lecture that Whitman read them during his lectures.

cases, space is added—perhaps for pauses in speech or for a subsequent printing. Whitman includes two printed poem translations, both of which have been retitled “The Midnight Visitor:” the first is Anacreon’s “Ode XXXIII,” and the second is a segment of Henry Murger’s “La Ballade du Désespéré.”<sup>192</sup> In each case, Whitman made corrections and changes to the poems: in the translation of Anacreon’s poem, he struck out several lines and added a new one, and he changed three words in the translation of the selection by Murger. Whitman also made changes to two of his own poems included at the back of the volume, “The Whale Chase” (published as part of “A Song of Joys”) and “The Singer in the Prison.”<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> The story of Whitman’s relation to “The Midnight Visitor” is long and complex. At one point a translation of the segment of the poem by Murger was published in multiple periodicals over Whitman’s name. Subsequent criticism of the poem (which was assumed to be written or translated by Whitman) inspired a response by Horace Traubel, and an effort to set the record straight, published in *Poet-Lore* and titled “Walt Whitman and Murger.” Traubel, a friend and acolyte of Whitman who visited the poet often during his residence in Camden in his later years, recorded his conversations with Whitman in detailed notes that eventually would make up nine volumes published over the course of the twentieth century. According to Whitman’s account in an 1890 conversation with Traubel, Whitman had encountered a bad translation of the Murger poem and had corrected it, producing a new copy that entered the papers as his own creation. Traubel describes the situation as follows in *With Walt Whitman in Camden*: “*Current Literature* contains ‘The Midnight Visitor’—quoted from Murger—and as if translated by W. This raised our laughter. Many papers have copied it in like error. W. said, however, ‘After all—though I do not know a word of French—I am to be credited with something in that poem. I had a miserable translation—got it from someone I met through John Forney—and so I had to put it in some shape myself—polished it, so to speak—though I don’t know that ‘polished’ is just the word—the idea really being, to connect—make clear. It is a difficult trial—to get all the quoted phrases right—the inverted commas. But the papers now seem to follow it very well—for papers!’ Then, ‘So you see, I participate in its authorship—if not in the translation’” (7:350). Traubel notes in his essay on Whitman and Murger that Whitman had his “polished” version printed in proofs and would often hand it to visitors or recite it aloud at social gatherings: “Whitman had his ‘Midnight Visitor’ printed on an odd leaf, by his still odder Camden printer. Copies of this leaf he always had in his pocket. He was very apt to disclose one of them, and read it,—perhaps at a dinner, or in a parlor, or at some public gathering. Oftentimes he felt free simply to recite it. Once at Mr. Harned’s, he exclaimed, ‘It goes like this (I have n’t the poem with me),’—thereupon reciting it without difficulty” (489).

<sup>193</sup> “O Captain! My Captain!” is also included, but does not have any revisions. It is unclear, of course, whether the revisions of the other poems were intended to be for the lecture reading or for future publications.

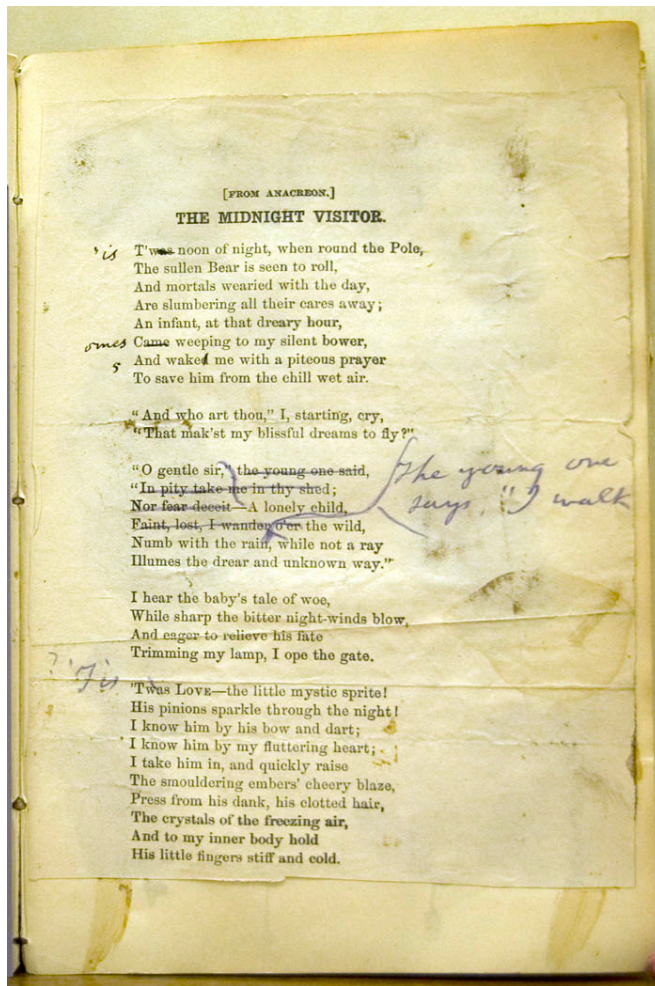


Figure 2: One example of Whitman's revisions to the poems he read during his Lincoln lectures, this is the renamed "Ode XXXIII" of Anacreon, included at the back of the Lincoln lecture book. The Charles E. Feinberg Collection of the Papers of Walt Whitman, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

These notes, speech reports, clippings from his own books and proofs of "polished" translations of the work of other poets formed the foundation for Whitman's public performances. One observer of an 1887 lecture described the poet's use of his notes: "Mr. Whitman, having acknowledged the greeting of the audience, put on a pair of eyeglasses and began to read the 'Death of Lincoln' from a little book upon whose pages



the manuscript and printed fragments of the lecture were pasted” (*The Critic*, 23 April 1887). If Whitman’s reading did not enact the dynamic role of orator he imagined in his early notes, it did signal the continuation of his desire to speak and read his poems: at the close of an 1879 report of Whitman’s speech published in the *New York World*, a reporter noted that “Mr. Whitman announced with much *naivete* that he desires to make engagements as a lecturer and reader of his own poems,” an announcement consistent with his stated objective in his letters from the time (“Recollections”).<sup>194</sup>

As the Lincoln lecture book and this description of Whitman as lecturer implies, Whitman’s relationship to speech and oratory also offers a way to think about Whitman, like Truth, not only as a speaker, but as a *reader*. Whitman’s renewed interest in oratory at the end of his life also would inform several of the descriptions of orators in *November Boughs*, a collection of reminiscences Whitman published in 1888 with the help of his friend and literary executor Horace Traubel. In this volume, Whitman included two chapters on orators—both of them preachers. Here the poet once again distinguishes between the speech—“the *living treat*”—and its printed report or avatar. *November Boughs* is a medley, comprised of both prose and poetry, and featuring Whitman’s notes on a number of topics, many devoted to specific figures. Poets and orators share the space of this book, in which Whitman criticizes William Shakespeare and Robert Burns and

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<sup>194</sup> In a letter to an unidentified newspaper editor from 13 April 1879, Whitman wrote that “to break the tedium of my half-invalidism—& as an experiment—I have come on to N Y to try a lecture—Can’t you give me a little lift in to-morrow’s paper—Something like the below?” Hollis writes that Whitman, never one to leave newspaper reports entirely to chance, likely sent several positive (likely exaggeratedly so) reviews of his lectures to newspapers.

talks about his experiences going to listen to Methodist minister Edward Thompson Taylor and Quaker preacher Elias Hicks.

The Hicks of Whitman's description in his notes is an effective speaker—less for the verbal content of his lectures, than for his gestures, his expressive power, and his ability to connect with the audience. Whitman reminisces about seeing Hicks when he was a child and being deeply affected by the experience. In his recollection of the event Whitman provides an extensive description of the audience, then sets the scene with not speech, but silence:

At length after a pause and stillness becoming almost painful, Elias rises and stands for a moment or two without a word. A tall, straight figure, neither stout nor very thin, dress'd in drab cloth, clean-shaved face, forehead of great expanse, and large and clear black eyes, long or middling-long white hair; he was at this time between 80 and 81 years of age, his head still wearing the broad-brim. A moment looking around the audience with those piercing eyes, amid the perfect stillness. (I can almost see him and the whole scene now.)

Though he does not try to reconstruct Hicks's speech after the first line—"I cannot follow the discourse"—Whitman does incorporate a partial record of one of Hicks's speeches, taken from another source. In doing so, Whitman notes of the Quaker that

Most of his discourses, like those of Epictetus and the ancient peripatetics, have left no record remaining—they were extempore, and those were not the times of reporters. Of one, however, deliver'd in Chester, Pa., toward the latter part of his career, there is a careful transcript; and from it (even if presenting you a sheaf of hidden wheat that may need to be pick'd and thrash'd out several times before you get the grain,) we give the following extract:

The extracts that follow were originally recorded stenographically by Marcus T. C. Gould and published in a series of volumes titled *The Quaker*, which included a series of

sermons by Hicks and other Quakers.<sup>195</sup> Whitman's note that the "hidden wheat" of this address "may need to be pick'd and thrash'd out several times before you get the grain" is consistent with his sense of the reader's necessary struggle with the text described in his early notes on oratory (175). The reading practice and the physical performance together comprise the description of Hicks, and it is worth thinking about the relation between the two—here, the experience of the voice is powerful, visceral, emotional, and *temporary*. The exercise of reading the speech is something else entirely. It is iterative, reflective: the printed speech must be re-read and studied, and the drama of Whitman's description in *November Boughs* is in some ways the contrast between Hicks's words and the immediacy of Whitman's representation, based on the effect the performance had on Whitman himself as a child. Looking at Whitman speaking finally leads us from Whitman as writer and orator to Whitman as listener and reader, grounds on which we also find Sojourner Truth, listening and reading for the words of God.

#### **"THE CRITTER'S OWN": WHITMAN'S RIGHT HAND**

Whitman's hyperauthorial presence is, ultimately, an illusion, bound up in Whitman's cultivation of his own fame and literary critical desires to find a coherent subject or an organizing principle behind his poetry. Scholars working to write articles and books about Whitman have found that the boundaries of authorship get blurrier the harder one looks. In anonymously authoring reviews of his own work, co-authoring

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<sup>195</sup> Gould was a noted stenographer who published a popular and widely reprinted stenography manual in the 1820s. See Beale. The particular speech of Hicks's that Whitman reproduces was reprinted in the *Phrenological Journal*, which likely is where Whitman saw it.

biographies of himself, writing articles and stories under other names, creating scrapbooks and notebooks, or acting as a scribe for the federal government during the Civil War, Whitman participated in a variety of nineteenth-century practices that called authenticity into question and pointed to a distributed structure of authorship and reading more consistent with the kind of nuance that Leon Jackson and others have described in studies of nineteenth-century literary production.<sup>196</sup>

For this reason, too, it is challenging to read Whitman's early notes on oratory, despite the temptation they offer to draw conclusions about how oratory fit into his priorities, his practices, his imagination of his own future, and the composition of his poetry. The difficulty comes in part from an article published in 1971 by William Finkel, in which Finkel painstakingly traces Whitman's notes to a variety of sources, including an inaugural address delivered by Edward Bulwer-Lytton; a commencement speech by Charles Murray Nairne; an essay titled "The Training of the Preacher," by Henry N. Day; *Lectures on the Art of Reading* by Thomas Sheridan; translations of the classics; and an essay by Sir James Mackintosh. Rather than Whitman's "original contributions to the subject" of oratory, Finkel argues, many of these notes were "either verbatim extracts or adaptations" of passages written by others (32). At most, they suggested Whitman's wide reading and the passages that struck his fancy. The phrases associated with the "agonistic arena"; the discussion of the "diffuse and impromptu character" of oratory—these and others, according to Finkel, were adaptations of Nairne's address, delivered June 30, 1857, at Rutgers College.

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<sup>196</sup> See, for instance, McGill's discussion of copyright in *The Culture of Reprinting*.

What does this mean for using these notes to talk about Whitman? The notes are in Whitman's handwriting—of that we are certain—but it turns out that handwriting can be deceptive. A common practice of annotation for Whitman involved copying notes from sources that interested him, in relation to which he sometimes expanded or revised or noted the source and sometimes did not.<sup>197</sup> In the case of Truth, because she was illiterate, critics are prepared to approach every written document with a certain amount of skepticism. This is less the case for Whitman, who did a great deal of handwriting and largely lacked the kinds of power struggles Truth was facing in nineteenth-century America. But textual instability takes a variety of forms, suggesting that critical techniques of reading African American texts in terms of multivocality may be usefully applied to a wider range of documents. Here, even handwriting does not necessarily represent the gold standard of authorship.

Whitman himself weighed in on the subject of authorship, with much the same emphasis on the ambiguities of handwriting and what it implies about authenticity or “original contributions.”<sup>198</sup> Horace Traubel describes a conversation with the poet as follows: “I had a letter from Brinton today asking if the manuscript I sent him had really been in W.’s own hand. W. smiled. ‘Yes—that is the very hand—the critter’s

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<sup>197</sup> “The Midnight Visitor” version of Merger’s poem is another example of this confusion. In his article in *Poet-Lore*, Traubel wrote of Whitman’s “polished” version of the poem: “During the last year or so of his life, his free rendering travelled the country over, in newspapers; in some places appearing as his translation, in other places as of his distinct creation, and still again, now and then, anonymously. He was rather amused over the discussion it aroused. I remember a number of instances in which I was appealed to, to settle the question of authorship” (488). For another example of Whitman’s practice of copying out notes, see his transcription of Jean Jacques Rousseau’s “The Social Contract; Or, Principles of Right” (Trent Collection of Whitmaniana, Duke University, MS quarto 100).

<sup>198</sup> For a discussion of handwriting in the nineteenth century more generally, see Thornton.

own,' lifting his hand to suit the words" (6:310-311). Whitman understands the implication of Brinton's question—did he write the manuscript?—and responds with a metonymic gesture drawing attention to the use of a body part—"hand"—to stand for authorship. In another account, Traubel writes that "I picked up a piece of old and stained manuscript from the floor—one sheet only—and called W.'s attention to it. He said: 'I have no idea in what connection it was written—it was long ago—long, long ago. Yet that writing is the critter's, without a shadow of a doubt.' He added—'Take it along—see what you can make of it—it is a waif'" (6:330). The third-person reference undermines the statement of certainty implied in "without a shadow of a doubt," as the responsibility of interpretation is transferred to Traubel. Whitman acknowledges what it means that the document is "the critter's own" handwriting, aware that Traubel and his other disciples were fervid about collecting such scraps, and with a hint of irony in his generosity.<sup>199</sup>

Critics writing about Whitman's notes on oratory after Finkel's publication have tended to dodge the implications of the article, either citing it and moving forward or validating their evidence by suggesting that Whitman's rewriting of these passages suggests his emphasis on or agreement with them. But it is worth thinking about Finkel's argument as a cue to another way of reading these notes, one invested less in an authorship defined by claims of originality and more in an authorship distributed across various nodes, in this case, as in Truth's case, involving what we can learn from practices

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<sup>199</sup> Traubel's resistance to disposing of anything with Whitman's handwriting became a joke between them, though Whitman delighted in it. Traubel wrote at one point: "Rescued another piece from the waste-basket today. He always joked about that. A manuscript early draft of 'The Unexpress'd'—so far, I think, unprinted" (7:171).

of reading, as well as writing—reading aloud, reading by listening, or, as Whitman’s reading practice suggests in the case of his notes on oratory, reading agonistically.

In his discussion of Whitman’s transcription of segments from Nairne—some transcriptions “verbatim,” some summaries or resemblances to Nairne’s wording—Finkel postulates that Whitman initially ran across an extract of Nairne’s address in the *Christian Intelligencer*, which he clipped and kept. Finkel notes that Whitman “also read and preserved a copy of the complete address which became available in book form later that year” (34). Finkel emphasizes that these both have been marked in various ways and in both pencil and ink, constituting “strong evidence that many of these passages were read and reread” (34). Here we see Whitman enacting the very thing he called for in the notes on oratory—that is, perusing and struggling with the printed version of an address. He marks, then re-marks, then copies, then revises the words of Nairne’s commencement speech, making them applicable to himself and his intentions to become a public speaker. He collects two different copies of the speech, beginning by clipping out the extract, and then locating the complete version.

Whitman’s reading practice here models the kind of engagement he advocated with printed reports of speeches in general. One of the passages from Nairne’s address with which Whitman showed, according to Finkel, “an identity or a marked similarity of phrase or thought” reads as follows:

May not the Grecian orator have intended to recommend, in addition to an animated delivery, the study of that style which Aristotle has named the “agonistic,” wherein we *wrestle* with an auditory, in opposition to the “graphic,” which we use in the written disquisition or essay...Lord Jeffry...delivered a learned and labored production...very suitable for the pages of the Edinburgh

Review, but very unsuitable for the agonistic arena of the House of Commons. It wanted *action*. It could not possibly be taken for the fresh, natural utterance of spontaneous thought and feeling. (qtd. in Finkel, 38-9)

Here we see the “origin” of the “agonistic arena” of Whitman’s notes in Nairne’s words, themselves adaptations of Aristotle, which tellingly describe that arena as the site for a specifically *aural* struggle—a space “wherein we *wrestle* with an auditory, in *opposition* to the ‘graphic.’”

Finkel includes three segments from Whitman’s notes on oratory, juxtaposing them with this excerpt from Nairne. They read as follows:

The place of the orator and his hearers is truly an agonistic arena. There he wrestles and contends with them—he suffers, sweats, undergoes his great toil and extasy. Perhaps it is a greater battle than any fought for by contending forces on land and sea.”<sup>200</sup>

...

Practice and experiment until I find a flowing, strong, appropriate speaking composition style, which requires many different things from the written style.

...

Talk only of what is insouciant and native and spontaneous and must inevitably be said, otherwise, silence. (38-9)

Though these segments seem less derived than responsive to Nairne’s lecture, an instance of Whitman digesting his reading and filtering it into his plans for his career as an orator, Whitman uses the distinction set up by Nairne to occasion his own meditation on speaking (agonistic) versus written (graphic) style. These notes toward a style show that speaking and writing represent an important dynamic for Whitman, who struggles with the relationship between the two at the outset of a poetic career that would come to

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<sup>200</sup> Finkel omits this last sentence, but suggests that it “derives” from elsewhere in Nairne’s address, where Nairne says: “Doubtless there is a fascinating sublimity in the career of a conqueror...But there is a loftier, although a calmer sublimity...in the triumph of a great speaker...This is verily a triumph beyond the soldier’s ovation, a conquest without humiliation, a subjugation unattended either by suffering or shame!” (qtd in Finkel, pp. 38-9).



depend on the sense of physical presence in print.<sup>201</sup> Whitman's notes on oratory point us toward a reconceptualization of authorship as both distributed and noncategorical: Whitman copies, adapts, reads, reflects, and speaks, using the distinction set up by Nairne to occasion his own meditation on speech as style. Playing with categories, Whitman goes on to pair the printed and sold text with the recitation in his imagination of his career as a lecturer.

What does it mean to reinterpret the agonistic arena, as Warren does, as operating for Whitman in a graphic as well as an auditory space? It requires, for one thing, a conscious misreading of Whitman's own reading. In his early notes on oratory, this arena is invoked as a means of distinguishing between written and spoken style. But perhaps there is a benefit to this misreading: we can see in the image of the agon a forward-looking displacement of the speaker into the poetry. Rather than emerging as the representative orator that he imagined, speaking on matters of politics and religion, Whitman became a poet for whom voice and body were enacted as a matter of print, rather than speech. As a result, print and poetry itself had to be loosed from its boundaries in order to resemble the eventfulness and the presence of speech. The agonistic arena reminds us that speech and print and poetry and prose were never too far apart for Truth or Whitman; both worked primarily in one medium while simultaneously imagining another. Reading formed a central part of authorship for both. If Truth, orchestrating readers to review the representations of her words in print, found herself navigating the

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<sup>201</sup> "This is no book," Whitman would write: "Who touches this, touches a man, / (Is it night? Are we here alone?) / It is I you hold, and who holds you, / I spring from the pages into your arms—decease calls me forth" (1860). For a discussion of Whitman's poetic intimacy as a trick of mediation, see Warner, "Whitman Drunk" (*Publics* 269-290).

overlap of aesthetics and politics, Whitman reimagined his political speeches as aesthetic reform, a sphere in which he could be radical without being too radical, representative and mediated at the same time.

Political theorists and rhetoricians of the present day have formulated the agon as an alternative to consensus-based projections of deliberative democracy that have often informed discussions of the public sphere.<sup>202</sup> For Chantal Mouffe, the agonistic arena becomes a space that acknowledges a world outside of the rational, one that has room for emotions, passions, identifications—and, we might add, embodiment—that defy the terms of rational argumentation. Casting representation as a space of agonistic activity, both political and aesthetic, calls us to bring together the analytics of reform and the analytics of revision in a more dynamic way than critics have previously done. Where book historians, rhetoricians, literary critics, and political theorists come together is the point at which Walt Whitman and Sojourner Truth can speak, write, and read in ways that speak to a mutual engagement of nineteenth-century practices and process of authorship. These practices are much more difficult to see, as long as orality and literacy continue to function as coherent categories that guide analysis, and as long as oratory and literature, poetry and prose, print and speech, readership and authorship are viewed categorically and independent of their imbrication in a broader field of representation and creative production that shaped both speech and writing in nineteenth-century America.

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<sup>202</sup> The agon, a figure of conflict or struggle taken from the context of Greek games and theater, has entered into discussions of literary influence and originality as well as discussions of politics and public debate. See Harold Bloom's discussion of the agon as a form of misreading that enacts literary tradition in *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

How might we think about the poet of personality with a different take on authenticity? Might we take this practice of reading to heart, reading Whitman not for authorship, but rather for reading or riffing practices? In his discussion of speech transcriptions in his early notes on oratory, the poet provides instructions on how to read how he read—and for Whitman, reading was revising, or perpetual composition. Whitman ultimately is doing with Nairne and other speakers what he recommends the reader do with Hicks, reading creatively, thrashing the wheat. This activity is both spiritual and generative. As Whitman would say in “A Backward Glance O’er Travel’d Roads,” “The reader will always have his or her part to do, just as much as I have had mine. I seek less to state or display any theme or thought, and more to bring you, reader, into the atmosphere of the theme or thought—there to pursue your own flight.”<sup>203</sup> The search is not for the originary speech, but rather its perpetual collaborative reproduction or reenactment: the search not for the author, but for the interaction that simultaneously destroys and recreates him, the production of additional readings and revisionary speech.

## CONCLUSION

In an account from May 27, 1890, published in *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, Horace Traubel wrote of Whitman: “Suddenly he asked me: ‘Did you see the Record this morning? According to the Record I am dying’” (6:426). Doubtless it is a strange thing to read in the newspaper that you are dying. Sojourner Truth had a similar experience: when Stowe published “The Libyan Sybil,” she wrote in the essay that Truth had died. Truth

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<sup>203</sup> This quote is taken from the 1891 edition, p. 434.

had an amanuensis write a letter for her to correct several of Stowe's mistakes, but made no mention of that one, apparently assuming the letter itself would be argument enough. The relationship between representation and reality in the nineteenth-century was enough to give one pause: what, after all, constituted reality? Traubel's representation of the suddenness of Whitman's question about the *Record* suggests it took him off guard. Whitman went on to protest the representation: "I suppose I am, in a sense, dying: but I have been pretty sick these past six years, and the past two badly sick: so that I do not see that it needs to be remarked upon now." He blamed the reporter—"It's all Adam Sloan's work"—and took issue with one comment, in particular: "At one point the report says: 'Whitman never was of a robust physique'—W. laughingly saying: 'What stuff! Why, that is the very point we travel on!'" Casting the incident as proof of the vagaries of reporters and their representations, Whitman then talked to Traubel at length about his upcoming birthday dinner, which the *Record* reporter had expressed skepticism about his ability to attend. Traubel included a description of this incident in his report of his conversation with Whitman that day, along with the text of the *Record* article itself.

Print had power in nineteenth-century America. Perhaps it is an irony that sometimes the most illuminating way to think about that power is by thinking about speech. Speech transcriptions give us an unusually rich site to explore the way nineteenth-century figures conceptualized, manipulated, and were frustrated by mediation. For both Truth and Whitman, figures around whom myths developed during and after their lifetimes, the questions of mediation and authenticity loomed large. Both paid attention to their representations in print, trying to assert as much control as possible

over them. Both imagined their work in a transforming and transformable combination of speech and print, as a nod to the close relationship between the two in the nineteenth century and as a way of thinking about the most effective means of reaching U.S. audiences. The exercise of thinking about Truth as poet and about Whitman as orator is useful, in that it reveals the ways these figures have been interpreted within specific, often artificial roles, but it is in the end perhaps the similarities between them that are the most interesting, in part because they are underexplored by studies of American literature.

By emphasizing the similarities, I do not mean to underplay or ignore the power structures that made speaking and reading for Truth something very different, and harder, than speaking and reading for Whitman. If something may be gained by claiming common ground, in practices of publicity and attentiveness, something also may be lost. Truth's emphasis on her poetry, after all, likely has been neglected as much because of the difficulty of publishing as a black female poet, much less an illiterate black female poet, as of critical desires and expectations. But at some point critics are going to have to come up with ways of speaking that do not build walls, but rather bridges: that do not isolate studies in one or another part of U.S. history, but instead look for patterns and networks that enable ways of seeing and thinking across racial and generic boundaries.<sup>204</sup>

American literature challenges us to consider authorship in the context of publicity, popularity, and myth. From the federalists to Tocqueville and beyond,

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<sup>204</sup> Sedgwick provides one precedent for theorizing this kind of approach in her discussion of reparative reading and agonistic criticism in "Paranoid Reading."

observers of American culture have meditated on the effect of the crowd, the public, on national policy and culture. It also insists that we think about race, the way that power structures and political affiliations determined the terms of representation in both speech and print. Figures of this time were repetitively and differently constituted in front of audiences, in print, and in speech. If Truth constructed a sense of belonging based on both her birth and her slavery in the Women's Rights speech in New York City in 1853, her death was misreported in "The Libyan Sibyl," as was Whitman's deterioration in the *Record*. For Whitman, one myth challenged another in Sloan's account: the robust physique of the democratic poet was the "point we travel on," the point at which the poet's body could act as evidence of the personality he created in his poems. The changes in his body Whitman faced in his final years presented him with an incongruity between the poet and the man, and it was this theme that inspired much of the late poetry he published in collections like *November Boughs*, which has been criticized in scholarship of the last century, perhaps because the poet it presents is a different figure than the poet of *Leaves of Grass*, and we aren't sure how to—or if we want to—understand the democratic poet without the robust physique.

What is Whitman without writing? What is Truth without speech? As literary critics looking at the past, we find ourselves working with fragments—printed and written relics of the vast world of what was written and said. The preservation of such relics is not innocent, and interpreting the fragments has often been a matter of figuring their relationship to the personalities of history, using elements like handwriting, material aspects of the book, and literary or narrative style to collect fragments around individuals,

searching for the subject in the vestiges that remain. In subjects we locate resistance, identity, human touch and voice—original speaking that confirms our desire for one form or another of ancestry or belonging. But the story of Sojourner Truth in criticism and in history, like that of Josiah Henson, challenges us to reflect on what we want from these figures, revisiting the critical conceits of resistance and subjectivity and the text to ensure that looking for them does not blind us to what can be difficult to see across a variety of multiply-mediated evidence: the negotiations of power, desire, and expectations for a series of nineteenth-century publics whose ways of seeing and hearing were different from and no less culturally conditioned than our own.

Ultimately, we need imagination to read how people read in the nineteenth-century, to understand how practices of inscription were neither authenticating nor deauthenticating, but a factor and an interpretive problematic for literature, politics, and religion, and to think about how figures of the nineteenth century lived without the guarantee of self-evidence from any medium, including personal contact. What such figures remind us is that nothing is self-evident, not even Walt Whitman, who—less despite than because of his vast archive—dissolves into textual mirrors and fragments at the very sound of our approach.

## Coda

In a manuscript now held at the Boston University Library, Walt Whitman wrote the following line and note:

—Was it thought that all was achieved when Liberty was achieved (shaking the head no—no—no.) Make a large part of lectures-meaning consist in significant gestures.

In the commentary accompanying this note in the *Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts*, Edward Grier estimates that the note was written in the 1860s, and writes that “the relationship between poetic and oratorical utterance is very close. Were it not for the stage directions one might take this as a poem sketch” (2243). The parentheses in the note serve as the formal markers of a distinction between speech and gesture, and between audiences, as the note spirals from public to private utterance. In the first sentence, the text outside the parentheses is for a (listening) audience; the text inside, cues for the speaker as he is speaking; the text in the second sentence, reflections for a speaker in the making. Reading the first sentence of the note today, critics might well take Grier’s approach and mark the sound and style of Whitman’s poetry, the medium in which he has become famous. But the question is punctuated by a parenthetical gesture rather than the question mark we might expect, and then a meta-reflection or a note about the importance of gesture to an imagined series of lectures. That the first words of this note were written to be spoken only becomes clear by virtue of the text in the parentheses and the second sentence, which explains the text in the parentheses and generalizes it as a guideline for a broader expressive practice.



Parentheses as a formal and graphic element begin and end my project, pointing as they do both here and in many of the phonographic reports from abolitionist contexts in chapter one to the layering of audiences and the imagination of sound and gesture in print, as well as the dissonance between historical and contemporary readers and listeners. Today we read this note as the statement of a poet, engaged in the temporary act of imagining himself as a speaker. But was the act of imagination temporary, or is its temporal brevity an illusion, an effect of what we look for when we read as critics, or what we expect to see? Parentheses mark a number of things in Whitman's poetry: asides to the reader, moments of intimacy, reflections or expansions on what has come before. Here they respond to a perennial question of American history, one that was also on the minds of many African Americans in the nineteenth century: Was it thought that all was achieved when Liberty was achieved? In the parentheses that follow is a gesture, a vehement, repetitive, unvoiced negative, one that signals both the perpetual space between ideal and practice in the U.S. and the silencing or bracketing of the negative answer that gestures to that space. Whitman's response is to turn to a reflection on the role of gesture in speech more generally, meditating on the forms of eloquence that could convince and reform a nineteenth-century audience, projecting a vision—from within the decade of the Civil War—of a future act of oratorical mediation that might help to confront the unfinished work of the nation.

Long before the Civil War, in a criticism of common oratorical practice in one of his early "Philosophy of History" lectures (an 1837 series whose alternate title he listed in his journal as "Omnipresence of Spirit"), Ralph Waldo Emerson said disparagingly: "It is

the age of parenthesis; you might put most that we say in brackets and it would not be missed. We ring a few changes on the stereotyped parliamentary phrases and it serves the turn” (*The Early Lectures* 163).<sup>205</sup> I have argued in this dissertation that parentheses in speech reports signal a shift away from the voice of the author, a refocusing on the audience that marks the text as event and reveals the presence of the reporter. But the structure of parentheses speaks more broadly to the work I do in this dissertation, which is to make the parentheses present, shifting from the major voices of American literary history to figures less well known and gestures that speak in ways not always audible to current critical listening practices. Like the parenthetical applause and dissent in speeches, the quieter voices contained in the parentheses of American literature, sometimes protesting vigorously, have things to tell us about the main show—perhaps are the main show, after all.

If Emerson criticized his antebellum era as the age of parentheses, we might say that ours is the age of the cursor: an age of digital media, a beckoning and a development that has had a startling impact on how we ring changes on stereotyped phrases, parliamentary and otherwise. One advantage of the current digital era in which we find ourselves and its attendant proliferation of texts is that our access to information has expanded, presenting challenges and opportunities for the ways we have thought about, approached, and processed data. For literary studies, in particular, digital textual editing and searching have created possibilities of new methodologies for literary critical

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<sup>205</sup> These lectures, at Boston’s Masonic Temple, were the first Emerson gave under his own management (Richardson 257).

research. I conclude, then, with a reflection on the age and the prompting of the cursor, in the form of a brief discussion of the implications of digital publishing for reading practices derived from the specific results of digitization for a massive nineteenth-century oral history project.

In his later years, Whitman found himself surrounded by a group of disciples, men who loved his poetry and worked to publicize both the poet and his words. One of these disciples, Horace Traubel, began recording his conversations with the poet in what would become a nine-volume oral history, published over the course of a century. Traubel had met Whitman in 1873, when the poet moved to Camden to live with his brother George. An avid reader employed at a newspaper printing office, Traubel would stop by and have discussions with Whitman about books. After Whitman bought himself a house on Mickle Street, Traubel began to visit regularly, and in the 1880s he began to help the disabled and largely immobile poet with running errands, writing letters, and publishing books.

In 1888, Traubel started to take notes on his daily conversations with Whitman, either in the evening after he left Whitman's house or, sometimes, while he was still there. In a note to the reader in the first volume of these notes, which Traubel published in 1906, Traubel wrote that although Whitman didn't know the extent of the record, "he knew I would write of our experiences together" (1: vii). Traubel wrote that he would occasionally read Whitman his reports, to which Whitman responded: "They were very satisfactory. 'You do the thing just as I should wish it to be done'" (1: vii). Traubel's note works to ensure that the myth of authorial control remains intact. Traubel was a

socialist—a friend and colleague of Eugene Debs and Emma Goldman—and after Whitman died he would found *The Conservator*, an organ for a group of socialists who took Whitman’s work as the starting point for their political beliefs. Though himself an author and poet, Traubel continued to devote himself to Whitman for the rest of his life, summoning the energy to attend a birthday commemoration of the old poet just before his own death in 1919.

Traubel’s labor of love and historiography had a sizeable material presence. Critic Michael Robertson estimates that “Traubel wrote, on average, one to two thousand words a day.” The final product, covering four years of visits and conversation, consisted of nearly 5,000 pages and almost two million words. Traubel’s wife Anne Montgomerie would later say that

The notes of the visits to Whitman were written on small bits of paper to fit into the pocket of his jacket, and were written in what he called 'condensed longhand,' in the dim light of Whitman's room. Within the hour of the words spoken, the material was put into the complete form with which you are familiar in the three published volumes. There was no vacuum of time or emotion, thus preserving the vitality of the original conversation. (qtd. in Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, 4: x)

The publication of the notes in a nine-volume series titled *With Walt Whitman in Camden* took almost a century, with the last volume issued in 1996. Only the first three volumes were published in Traubel’s lifetime.

In the introduction to Volume 4 of the series, published in 1953 and edited by Anne Traubel and Sculley Bradley, Bradley makes a case for the importance of the volumes and Traubel’s reportorial prowess, one that sounds very much like nineteenth-century descriptions of phonographic reporters. Bradley writes that Traubel recorded

Whitman's words "almost with the fidelity of a modern wire recorder" (Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, 4: x). "Without the reporter's formal training," Bradley writes, "Traubel apparently had the reporter's instinct, and the eyes and ears of a television camera" (x). Other accounts praise the fidelity of Traubel's account: Robertson writes that Traubel's "record of Whitman's speech is consistent, convincing, and completely in accord with interviews and memoirs of the poet" (237). Critic Gary Schmidgall writes that "nothing on the wide shelf of Whitman's own writings and all the commentary on him gives a more vivid sense of the poet's actual, personal voice than Traubel's nine volumes." A review of the first three volumes in 1915 stated that "The length is justified by the great veracity it secures...The best service this more honest, unselected record will do for Whitman is to show the kind of mind he had" (xxvi). Schmidgall goes on to call Traubel's record the "most astonishing oral history project in all of American letters" (vii). It has occasioned comparisons with Boswell's life of Johnson, a massive and popular eighteenth-century biographical and literary project.

But like William Lloyd Garrison's note of appreciation to J.M.W. Yerrinton that cast the phonographic reporter as an instrument of record, these descriptions misrepresent the observer. Traubel's notes are written like a diary, with a date and time of his visit to Whitman, followed by a record of their discussions. Covering nearly every day of a four-year period, these entries yield conversations about a number of topics, from literature, to politics, to Whitman's own work. If you read them straight through, they have a certain rhythm. The date and time of the entry is often followed by Traubel's announcement of his arrival, typically (and increasingly) with some comment about Whitman's health.

Whitman is usually reading something that he sets down when Traubel enters. There is often mention of the fire, or the weather. The account consists of a series of repetitions, patterns, rhythms of everyday encounter. As Matt Cohen writes, Traubel's record "is both macroscopic and microscopic: the sense we get of the span of nineteenth-century culture from the sheer number and variety of Whitman's friends and acquaintances, from everywhere, is matched only by the densely quotidian experience of Whitman's home, street, living and eating ways, caught by Traubel's eye and ear" ("Introduction").

It was the very quotidian expansiveness of the record, in fact, that seemed to bring it to life. In a forward to Volume 7, Justin Kaplan wrote that "Reading Traubel's transcriptions John Burroughs, who had known Whitman since 1863, said that in some passages he could almost hear his old friend breathe. Many readers since Burroughs have felt that they were reliving Whitman's daily life in real time, watching him as he opened his mail and shuffled through his papers, and listening to the conversations of a remarkably radiant survivor who described himself in a valedictory poem as 'O so loth to depart!'" (7: xi). Earlier, in a foreword to Volume 4, Bradley had mused that "The idea, one gathers, was to transcribe not only the words, but the very inflection of the poet's voice. The young scribe often read it back to his future bride [Anne Montgomerie Traubel] to check the sound of it" (4: x).

If the sound of Whitman's voice had to be represented correctly, it was brought into being in part by contrast: set against it is the apparent silence of Traubel's mediation. Robertson writes that "Traubel is almost invisible throughout the nine volumes of *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, an ideal interlocutor, waiting in silence for Whitman to finish

a thought, asking leading questions, occasionally making a saucy remark to stir the old man up” (237). But observers have noted that Traubel made his own edits, particularly at sensitive moments like Whitman’s reception of a letter from John Addington Symonds confronting him about male affection in the poems in the Calamus cluster.<sup>206</sup> And there are also formal markers of omissions in the record. Phrases like “as I caught it” and “or words to that end” suggest that the observer was more present than the thoroughness and structure of his records might suggest (7: 25, 41).

Traubel’s oral history is suggestive in the context of this dissertation, not least because of the ways it speaks to the dynamics of transcription, authorship, and representation I have raised throughout. Like Sojourner Truth, Whitman found his myth and his voice perpetuated in a variety of ways in his later years—some subject to his control, others beyond it. The speech of both Whitman and Truth was mediated, and if Truth’s representation and revision by her white female editors seems a familiar abolitionist story, the transcriptions of Whitman’s conversations by Traubel at the end of his life suggest that this is not the only context within which to read such representations. Scholars writing about Whitman frequently cite Traubel’s notes as a resource for what Whitman said or thought about a wide range of subjects. The desire for transparency and intimacy takes a similar form in works that have been read as political and works that have been read as literary, pointing to the need for critics to rethink the kinds of assumptions that shape our conception of the authenticity of literary remains.

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<sup>206</sup> For more on this, see Schmidgall.

The transparency of Whitman's voice in a neat, unobtrusive typeface and readable text is, like many large-scale editorial efforts, an elaborate illusion. It took a century and a great number of people, from publishers, to editors, to transcribers, to produce the nine volumes of *With Walt Whitman in Camden*. The first volume was published in Boston in 1906 by Small and Maynard; the second and third in New York in 1914 and 15, by Mitchell Kennerley. Volume 4 was edited by Sculley Bradley and published in Philadelphia by the University of Pennsylvania Press in 1953; Volumes 5, 6, and 7 were published in Carbondale, IL by Southern Illinois University Press in 1964, 1982, and 1992; and Volumes 8 and 9 were edited by Jeanne Chapman and Robert MacIsaac and finally published by W.L. Bentley in California in 1996, ninety years after the first volume and nearly a century after Traubel had taken his notes. As of June 2012, all of these volumes were republished digitally on the *Walt Whitman Archive*, adding still another layer of editorial undertaking. This century-long collaboration historicizes the resistance of spirit, offering a publication history in which each textual encounter is framed as a new act of resurrection and reform.

Their publication as printed volumes presented Traubel's notes as a stable point of reference available to scholars, limiting the need to visit an archival repository or to try to decipher Traubel's "longhand." Offering a single, clear interpretation of Traubel's handwriting, these volumes act as a site of fixity and an authoritative source of scholarly citation. In turn, their publication on the *Whitman Archive* as XML and HTML files now allows these volumes to be searched, so that scholars no longer must wade through the quotidian day-by-day pace of Traubel's account in order to find relevant information.



One can type a keyword into the search prompt and the results are more or less efficiently organized around the topic of interest. Searching for “slavery,” for instance, yields a comment by Whitman on anti-slavery, in the context of a conversation with Traubel and Thomas Harned about evolution:

Afterwards talked evolution. H. rather conservative in the matter. W. said: “There comes a time, after all this is expounded, promulged, proved, for some one to come forward and say: ‘Don’t be in such a damn big hurry: don’t believe that this settles everything—that nothing more remains to be done. We can say here as was said of anti-slavery: don’t deceive yourselves into the idea that this question is the only question: that with this settled all is settled—that the world centres upon this spot: there are slavery and anti-slavery: the world’s a big one: there’s more to it than can be put into a single definition.’” Harned said: “The evolutionists are the master-men of the time.” W. then: “So they are: I don’t know but you can call this their age. I stand in awe before the men of science: they hold the key to the situation: they are the true discoverers: they are—they, with their utter abandon, honesty.” (3: 97-98)

This conversation from November 15, 1888, seems to echo the question Whitman raised in his notes almost three decades earlier: Was it thought that all was achieved when Liberty was achieved? In this case Whitman posits that the new age belongs to scientists and evolutionists,<sup>207</sup> a then-modern batch of discoverers whose form of innovation depended on a combination of “honesty” and “utter abandon.”

The remediation of Traubel’s account adds still more creators and editors to the mix of people involved in the production of the printed volumes, extending it outward to the makers of the machinery of the new books: electronics technicians, computer and web designers, information technology experts. The route from voice to page to screen was long and circuitous, and so the history of publication of *With Walt Whitman in Camden* is

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<sup>207</sup> For a discussion of Whitman’s changing views on evolution, see McGinnis.

bound up in complex ways with the twentieth- and twenty-first century history of media forms and transformations. These transformations have prompted new interpretive practices for literary studies more broadly, from distant reading to macroanalysis: visualizations and language maps provide cues for close readings, word counts reveal new complexities of literary style, and arcs demonstrate textual networks and absences.<sup>208</sup> Prompted by the cursor, we too seem to find ourselves at a new stage of discovery, honesty, and utter abandon.

The ability to search Traubel's volumes and an increasing number of other literary texts online makes it all the more urgent that we consider the role of critical desire, how what we look for shapes what we find, and how assumptions can lead to potential blindnesses. One way to do that might be to work backward, becoming familiar with the way searches and other digital tools work and recognizing the incompleteness of literary archives even while acknowledging the vast resources they offer, an approach that would insist on a publication history for online archives as well as printed resources. Another might be to take seriously the dialectic of pattern and randomness that N. Katherine Hayles has associated with digital textuality, recognizing, as she writes, that "a book produced by typesetting may look very similar to one generated by a computerized program, but the technological processes involved in this transformation are not neutral" (28). Books generated by both—first by typesetting, then by digital reproduction—face added complications. Information, Hayles has taught us, is not separable from its material

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<sup>208</sup> See Moretti on distant reading, Jockers on macroanalysis, Clement for a use of digital analysis in a discussion of the stylistic innovations of Gertrude Stein, and Klein on James Hemings and the networks of Thomas Jefferson. See also Lorang and Zillig.

conditions, or the emotions that frame our use of it, any more than the abstract rationality that was imagined to form an essential part of a functional public sphere was separable from the bodies and the biases of the people who promoted it. As in the case of the nineteenth century, what appears to be randomness, honesty, or authenticity operates consistently as a function of the medium, the message, or the observer. In searching for “slavery” in Whitman we find not only its opposite, but also ourselves, back at the place where we began the search—but with intention, never quite total honesty, never quite utter abandon. This history of mediation and desire and the spirits that animate them continues to present a provocative site for reflection, revision, and revelation.

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