DREAD STRESS: THE POLITICS OF LITERATURE

AMID THE TRANSFORMATION OF U.S. PRINT CULTURE 1847-1892

by

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Dread Stress: The Politics of Literature amid the Transformation of U.S. Print Culture (1847-1892)

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Abstract

Examining Herman Melville's magazine writing and late poetry, and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's influential antislavery poetry and prose, *Dread Stress* details how nineteenth-century writers generate and modulate their aesthetics in relation to the shifting configurations of U.S. print culture. My dissertation maps such developing aesthetics across the gradual decline of the partisan press and the subsequent rise of the commercial press, an uneven transformation that occurred across the second half of the nineteenth century. I argue that Melville's and Watkins Harper's aesthetics, a term I use to designate modes of creative expression with the capacity to disrupt a community's ways of perceiving and apportioning the shared world, come into being through their mutually constitutive relationship with their historical and material contexts. I therefore devote considerable attention to the spaces and material mediums where Melville's and Watkins Harper's texts emerge—such as the magazine, the antislavery newspaper, and the privately printed or published book. My close textual investigations thus evaluate the features of Melville's and Watkins Harper's texts in respect to their strategies for negotiating these mediums and their publics. *Dread Stress* is similarly invested in charting the political dimensions of these strategies, specifically in respect to how Melville's and Watkins Harper's writing disrupts or revises the boundaries of who can speak, and where and how they can do so. In pursuing these questions, the course of my discussion moves from Watkins Harper's *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* (1854) and Melville's earliest magazine writings (pre-1853) to Melville's final printed book, *Timoleon, Etc.*, a near-forgotten text that is deeply relevant to our current historical moment.

Dedication

To Sarah, Finn, and Connor, for every moment, even amid the dread stress of dissertation writing.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: TRANSGRESSIVE VIRTUES

>   Or, put it, where dread stress inspires
> A virtue beyond man's standard rate,
> Seems virtue there a strain forbid—
> Transcendence such as shares transgression's fate?
>
>   --Herman Melville, from "Timoleon" (1891)

Final moments haunt this study. The most visible and persistent of these specters is

Herman Melville's private printing of his last book, *Timoleon, Etc.* (1891), an endeavor that, like

a vexing Shakespearean ghost, continually calls on us to attend to two key questions: Why did

Melville decide to abandon fiction for more than thirty years (minus *Billy Budd* and some minor

forays into prose)? And, why did he eventually abandon the publishing marketplace? The answer

I propose and examine throughout the following chapters is that, ultimately, Melville was

searching for an aesthetics. While this may seem an obvious or even outmoded response, *Dread*

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works both to revise the meaning of this claim and to expand its implications.[1] This is not, then,

an argument about Melville's search for the "nature of art" (Dillingham, *Melville and His Circle*

3), nor about his attempts to locate a "new standard of fitting language to fact" (Rosanna Warren

115-116), nor concerning his desire to convey "the truths of human existence" (Renker,

"Melville's Poetic Singe" 30). Instead, I offer an argument respecting the historical and material

contingency of aesthetics, specifically within U.S. literary production across the mid- and late-

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[1] Although I offer a different conception of aesthetics than current studies concerned with Melville's poetics, the relation between Melville's shift to poetry and his probing investigation of art is a well-trodden narrative. In the early phase of the recent revival of Melville's poetry, for example, William Spengemann argued that "the search for a form and style appropriate to an utterly ambiguous and ultimately unknowable world" is a core component of his poetry that continued "throughout his last published prose writings" ("Melville the Poet" 580). William Dillingham similarly notes that "Thoughts about the essence of art and the process of creativity probably occupied his mind more during these years than during any other period of his life" (*Melville and His Circle* 3).

nineteenth century. I primarily orient my discussion around Melville because of his longevity,

his cosmopolitanism, his probing critical insight, and his fluid, multifaceted engagement with

nineteenth-century print culture. Similarly, the last two decades have witnessed a resurgent

critical interest in Melville's relationship to aesthetics, as evidenced by a rash of studies of his

poetry, and the publication of collections like Samuel Otter and Geoffrey Sanborn's *Melville and

Aesthetics*.[2] Melville's "quarrel with fiction," as Nina Baym famously put it, and his decades-

long search for an alternative mode of creative practice therefore provide fertile and varied

grounds for this investigation.[3]

Examining not only Melville's poetry and magazine writings alongside their mediums of

publication, but also Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's foundational antislavery collection, *Poems

on Miscellaneous Subjects*, I detail how the stakes of Melville's pursuit of an aesthetics concern

broader shifts in the function and status of literature across the period in question. If, as Elizabeth

Renker argues, "the routine story about Melville's failed postbellum poetry is very similar to the

routine story told about American poetry more generally" ("Melville the Realist Poet" 483), I

illustrate how Melville's poetry also foregrounds the cultural factors, and the corresponding

shifts in artistic practice, that sponsor such characterizations. His commercial failures, like the

perceived inadequacies of Melville's and Harper's poetry, reveal spaces where competing

conceptions of aesthetics vie for prominence, legibility, and influence.

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[2] In respect to the renewed interest in Melville's poetry, see, for example, Marovitz, *Melville as Poet*, or Spengemann, *Three American Poets: Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, and Herman Melville*. Elizabeth Renker is perhaps the most significant proponent of this revival, and her upcoming text *Realist Poetics in American Culture, 1866-1900* identifies Melville as one of its central subjects. The release of the comprehensive Northwestern Newberry edition of Meville's *Published Poems* in 2009, as well as Hershell Parker's recent *Melville: The Making of a Poet* (2007), has further precipitated critical study of Melville's poetry. *The New Cambridge Companion to Herman Melville*, edited by Robert S. Levine, offers a number of examples of the recent turn to aesthetics in Melville studies (such as Snediker, "Melville and Queerness without Character").

[3] See Baym.

While *Dread Stress* foregrounds the ways that Melville's and Harper's work illustrates and addresses these shifting cultural and literary formations, however, its ultimate focus is in deciphering how both authors generate an aesthetics in relation to such protean networks. *Aesthetics* is obviously a slippery and contested term, and it takes on slightly different dimensions across the following chapters.[4] That said, I use it to denote, above all, a mode of creative expression that has the capacity to disrupt a community's shared ways of perceiving, understanding, and parceling the world. Importantly, I understand this capacity as grounded in its mutually constitutive relationship with such shared perceptions and practices, and therefore deeply tied to the various contexts—historical, spatial, material, political, etc.—of its emergence. As I depict *aesthetics* throughout this study, neither textual form, nor compositional strategy, nor affective function/aim (e.g., pleasure or discomfort) is *aesthetic* in its own right, but instead comes to be such through its interface with shared modes of being and seeing. In teasing out Melville's and Harper's aesthetics, I therefore devote significant attention to the interaction between literary text and such contexts, as well as to each side of this exchange. That I ultimately privilege disruption, and what Jacques Rancière refers to as "dis-identification," does not signal its universal or timeless importance to the value of literary art, in the manner we might ascribe to, let's say, the Russian formalist notion of defamiliarization. Instead, it recognizes that certain systems of meaning and practice—specifically, in this case, those at play in the nineteenth-century U.S.—rely on and thus empower certain types of speaking and doing, and *aesthetics* has come to designate modes of expression that simultaneously leverage, uncouple, and revise these relationships.

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[4] See Otter and Sanborn, especially 1-6, for a succinct summary of contemporary debates over aesthetics in the context of American studies.

Melville's decision to print only twenty-five copies of his final two volumes of poetry strikes at the heart of this cluster of cultural and aesthetic concerns, in that it signals his need to forge a sphere of creative activity at a remove from those he saw as accessible via mainstream (a.k.a. "popular") print culture.[5] Whether or not his artistic goals in *Timoleon, Etc.* align with those I describe in the closing chapter, they did not directly concern the popularity or capital potentially available through late-nineteenth-century periodicals or publisher-supported books. His choice to refrain from returning to local and national literary communities, even symbolically (such as through membership in *The Century*'s Authors Club), further suggests that his reasons for writing and printing books had changed considerably since his days as a novelist.[6] Where his early career was marked by soaring ambition and near-manic industriousness, he later took a far more critical perspective on the goals and strategies of the "magnanimous years" (*Published Poems* 279) of his youth, as he puts it in one of *Timoleon's* more ambiguous poems. Melville's printing decision thus reflects his substantial consideration of the broader historical and literary contexts that he sought to evade—thematically, stylistically, and materially—in *Timoleon*. Significantly, it also alludes to the possibility that he saw the aesthetic dimension of his writing somehow foreclosed by these broader contexts (a question I take up in the last chapter of *Dread Stress*). His response to this foreclosure not only helps pinpoint problematic fractures in the connection between "literature" and its disjunctive capacity, but also examples a complex attempt to work around such issues—to carve out a new space for aesthetic practice.

The subject of my initial chapter, Watkins Harper's *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* (1854), engages with related concerns, if at a radically different historical moment, and for

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[5] For a detailed discussion of the complexities and potential drawbacks of the categorization "popular print culture," see Bold 3-4.

[6] For more on Melville's invitation to the Authors Club, see Dillingham, *Melville and His Circle* 12-14.

different purposes. Where Melville attempts to establish an alternative aesthetics by (in part) working outside mainstream print culture, Watkins Harper leverages her inherent status as outsider-other to generate her aesthetics within the consensus-oriented, collaborative frameworks of sentimentalism and abolitionism. (If Melville achieved somewhat analogous results in his early novels due to his related status as renegade whaleman-turned-novelist, his rapid integration into mainstream publishing circles—thanks to the success of *Typee*—and his position as an enfranchised white man from two prestigious American families complicates any attempt to draw an effective parallel to Watkins Harper's tenuous, disruptive status as a free black woman, author, and political activist.) Investigating Watkins Harper's poems in respect to their material and conceptual contexts, specifically U.S. sentimentalism and antislavery activism, yields sight of more stable links between literature and its ability to propel social and political change than those Melville saw available in the late 1880s and early 1890s. My discussion of Watkins Harper thus provides a telling and distinctive snapshot of the participatory and collaborative conceptions of literary extant in U.S. at mid-century. While I ultimately detail how Watkins Harper's text works both with and against such conceptions, the opening chapter sets the stage for examining their subsequent developments within the later pages of my dissertation.

The narrative I trace from *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* to *Timoleon* largely maps onto the transformation of U.S. print culture, specifically as it developed from the party- or partisan-press system to the commercial press. While this familiar and broad schematization "omits many subplots and too eagerly sees the homogenized, objective professional press of the late twentieth century emerging automatically from social forces" (Nerone 245), it nonetheless effectively illustrates the pervasive and fundamental changes to the mainstream publishing marketplace throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. In essence, the partisan press

consisted of an intricate national network of newspapers that provided opinionated, party-oriented (and/or religiously or politically biased) versions of recent events. Newspaper editors and, to a lesser extent, magazine editors participated in a system of postal-driven exchange of their publications that facilitated the spread and consistency of news, and simultaneously joined readers and writers in an apparently national conversation. Importantly, mid-nineteenth-century newspapers and magazines had minimal initial dependence on advertising, instead relying on subscribers, and subsidies from political groups, wealthy backers, and/or religious associations for their success or (more likely) survival.[7]

Historian John Nerone dates the "full maturity" of this system to the 1840 presidential election, a campaign that "saw both parties deploy media strategies aimed at mobilizing mass coalitions of voters" (233). Theoretically, as Nerone describes it, "the party-press system promised equality, multivocality, and a bottom-up process of deliberation" (233). While actual practices frequently privileged editorial and political voices over those of the individuals ostensibly represented, the theoretical aspects of the partisan-press system are more relevant to the argument I present in *Dread Stress*.[8] That is, I am most concerned with how mid-nineteenth-century literature was organized around the participatory promise of literature, as this promise propels a specific mode of engagement with the "literary" for readers and writers. As I discuss in the first half of *Dread Stress*, readers and writers saw themselves as actively shaping and contributing to the political, social, and aesthetic discourses in which they participated. They also felt involved in the development of publishing mediums themselves, particularly periodicals. I've suggested elsewhere, for example, that the success of literary contributions to Gamaliel

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[7] Lupfer notes, for example, "Only a fraction of the magazines founded during this period [the mid nineteenth century] survived" (249). For more on the nature of religious periodicals, see Brown.

[8] See Nerone 234.

Bailey's antislavery newspaper *The National Era*—which included the influential serialization of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—caused him to rethink the importance of literature to the paper's antislavery message, and, subsequently, to shift the emphasis of its content to literary offerings. Where he originally considered it difficult to "mingle literature with politics" (qtd. in Krywicki 126), he soon felt that the inclusion of literature in an antislavery newspaper spoke "for itself."[9] Witnessing and participating in such developments gave writers and readers a sense of empowerment respecting the impact of their political and artistic views within (and on) popular print culture. Similarly, the relatively minor influence of advertising, and the frequent prioritization of message over financial stability implied an editorial commitment to the ideological, political, or literary integrity of the publication, rather than to simply its potential marketability.

Such a participatory outlook changed throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, as the commercial press achieved ascendance.[10] Broadly conceived, the commercial press was characterized by mass production, mass circulation, increased professionalization, and the rapid growth of print advertising.[11] As Cary Nelson and Mike Chasar assert, "the period from 1860 to 1920 saw not just the establishment of advertising as a coherent industry in the United States but also the wide-scale corporatization that would make it a prominent part of American's everyday lives for the first time in history" (134). Periodicals dramatically illustrated this prominence. By the 1870s, newspaper advertising columns were often more visually appealing than other content, and "pulsed with pictures, typographical variations, and white space" (Nerone 239),

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[9] See Krywicki 125-127.

[10] R. Zboray and M. Zboray suggest, for example, "After economic depression during the late 1850s and war in the early 1860s, the face of publishing became that of the media entrepreneur, whether the newspaperman, magazinist, advertiser, cromolithographer, sheet-music publisher, travelling salesman, or stereographer" (24).

[11] For example, see Lutes, especially 97-99.

while magazines like the *Chicago Ledger* (1872-1936) began to print "advertisements and miscellaneous editorial matter together on each page" (Lupfer 257), rather than in separate sections. Such changes eventually led many periodical publishers to turn to "advertising as their primary source of profit" (Lupfer 257), which produced a subsequent shift in the emphasis of the editorial content. As Eric Lupfer aptly remarks, "Where once [publishers] sold magazines directly to readers, they now sold their readers' attention to advertisers" (258). Periodical content, especially news, became "a commodity, valued more for its profitability rather than for its civic role in persuading the public about political issues" (Lutes 97). Although these shifts happened across more than half a century, each phase of changes signaled a definitive move away from the participatory model of the partisan press, offering readers and writers fewer recognizable opportunities to exert direct influence on the public sphere.

Writers and readers felt this move away from such direct involvement elsewhere, as well. Mary Louise Kete and D. Zachary Finch, for example, argue that certain Reconstruction-era authors and publics "mourned" the loss of sentimentality, not as a component of the publishing marketplace (where it remained popular), but as a collaborative and communal practice of mourning.[12] African American writers and editors experienced more drastic transformations in their participation in popular print culture, as "[e]mancipation closed the door between African American and the mainstream press" (Nerone 246). Abolitionism also receded in the aftermath of emancipation, frequently opening the way for suffrage movements, which nonetheless "failed to drive public discourse" (Nerone 246) with the same intensity. Those antebellum authors that, like Walt Whitman, survived the Reconstruction period to experience newfound public interest nonetheless found their work assimilated or otherwise co-opted by advertisers and publishers.

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[12] See Kete 145-157, and Finch 47-49.

Nelson and Chasar, for example, highlight the New York *Sun*'s 1883 publication of a Walt Whitman "imitation poem" titled "A Chant of the Sun" to advertise the newspaper (145-149).

While neither Melville nor Watkins Harper register the full scope of this narrative, their aesthetics emerge in relation its key formations and developments. Both Watkins Harper's *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* and Melville's early magazine writings (pre-1853) reveal their commitment to the types of participation supposedly accessible through print at the outset of the period I discuss. As I explain in the first two chapters of *Dread Stress*, they generate their subtly dissonant aesthetics in part through the ways that they stage competing projects within and against the participatory models that they otherwise adopt. However, much of the conceptual force of their work also relies on their investment in shaping public discourse through active participation in print culture. The dissonant aspects of Melville's fiction becomes more pronounced throughout his later magazine writings (1853-1856), particularly in his bipartite tales (often referred to as "diptychs"), which undertake probing investigations of the logic of the magazine form and its attendant literary genres. These investigations eventually lead to his disillusionment with fiction and with the publishing marketplace's already waning promises of participation, as well as to his growing interest in the overt artifice of poetic form—thus presaging his prolonged move to poetry.

By *Timoleon*, as I argue in the final chapter, Melville recognized that the market's gradual erosion of the participatory and collaborative promise of literature nonetheless presented significant—even dangerous—challenges to both art and democracy. To Melville, the fusion of commerce, literature, and mass-production occurring near the close of the nineteenth century covertly realigned the community's perception of the value and function of creative practice. In the view he presents in the titular poem, "Timoleon," which intentionally merges political and

artistic concerns, this new formation nullified the disruptive potential of literature by inhibiting the community's ability to understand certain forms of transgression as *virtue*. Instead, as Timoleon's continuing exile suggests, the virtuous and transgressive acts required to sustain democracy become conceptually inaccessible to the community—or, as the poem describes Timoleon, severed from "common membership in mart" like a "trunkless" head found after battle (*Published Poems* 257). What critics have consistently called the weirdness, difficulty, complexity, and obliqueness of Melville's poetics surface as a response to this scenario, as he attempts to generate new spaces for transgressive virtue by foregrounding the importance of a provisional, rather than ideological, commitment to art as a means of speaking to both power and community.[13]

I draw on Jacques Rancière's theorizations of aesthetics in my analysis of *Timoleon*, and throughout much of *Dread Stress*, but I understand these theories through another sequence of final moments: Michel Foucault's late series of lectures at the Collège de France. While Melville's final set of preoccupations play out across the following pages, however, those of Foucault populate the margins, unseen. The majority of interest in Foucault's late lectures centers on biopolitics and governmentality, but the investigation I undertake here owes a significant debt to his detailed analysis of *parrēsia*. Foucault explains this term as "a spidery kind of notion" (*The Government of Self and Others* 45) that refers to (among other things) a type of "free-spokenness" and "telling the truth" (*The Government of Self and Others* 75). He notes that *parrēsia* "is found on a number of different levels" (*The Government of Self and Others* 46), but that "good *parrēsia*" (specifically in respect to politics) often relies on the speaker's willingness to put their life or civic life at risk. Such a mode of speaking truth to

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[13] See, for example, Renker, "Melville's Poetic Singe" and "Melville the Poet in the Postbellum World," or Jackson.

power, which Foucault tracks from its ancient Greek origins, and which he designates as simultaneously "a virtue, duty, and technique" (*The Government of Self and Others* 43), has obvious bearing on "Timoleon." The poem largely concerns the titular Greek statesman's involvement, via a "predetermined word" (*Published Poems* 256), in the assassination of his tyrannical brother—an act that, to my mind, maps onto much of Foucault's description of *parrēsia*.

That said, my understanding of aesthetics, and my readings of Rancière primarily stem from Foucault's exhaustive genealogy of *parrēsia*. In his charting of the term's metamorphosis through various political formations, particularly from its key role in a "working" democracy to its potential value to the tyrant, Foucault documents extensive changes to a mobile form of speaking capable of influencing and shaping the community and its politics. Through this genealogy, he therefore reveals the mutability of a mode of expression across different political and social formations, illustrating how it achieves its shifting functions through the ways that interlocutors perceive, adapt, and modify it within each scenario. Foucault eventually links this form of speaking to philosophy, suggesting that "[p]hilosophical truth-telling is not political rationality, but it is essential for a political rationality to be in a certain relationship, which remains to be determined, with philosophical truth-telling" (*The Government of Self and Others* 288). This claim, as well as the genealogy that leads up to and supports it, serves as the basis for my earlier definition of aesthetics, in that it reveals how a creative/expressive practice comes to occupy an indirect, but mutually constitutive relationship to certain political forms and social milieu.

I therefore interpret Rancière's understandings of aesthetics (discussed at length in the following chapters) through the relationship Foucault outlines between philosophy and politics.

As Elizabeth Maddock Dillon incisively notes, "what Rancière pursues in his account of the aesthetic is the claim that politics is embedded in the differential ability to create shared meaning" (175). Like the philosophical truth-telling of Foucault's account, then, aesthetics occupies a specific relationship to political rationality, driving this rationality insofar as it creates (or disrupts) shared meanings. Thus, when Rancière attempts to pin down the "historic distinctiveness of literature" in respect to its function as a new "system of identification of the art of writing" (*Politics of Literature* 7), I am more concerned with his recognition of literature's historical embeddedness in systems of meaning-making, and with his mechanisms for extricating "literature" from transhitoricity, than with his generalizing account of its political capacity.[14] This capacity, as I detail (particularly in the first and last chapters), is far more localized and temporalized than his revisions of modernity and post-modernity seem to allow.

In undertaking my analyses across the following chapters, I therefore integrate print culture studies, formalist (new and old) interpretive techniques, and the types of "close but not deep" (Love 375) reading practices advocated by critics like Heather Love, Stephen Best, and Sharon Marcus.[15] While my readings tend to privilege the text and certain close reading protocols, I situate these readings within their varying material and (to a lesser extent) historical contexts as a means to show how textual features acquire their aesthetic significance through their relationship to these contexts, rather than as fixed elements of a stand-alone text. I thereby undertake a highly attentive, and "willed, sustained proximity to the text" (Best and Marcus 10), often as a means to understand what Samuel Otter discusses as its "verbal complexity" (Otter

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[14] Rancière explains a "system of identification of an art" as "a system of relationships between practices, the forms of visibility of such practices, and modes of intelligibility" (*Politics of Literature* 7).

[15] For a helpful overview of such "surface reading" approaches, see Best and Marcus 9-13.

117), but I evaluate and interpret the text through a similarly deliberate investigation of the material formats (magazines, newspapers, books, etc.) and spaces in which it emerges.

In their discussion of "surface as the intricate verbal structure of literary language" (10), Best and Marcus suggest that because "most readers have trouble construing the sensuous form and literal sense of poetry, simply paraphrasing a text or understanding its verbal meaning is a demanding 'craft'" (10), a claim that has significant implications respecting Melville's and Watkins Harper's poems. What Renker calls Melville's "poetics of difficulty" ("Melville's Poetic Singe" 13), which are indeed "formidable … in every respect" ("Melville's Poetic Singe" 13), are particularly suited to such a descriptive approach, and many of my arguments about the poems of *Timoleon* revolve around careful attention to Melville's precise but tortuous phrasing. Perhaps surprisingly, such attentiveness also generates new insights into Watkins Harper's *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*; critical emphasis on the "sincerity" (Farrar 55) and didacticism of Watkins Harper's verse has frequently diverted attention from her specific use of language and the "patterns that exist within and across texts" (Best and Marcus 11) to the ethical dimensions of her writing and activism.[16] Renewed focus on such patterning and use of language, as well as to Watkins Harper's subtle revisions to her source material, reveals new ways of looking "at," rather than "through," her poetry (Best and Marcus 9).

The texts I analyze through these methods serve as the primary foundation of my dissertation's unusual periodization (1847-1892). In part, this timeframe is meant to express solidarity with recent attempts to revise the chronologies typically used to understand and schematize nineteenth-century American literature, an endeavor that Christopher Hager and

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[16] Foster's discussion of Watkins Harper's "readily accessible" (Introduction 29) poetry, for example, notes that "Harper had only to rearrange the complex sentences of her prose into a series of simple concepts in more quotable lines to satisfy the criteria of her audience and to achieve her purposes" (Introduction 30).

Cody Marrs identify as "part of the emerging project of rescaling American literary studies" (261). Hager and Marrs see the Civil War's "status as a terminus in American literary history" (260) exerting disproportionate influence on the field, both in respect to scholarship and the profession. They therefore position the war as "less an endpoint than a crucial link in the raucous, irregular unfolding of literary forms, practices, and careers across the nineteenth century, many of which commence long before 1861 and continue long after 1865" (260-61). Melville and Watkins Harper, whose lengthy careers example such "irregular unfolding" across the nineteenth century, greatly benefit from such an approach, as the trajectory of their writing registers and bridges the war. Indeed, a longer version of this study would trace the development of Watkins Harper's aesthetics through her postbellum advocacy of women's rights and black suffrage, and into the first decade of the twentieth century.

The timeframe I examine therefore begins and ends with relatively minor publishing events: the 1847 serialization of Melville's "Authentic Anecdotes of 'Old Zack'" in *Yankee Doodle* (1846-1847), and the posthumous publication of five poems from *Timoleon, Etc.* in the May 1892 issue of *Century Magazine* (originally *Scribner's Monthly*). The former year (1847) also marks the likely publication date of Watkins Harper's first (and recently rediscovered) volume of poetry, *Forest Leaves*, which features early versions of a number of poems that later appear in *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* (such as "Ethiopia" and "That Blessed Hope").[17] Similarly, the latter date (1892) witnessed the initial publication of Watkins Harper's most widely discussed text, the novel *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted*. The framing of *Dread Stress* therefore reflects its close emphasis on individual texts, and its engagement with the local and material contexts of their emergence. As I have already outlined above, the dates in question also

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[17] For a comprehensive discussion of the likely publication date of *Forest Leaves*, as well as a digitized copy of its pages, see Ortner.

capture—if imperfectly—significant transformations to U.S. print culture, which begin well before 1847, and continue unabated beyond 1892. In some respects, by designating something of an incomplete chronology, the dates of this study also express the complexity of periodization itself in respect to the types of gradual, incomplete, and fragmentary shifts occurring in (and outside) the publishing marketplace.

If 1847 to 1892 is nonetheless an accurate representation of the temporal scope of the following chapters, it is also a deliberate move away from more recognizable periodizations. Shelley Streeby, for example, provides a compelling account of the importance of 1848 "in the history of U.S. empire" (7), emphasizing the impact of the U.S.-Mexican War, Native American resistance, and the "transformation of urban white working-class cultures" (10), as seen through "the American 1848" (a phrase she borrows from Michael Rogin's *Subversive Genealogy*).[18] Other events in the U.S., such as the Seneca Falls convention or the election of Zachary Taylor, as well as the extensive upheaval across Europe, further suggest 1848 as a more likely bookend for my study. While 1891 is a less prominent historical touchstone, it offers near equal appeal as a framing mechanism for *Dread Stress*. The year covers not only the printing of *Timoleon* and Melville's death, but also the passage of the U.S. international copyright act. The Chace Act, as it is also known, did not afford the level of protection we might now expect, as it was "all but impossible for works in languages other than English to receive protection" (Law and Morita 212), but it had "immediate and profound effects" (R. Zboray and M. Zboray 31) for publishers and authors in the U.S.[19] By avoiding such familiar points of reference, I seek to call attention to the smaller zones of activity in and through which creative practices generate their profound

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[18] See, in particular, Streeby 6-19.

[19] Also see Jaszi and Woodmansee's detailed examination of the effects of the Chace Act.

effects. Finally, I pause before the end of the nineteenth century to conjure the specter of its final moments, particularly as these moments seep into the approaching century.

The first chapter, "From Shriek to Psalm: Politics as Aesthetics in Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*," opens my investigation at mid-century. In it, I explore how Watkins Harper's commitment to the political and cultural emergence of the voice of the black American informs her compositional and conceptual approach in *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* (1854). I argue that, because her primary focus concerns distinguishing the speech of the slave and free black American from "mere noise," a conflict virtually identical to that which Rancière locates at the core of politics, her political commitments come to function *as* her aesthetics. That is, by staging these commitments within the consensus-oriented, collaborative horizons of U.S. sentimentalism and the participatory milieu of antislavery activism, she introduces a partially incongruous project, thereby generating the subtle dissonances and disruptive capacity of her poetry. As a means to more deeply theorize such *aesthetics* in respect to both Watkins Harper's status as a free black woman, poet, and antislavery activist, and the collaborative focus of the communities with which she interacted, I also leverage contemporary studies of participatory art. These studies, I suggest, provide important methods for disentangling ethical and aesthetic considerations without resorting to critical procedures that isolate the text from its historical and material contexts.

Chapter 2, "Piazza First: Herman Melville's Early Magazine Phase and 'The Town-Ho's Story' as Told in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*," also examines mid-nineteenth-century texts in context, shifting from antislavery milieu to the mainstream magazine. My discussion centers on *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*'s October 1851 publication of "The Town-Ho's Story," a tale excerpted from *Moby Dick* a month before the novel's U.S. publication. *Harper's*, a

profitable mouthpiece for *Moby Dick*'s U.S. publisher, Harper and Brothers, positioned the story

as a promotional piece for the novel, advertising it as a section of "'THE WHALE' … a new work

by Mr. Melville" ("The Town-Ho's Story" 658). While current archives provide limited evidence

respecting Melville's intentions for the tale, I argue that its ability to "stand alone" (Paul 212) as

an excitatory preview for the novel stems from the magazinistic basis of Melville's

understanding of promotion itself. In either *Harper's* or *Moby Dick*, the story acts to *tease* the

white whale. I therefore track Melville's understanding of promotion to its foundations in his

early magazine work for Evert A. Duyckinck's *Yankee Doodle* (1846-1847) and *Literary World*,

detailing how Melville's mid-century writings evince his commitment to shaping the emerging

U.S. literary sphere and the mediums that sponsored its emergence.

The third chapter, "Piazza Second: Herman Melville's *Benito Cereno* and the Evolution

of the Diptych," forms something of a diptych with the preceding chapter. The thread that links

chapters 2 and 3, connecting the "thick-gilt tiled piazza" of "The Town-Ho's Story" to that of

"The Piazza," is Melville's development from fiction writer to poet, particularly as it stems from

his involvement in magazine writing. Across the two "Piazzas," I chart his increasing fascination

with overt artifice, and his critical dissatisfaction with the supposedly participatory promise of

mainstream literature—specifically fiction—as these shifts emerged from his interrogation of the

magazine medium. In chapter 3, as the title implies, I trace the development of Melville's

bipartite stories from their magazinistic origins to what I argue is their late flourishing in *Benito*

Cereno and their coda in "The Piazza." My primary claim is that Melville's critical absorption

with the magazine medium, evinced by the structure and thematic focus of the diptychs,

produces increasing attention to form and style, which eventually lead to his recognition of the

coercive and suppressive functions of the *literary* itself (and therefore to his disillusionment with

fiction). In other words, as he attempts to work through his conflicting ideas about the magazine medium through formal and stylistic experimentation, he becomes more cognizant of the ways that "literature," like the publisher-driven magazine, generates certain modes of reading, seeing, and being. In *Benito Cereno*, Melville manipulates the diptych structure to show how seemingly transparent, well-intentioned, or "benevolent" (*Piazza Tales* 47) forms of writing, such as the magazine tale and the legal deposition, come to determine our perception, and, by extension, our organization of spaces and bodies. For example, the overtly redundant grays and shadows of *Benito Cereno*'s opening scene not only suggest the limitations of Delano's perspective, but also render the opacity of the narrative to the reader. Similarly, at the close of the tale, Captain Delano cannot see what casts a shadow on Benito Cereno because of his embeddedness in the shared meanings and representational modes that come to organize his perception and his world—the world that Melville's aesthetics seek to disrupt.

In the final chapter, "Then, 'As Now': Art and Politics in Herman Melville's *Timoleon, Etc.*," I return to the opening subject of this introduction. My investigation considers Melville's private printing of *Timoleon* in respect to *Century Magazine*'s publication of five of Melville's poems in 1892, a project orchestrated by family acquaintance, Arthur Stedman. Through a detailed look at *Century Magazine*'s editorial content and advertising, I diagram the problematic link between market and "art" that Melville wrestles with in the pages of *Timoleon*. I further suggest that the particular poems Stedman selected intersect so neatly with the coupling of market and art evident in *Century Magazine* that the medium itself largely forecloses their insurgent aesthetics. Closely examining the titular poem, "Timoleon," I show how Melville is similarly concerned with this type of foreclosure, which poses serious threats to both creative practice and democracy, as he understands them. As I've already suggested, I argue that the

collection ultimately emphasizes the need to make a provisional, rather than ideological, commitment to *art* as a mode of speaking to power and community. I therefore explain how Melville stages art's promise of truth against its compromised foundations, leveraging this uneasy suspension as a mechanism for disrupting shared ways of perceiving and parceling the world.

Throughout these chapters, then, I show how the aesthetics of Melville's and Watkins Harper's texts emerge through their reciprocal relationship with material and social contexts and practices. That is, the texts are both the product of ongoing processes and established meanings, and the site where such processes and meanings are sustained and contested (particularly in the print-driven nineteenth century). They therefore simultaneously exhibit the centripetal pull of consensus and the impulses that resist, complicate, or disrupt such force. It is in their function as an interface between shared meaning and its potential or actual dissolution that I locate the aesthetics and political capacity of these texts; their ability to revise or otherwise disturb how the community perceives its own practices has significant (if often indirect) bearing on how this community understands and partitions bodies and spaces. Attending to Melville's and Watkins Harper's specific methods for negotiating this interface, I hope to illustrate how both authors generate new horizons for imagining and enacting community.

FROM SHRIEK TO PSALM: POLITICS AS AESTHETICS IN

FRANCES ELLEN WATKINS HARPER'S *POEMS ON MISCELLANEOUS SUBJECTS*

Like a number of other poems in Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's popular *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* (1854), "A Mother's Heroism" opens with suggestive, but not wholly intelligible sounds. These "murmurs of a distant strife" (1) relate the death and life of abolitionist editor, writer, and preacher, Elijah Parish Lovejoy, to his "noble" mother, Elizabeth Pattee Lovejoy. Despite their partial incoherence, they speak directly to Elizabeth Lovejoy, telling her how her son "spent his breath / in pleading for the dumb" (5-6), and how "he had nerved himself to die, / in battling for the right" (11-12) against the pro-slavery mob that killed him. As the murmurs relate their message, Elizabeth Lovejoy's "fragile form" (15) nearly succumbs to a "fearful storm" (13) that she imagines sweeping "wildly around her soul" (18), but she quickly regains control of her grief and extols her son's heroism through the poem's closing stanzas.

For many of the poem's mid-nineteenth-century readers, Elizabeth Lovejoy's measured praise for her dead child would register as a familiar trope, common to the sentimentalist poems that populated contemporary periodicals, pamphlets, and books.[20] Given their recognizably formal and generic nature, Elizabeth Lovejoy's words thus seem to illustrate her ability to channel her emotions and the poem's initial cacophony through a legible, productive mode of public and aesthetic discourse—a restraint that further extends to Watkins Harper. Indeed, as Carla Peterson argues in her foundational study, *Doers of the Word: African American Women*

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[20] For more on the "currency of dead children within a material and symbolic economy of sentiment" (63), see, for example, Kete 61-66.

Speakers and Writers in the North (1830-1890), the poem succinctly articulates "Watkins

Harper's awareness of the need to temper personal political passion through narrative control"

(129). In Peterson's incisive reading, speech "enables Lovejoy's mother to regain her emotions

and consequently to articulate a narrative of liberty" (129), just as Watkins Harper's

"conventional use of the ballad's formal elements" (129) serves to harness her own emotional

response to mob violence against antislavery advocates. However, while Peterson's investigation

provides key insights into the function of Elizabeth Lovejoy's remarks, the tidy sentimental close

of the poem also acts as something of a shell game, diverting the reader's attention away from

Watkins Harper's considerable commitment to diagramming and revising the status of the black

voice within the white public sphere. The poem's final moments document not only Elizabeth

Lovejoy's and Watkins Harper's imposition of narrative control, but the collapse of the muted

expressions of slaves ("the dumb") and the voice of a free black woman into the formularized

sentiment of a white mother.

What is at stake in "A Mother's Heroism" is, then, not solely how formal speech

legitimizes and authorizes Watkins Harper's emotional and political convictions for white

publics, but the processes by which the utterances and silences of free and enslaved black men

and women in the U.S. become legible within the public sphere. Moreover, the poem's emphasis

on the public legibility/audibility of the black voice is representative of much of Watkins

Harper's collection. As I argue throughout this chapter, Watkins Harper's commitment to

revising and leveraging the processes by which this voice emerges informs a wide range of her

formal and conceptual choices throughout *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*. Despite the title's

pronouncement of the miscellany of its texts, Watkins Harper's project coheres when viewed as

a means of producing a conceptual window for the emergence of free blacks and slaves as

speaking, political members of the U.S. community. As I will detail, her politics come to act as her aesthetics, both in "A Mother's Heroism" and in the collection at large.

The argument I trace here serves not as an attempt to blur or erase the boundaries between these two largely distinct, if overlapping, spheres of activity, but to suggest an alternative means of engaging with Watkins Harper's poetics that more extensively accounts for the ways that her antislavery commitments factor into the composition and artistry of her texts. Rerouting Watkins Harper's political commitments into an examination of her aesthetics, rather than pursuing the reverse trajectory, foregrounds how her poems functioned as *art* rather than solely as social critique or as a supplement to political activism. In this regard, my analysis is structured around the assumptions that "the *sensus communis* of aesthetic judgment is grounded not in universality but in a dialectic of meaning making that operates in the direction of both inclusion and exclusion" (Dillon 175), and that "art and democratic politics are mutually constitutive, and studying the one sheds light on the other" (Tipler and Chang 76). That is, art and aesthetics are historically and socially contingent conceptual arenas that arise in tandem with certain forms of politics, particularly democracy. Aesthetics thus comes to function as a separate space for conceiving and partitioning reality, a sphere of activity also capable of shaping the *demos* and "its outside" (Dillon 175). Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, whose language I draw on here, advances the stakes of this argument a step further in her examination of novels of the Haitian revolution, asserting that the aesthetics occurring within certain art forms both necessitates and generates the *demos*—a claim I would stress is supported by the centrality of *representation* to a functioning democracy. Deepening our understanding of how Watkins Harper's poetry operated and came to be understood *as art* therefore expands our capacity to assess her impact on the publics she encountered.

In charting Watkins Harper's aesthetics within *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*, my investigation pursues a twofold strategy. First, I position her text between, on one hand, African American literature dedicated to the dismantling of U.S. slavery, and, on the other, U.S. sentimentalism, particularly insofar as it is understood as a discourse whose transformative capacity was predicated on collaborative feeling. Through poems like "Eliza Harris" and "Eva's Farewell," Watkins Harper invites comparisons to Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose antislavery writing critics frequently consider "the paradigmatic example of nineteenth-century abolitionist sentimentality" (Pelletier 2).[21] Indeed, Watkins Harper's poems explore themes regularly associated with U.S. sentimentalism (e.g., morality, domesticity, nurturance, etc.), and place significant emphasis on the "valorization of affectional connection and commitment" (Dobson 267)—what Joanne Dobson's foundational analysis deems the "generative core" of sentimental experience for U.S. writers. However, while her poetry therefore seems to fit squarely within the discourse of abolitionist sentimentality, it also revises this discourse in ways important to the African American experience.

Specifically, Watkins Harper's work seems to anticipate the types of challenges to abolitionist sentimentalism raised by critics like Sadiya Hartman, Elizabeth Barnes, and Kevin Pelletier, who see its "potential for breaking down hierarchical structures" (Barnes 1) as grounded in erasure of or aggression toward the victims of the violence it ostensibly condemns. That is, where Watkins Harper's vision of social progress is predicated on white audiences' belief in the transformative potential of collaborative sentiment, her poems primarily base this transformation on the emergence of the black voice rather than the suffering of the black body.

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[21] "A Mother's Heroism" invites similar comparisons to Stowe, if less recognizably. The opening epigraph is likely a slight modification of Stowe's discussion of Elijah Lovejoy in *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1853). Stowe's text reads, "When the noble mother of Lovejoy heard of his death, she said, 'It is well. I had rather he would die so than forsake his principles!'" (320-21).

This is suggested not only by her texts' pervasive emphasis on speech and what Geoffrey Sanborn describes as "the general invisibility of the body in Harper's work" (693), but also by her close attention to the registers in and through which voices of the oppressed come to be heard.[22] Thus, while Hartman's and Barnes's critiques reveal how sentimentalism both "sanctions black subordination" (Hartman 10) and authorizes masculine aggression through its methods of staging suffering bodies, Watkins Harper's poetry complicates this approach to her work by designating the black voice as both an originary and legitimizing facet of her particular version of abolitionist sentimentality.

Second, I engage with recent examinations of aesthetics respecting what Claire Bishop has discussed as "participatory art" as a means to contend with the extensive intersections between Watkins Harper's literary writings and her social reform activities. Watkins Harper's commentators have attempted to make sense of these intersections through varying strategies, whether through compound categorizations like "artist-activist" (Boyd 11), "poet-priestess" (Hill 60), "poet-preacher" (Peterson 124), or, most recently, "artist-intellectual" (Gardner), or by examining her stylistic choices in respect to her popularity and efficacy as an antislavery activist. If such categorizations suggest an unexpected proximity between Watkins Harper's artistic and social activity, they nonetheless retain certain conventional distinctions respecting the two spheres, a tendency also reflected in the evaluative criteria often applied to Watkins Harper's poetry. Thus, discussions of Watkins Harper's "aesthetic agenda" (Boyd 16) revolve around reassessing the "traditionalism of her verse" (Peterson 128) and her "sincere and didactic" (Foster 25) poetics in respect to a critical tradition increasingly invested in "abstraction,

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[22] Sanborn is not the first critic to recognize this tendency. As Farrar notes, "Carla L. Peterson and Carolyn Sorisio have both discussed Harper's strategic downplaying of the black female body during her lecturing career" (54).

difficulty, and technical experimentation" (Farrar 55). While these studies establish a powerful

counternarrative to such "elite domains of poetry criticism" (Farrar 55), thereby generating a

critical and historical foundation for reassessments of Watkins Harper's work, they nonetheless

leverage similar understandings of poetic form and compositional strategy.

Meredith McGill's compelling reading of *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* in its initial

pamphlet format exposes some of the potential pitfalls of such an interpretive approach, even as

it propels us to reorient our mode of engagement with Watkins Harper's poetry. McGill writes,

"Watkins's poems can seem trivial, ornamental, mere supplements to the more important,

persuasive work of antislavery narrative and oratory. But they also offer something these modes

cannot, or cannot do as easily or as well: a simulation of intimate address that is as general and

iterable as print itself" (67). What McGill suggests, if somewhat indirectly, is that considering

Watkins Harper's poems in respect to her activism often leads contemporary readers to

subordinate aesthetic questions to ethical ones. Building on McGill's recognition of how this

tendency often ornamentalizes Watkins Harper's literary works, I further suggest that such

schematizing has frequently led critics to rely on relatively standard concepts of form and

aesthetics when evaluating Watkins Harper's poetry—causing them to reimagine the significance

of her poetry's simplicity, sincerity, and didacticism rather than interrogating such labels.

Claire Bishop's examinations of participatory art, largely informed by the theories of

Jacques Lacan and Jacques Rancière, aim to more explicitly engage with *aesthetic* dimensions at

play in the peculiar intimacy McGill describes, and to evaluate these dimensions alongside the

types of ethical concerns McGill locates in and around Watkins Harper's poetry. Drawing

attention to "a series of critical operations in which the difficulty of describing the artistic value

of participatory projects is resolved by resorting to ethical criteria" (19), Bishop argues that such

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operations produce their discursive criteria from a "tacit analogy between anti-capitalism and the Christian 'good soul'" (39). This ethical focus leaves "no space for perversity, paradox and negation" (40), which she considers functions "as crucial to *aesthesis* as dissensus is to the political" (40). As an alternative to the evaluative emphasis on ethics, she highlights the "urgency of examining each artistic practice within its own singular historical context and the political valencies of its era" (40). Through this shift in critical perspective, she attempts to retain "fidelity to singularized desire … rather than to social consensus" (39), thereby avoiding imperatives to extract art "from the 'useless' domain of the aesthetic to relocate it in praxis" (40).

It may seem counterintuitive to leverage Bishop's work as a means to explore the connection between politics and aesthetics in Watkins Harper's work. However, Bishop's discussion provides a crucial mechanism for disentangling the aesthetic qualities of Watkins Harper's poems from their assumed antislavery functions, while nonetheless examining them in respect to the political and social terrain in which they—and Watkins Harper—circulated. Such a focus enables us to recognize how Watkins Harper's commitment to the emergence of the black voice produces subtle dissonances within her poetics—dissonances that often evade the ethical criteria of antislavery sentimentalism. As "A Mother's Heroism" seems to illustrate, for example, it is the measured, white voice that audiences expect to emerge from sentimental suffering, not that of the slave or free black. Read through the framework I propose below, however, both Watkins Harper's voice and that of the slave come to speak over and within this voice in significant ways. Such dissonances, which parallel what white audiences frequently registered as the irreconcilability of Watkins Harper's status as a black, female writer and speaker, generate something akin to the perversity, paradox, and negation that Bishop highlights, specifically when located within the collaborative, consensus-driven framework of U.S. sentimentalism. While

Bishop's emphasis on Lacanian categories perhaps limits the criteria of aesthetic experience, her terms alert us to the potential alterity of Watkins Harper's creative and social practices by signaling how these practices might produce unexpected and jarring spaces of possibility within a seemingly cohesive community.

McGill's discussion again provides insight into why such a critical perspective could prove valuable to engaging with Watkins Harper's work. Highlighting the overlapping circulation of Watkins Harper (as speaker and activist) and her poetry (as newspaper items or chapbook-style pamphlets), McGill suggests that the poems function not as lyrics, but as "relays for abolitionist sentiment that neither originates with nor is captured or contained by the poems themselves" (66), and as "instruments of exhortation, nodes for the condensation and transfer of oral authority, and vehicles for collective assent" (62). She also notes that "*Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* bears in its format the traces of a strong relationship to oral performance—to the punctual meetings of reformers bent on miscellaneous reforms that were brought under the umbrella of antislavery, and to the songs that were sung and the songsters that provided a text held in common at these meetings" (57). Importantly, McGill's exploration of the material formats of Watkins Harper's poetry reveals their embeddedness in and dependency on various social and participatory practices. Peterson makes a related point respecting the intersection of Watkins Harper's creative and political practices, arguing that "speaking and writing constituted a form of doing, of social action continuous with … social, political, and cultural work" (3) for Watkins Harper and other black women activists. These accounts locate both Watkins Harper and her poetry in an active network of practices that span the collaborative, participatory, confrontational, and performative. While this embeddedness in such wide-ranging interactive environments doesn't establish Watkins Harper as a participatory artist, nor

necessarily as a precursor to such artists, it nonetheless invites us to leverage theorizations that account for such modes of activity and creative expression. As I understand it, both McGill's and Peterson's comments represent attempts to think two fields together—critical practices similar to what Bishop, in her examination of educational forms of participatory art, describes as attempts to "devise adequate new languages and criteria for communicating [such] transversal practices" (274).

In identifying Watkins Harper's politics as her aesthetics within *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*, this chapter also aims to devise criteria that think two such fields together (political activism and art). As I've suggested, the focal point of these criteria is the question of speech—specifically a politically and publicly relevant/legible expressive capacity—as such speech constitutes one of the fundamental organizing concerns of Watkins Harper's poetry, and (not coincidentally) a primary battleground of the political for U.S. black men and women in the nineteenth century. Celeste-Marie Bernier, responding to a critical discussion of her work on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century black experimentalism, has also affirmed the need "to forge an alternative intellectual language with which to theorize the politicized aesthetics and aestheticized politics at work across a black heroic tradition and black diasporic art more generally" (525)—a project that this chapter obviously takes up with respect to Watkins Harper. If, as P. Gabrielle Foreman has argued, "[f]ew nineteenth-century speakers and writers were as committed to—or as successful at—reaching the broadest possible audience as Harper was" (73), my investigation reveals how a corresponding critical emphasis on the pragmatic, sincere, and popular characteristics of Watkins Harper's poetry often overwrites its more elusive aesthetic dimensions. Bernier's study offers further reasoning and incentive for engaging with these dimensions as inherently political and experimental.

A closer look at "A Mother's Heroism" shows how attending to speech and its emergence renders such "politicized aesthetics and aesthetic politics" in Watkins Harper's poetry. To offer a useful starting point for revisiting the poem, I'd like to explore its historical basis. Elijah Lovejoy was murdered on Nov. 7, 1837, roughly seventeen years before the first known publication of "A Mother's Heroism" (and when Watkins Harper was thirteen). Even decades after Elijah Lovejoy's death, however, he remained a well-known, if relatively controversial, figure due to his extensive antislavery advocacy and his decision to fight back against the mobs that had assaulted him and destroyed his presses (on multiple occasions). His long-standing posthumous reputation also owed to the continued sale of books concerning his life and the Alton, Illinois, riots, particularly the *Memoir of the Rev. Elijah P. Lovejoy* (1838), written by his brothers, Joseph and Owen, and John Quincy Adams, which advertisements billed as "the *cheapest Anti-Slavery* book in the United States" (The National Era July 22, 1847), and Edward Beecher's *Narrative of the Riots at Alton* (1838). Importantly, Stowe's then-recent *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1853) also provides a lengthy account of Elijah Lovejoy and his death.[23] To put his reputation in further historical context, Elijah Lovejoy's continuing influence on the slavery debate was such that antislavery advocate Senator John P. Hale devoted considerable time to his activities in an 1850 speech to the U.S. senate.[24]

The significance of this seemingly minor point plays out as we trace the various vectors of speech within the poem. First and foremost, Watkins Harper's temporal distance from the event invites us to refigure her own space of speaking/writing. To whatever extent she might sympathize with Elizabeth Lovejoy's capacity to control her tumultuous emotions, Watkins

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[23] See Stowe 306-21.

[24] See "Speech of Mr. Hale, on the Territorial Question."

Harper does not wrestle with the same immediate sentiment. She issues the poem from a calculated position respecting deliberately chosen (rather than occasional) subject matter. Watkins Harper's distance from Elijah Lovejoy's death, her certain familiarity with the biographical texts about his life (especially Stowe's text), and her choice to write about an abolitionist newspaper editor also helps us recognize that her subjects are primarily textual entities, a recognition borne out by his transformation within the poem. The poem's initial "murmurs" carry news of Elijah Lovejoy's life, which Watkins Harper renders as "breath" spent "[i]n pleading for the dumb" (6). Within the first line, then, Elijah Lovejoy's life has already transitioned in and through language, metamorphosing from living breath to antislavery speech and text (his "pleading for the dumb"), then into the various forms of speech of the public sphere (the "murmurs"). Elizabeth Lovejoy's closing eulogy marks his final transition of life-to-speech, exampling how her son's antislavery activity eventuates in a controlled, forthright ballad form seemingly issued from the core of sentimental domesticity—the mother. By suggesting an intrinsic link between Elijah Lovejoy's life and the muteness of the slave, the poem also charts the complex pathways through which this silenced voice manages to enter the public sphere, tracking it from voicelessness, through antislavery activism and publication, into the sentimental lyric (where it is still virtually inaudible).

If Elizabeth Lovejoy's speech subsumes and further effaces the already stifled cries of the slave, however, Watkins Harper leverages this appropriation to covertly embed these cries in the generative space of the sentimentalist address. This becomes apparent in Elizabeth Lovejoy's revision of how her son had "spent his breath / In pleading for the dumb" (5-6), which she restates as "to his latest breath / He plead for liberty" (21-2). Via her repetition of the *pleading* of the opening lines, inaudible slaves (the "dumb") morph into the unassailable concept of

"liberty," whose pursuit *nerves* and *teaches* her son how to achieve the poem's Christian promise, here described as casting aside "Earth's honors and renown … And win[ning] a martyr's crown" (27-8). The moment of sentimental closure and fulfillment thus produces a reflexive return to its genesis in listening to, speaking for, and *writing* for the marginalized and silenced slave.

Importantly, the poem replays this revisionary practice on a structural level, a trait it shares with numerous texts in the collection. Watkins Harper prefaces "A Mother's Heroism" with a short epigraph that provides Elizabeth Lovejoy's reported response to her son's death: "It is well! I had rather he should die so than desert his principles."[25] The poem's brief narrative then relates the details expressed by its initial sound (the "murmurs"), shifts from this sound to the central figure's interiority, and concludes with a speech that significantly revises Elizabeth Lovejoy's reported words. Thus, where Elizabeth Lovejoy refigures the voice of the slave and antislavery activism as sentimental closure, Watkins Harper uses the poem's progression toward such consensus-oriented, ethical closure to legitimize her own revisions to documented white speech. Furthermore, Elizabeth Lovejoy's relatively inconspicuous revisions to the poem's initial lines authorize the revisionary function of sentimental discourse (as such discourse relies on the ability to rewrite and restage the experience of loss), which Watkins Harper appropriates for a different political and aesthetic agenda.

My characterization of Watkins Harper's politics as aesthetics, I think, comes into view at this moment. Here, we witness her commitment to the emergence and legitimacy of her own voice and of the virtually inaudible voice of the slave. This commitment serves not only to

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[25] The precise wording of Elizabeth Lovejoy's response varies across each account. For example Joseph Lovejoy's text records her response as, "It is well; I had rather my son should have fallen a martyr to his cause than he should have proved recreant to his principles" (369), while Stowe suggests a different phrasing (see note 21).

organize the poem in a sequence that we will see reiterated throughout *Poems on Miscellaneous*

Subjects, but to produce dissensus with and within the collaborative horizons of sentimentalism.

It accomplishes the latter by superimposing a competing project—making the black voice

audible—over a recognizable, but ultimately incongruous, sentimental formula. Such dissonance

does not necessarily imply aesthetic experience, nor does it negate alternative aesthetics within

sentimental literature, but it serves as a marker for features that evade evaluative frameworks

organized around the ethical imperatives of white antislavery and modes of "collective assent"

associated with U.S. sentimentalism.

  If aesthetics constitutes a sphere of activity that acts to shape the *demos* and its outside,

Watkins Harper's poetry forges alternative boundaries for inclusion and exclusion, even as it

reveals inside and outside vacillating between conflict and reciprocity. In communicating many

of the paradoxes of sentimental and antislavery discourse, Watkins Harper's poetry elicits the

"perverse, disturbing, and pleasurable experiences" that Bishop suggests "enlarge our capacity to

imagine the world and our relations anew" (284)—generating an uncertain terrain that provides

opportunities and incentive to rethink politics and community.

Collaboration and Participation

  The sentimental project partially underpinning "A Mother's Heroism," and Watkins

Harper's poetry more generally, is perhaps best understood through Mary Louise Kete's

discussion of sentimentalism as an essentially collaborative form of expression. Kete's

Sentimental Collaborations pivots from earlier readings of sentimentalism that associate it with

tropes of home, family, and social bonds to a position that sees it as primarily concerned with the

loss of these elements. She therefore sees sentimentality as "a discourse generated by the need to

counteract—to nullify—the effect of loss" (17), and suggests that sentiment "structures a collaboration through which individuals can join together in solving the seemingly local problem of grief in the face of death" (3). On one hand, sentimental collaboration "works … to construct a particularly American form of personal subjectivity, national subjectivity, and aesthetic subjectivity" (4), and thus redirects its collaborative and participatory focus to the individuated subject. On the other, mourning, what she deems "a technology for the reorganization of the self" (22), acts to demand and enforce the collaborative activity of more than a single individual. For Kete, then, "sentimentality's role in the construction of a personal subjectivity … [is] a necessary condition of … community" (7).

Kete largely explores this collaborative activity through an examination of *Harriet Gould's Book*, an unpublished album of sentimental poems primarily composed by an intimate group of family members and friends. As Kete describes it, the text reveals a "system of exchange in which evidence of one's affection is given in such a way as to elicit not only a return donation of affection but also a continued circulation of affection among an increasing circle of association" (53). Her description, which highlights a single text driven by instances of individual authorship, communal interaction, and the material and social circulation of sentiment, offers a helpful model for resituating *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* within a broader range of collective and participatory practices. Although composed by a single author, the initial pamphlet versions of *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* nonetheless served as "keepsakes or extensions of her antislavery lectures" (McGill 67) disseminated to foster the continued circulation of sentiments expressed and experienced during these lectures. The text's status as commemorative and reiterative of Watkins Harper's oral performance, and as reliant on a mode of sentiment-driven exchange, reveals it as potentially indexed to the type of collaborative practices Kete

locates in *Harriet Gould's Book.* The content of the poems in the collection, which I discuss at length below, evidences similar indexing.

Kete's discussion of sentimentality therefore provides insight into the potential function of loss (and the threat of loss) in Watkins Harper's work, and into the ways her poetry may have simultaneously interfaced with sentimental discourse and practices, and the participatory milieu of antislavery activism. Watkins Harper's own rise to prominence within this milieu further illustrates such potential intersections. Niece to noted abolitionist, educator, and leader, Reverend William Watkins, Watkins Harper circulated through black and abolitionist communities in Baltimore throughout her youth. As Frances Smith Foster relates, she likely also contributed to publics that extended beyond this sphere, possibly publishing in local and antislavery newspapers like *Freedom's Journal* and *The Liberator*, which regularly featured contributions from Reverend Watkins (7). The recently rediscovered pamphlet *Forest Leaves* (1847), a short collection of Watkins Harper's poetry published when she was in her early twenties, supports this claim, suggesting that her talents as a writer were sufficiently known to warrant such publication, and evincing her interaction with local publishers.[26] After leaving her uncle's household, she worked as a teacher, while still writing and remaining involved in antislavery activities.

Her focus on writing, education, and activism became increasingly intertwined in the 1850s, particularly after delivering what she considered her "maiden lecture" in New Bedford in 1854—a speech that characteristically concerned the "Elevation and Education of our People" (Harper 44). During a six-year period of lecturing for larger audiences, which were "often integrated, but sometimes all black" (Peterson 121), Watkins Harper also spoke and conversed at

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[26] For a detailed discussion of both the publication date and publisher of the volume, as well as its contents, see Ortner. I have provided the earliest likely year of publication, for the sake of convenience.

small anti-slavery meetings (Harper 44), served as an agent and fund-raiser for multiple anti-slavery societies (Foster 15), and regularly visited the homes of white and black activists. The intersections between her artistic and reform activities similarly extended to her poetry. Watkins Harper frequently gave away or "sold her books of poems to the audiences that had come to hear her lecture" (Peterson 128), and regularly saw her poems and correspondence published and reprinted in the *Christian Recorder*, *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, and other anti-slavery newspapers. She also integrated her various modes of public expression with one another, incorporating poems into lectures, transmuting correspondence into poems, and accompanying her lectures with recitations of her poetry.[27]

In Watkins Harper's wide-ranging activities, we see not only the overlapping and interconnected circulation of her body and her texts, but also the slippage, seepage, and admixture of forms of expression, and material and embodied practices. This points to the constitutive aspects of her presence in spaces where her artistic production emerged, as well as the interplay between performance, participation, and spectatorship attendant on her work and activism. When we consider this interplay alongside the ways Watkins Harper's poetry is indexed to collaborative sentimentality, we come to see her poetry as malleable and adaptive, and integrated within concerns and practices akin to those constellating around participatory art. At the heart of such art, as Bishop theorizes, is a focus on "the creative rewards of participation as a politicized working process" (1), with participation denoting that "people constitute the central artistic medium and material, in the manner of theater and performance" (1). Seen through such a lens, Watkins Harper's poetry becomes more recognizably linked to a continuum of actors, with their actions functioning as perhaps her core artistic concern. If Watkins Harper

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[27] For more on Watkins Harper's blending of these modes, see Peterson 122 and 131-32, and Foster 30-31.

doesn't quite aim to "overturn the traditional relationship between the art object, the artist and the audience" (2), what Bishop deems the "hallmark of [recent] artistic orientation towards the social" (2), she makes an intervention in a related space—seeking to reconfigure the organization of bodies, objects, and herself.

Again, my intention is not to trace a lineage between Watkins Harper's aesthetics and forms of contemporary art, but to suggest why studies of community based art, experimental communities, critical art (if outside the scope of participatory art), and other related modes of artistic expression might be productively applied to Watkins Harper's work. Both Bishop's comprehensive *Artificial Hells* and Jacques Rancière's *The Emancipated Spectator* are particularly relevant, as both are concerned with disentangling aesthetics from anticipated political or ethical effects. Bishop convincingly posits that because "ethics is the ground zero of any collaborative art" (238), judging a work "on the basis of its preparatory phase is to neglect the singular approach of each artist, how this produces specific aesthetic consequences, and the larger questions that he/ she might be struggling to articulate" (238)—an argument that we can extend to Watkins Harper's antislavery poetry. What made Watkins Harper's singular approach to literature so noteworthy to audiences, and what type of specifically aesthetic consequences did it produce?

If the latter question is outside the scope of this investigation, it nonetheless invites us to locate the aesthetics that could be at stake in Watkins Harper's poetry. As I've already touched on, Bishop places considerable critical emphasis on perversity, paradox, and negation when isolating the aesthetic qualities of the participatory situations she investigates. Her exhaustive mapping of the development of participatory art, from the "invention of a popular mass audience in Italian Futurist *serate*" (3) to the contemporary pedagogic project, also gravitates towards

artworks that evade or contradict the social, ideological, and ethical aims of the artist, or which

enable engagement with more complex visions of politics, society, and art than are

accommodated by a cohesive ethical agenda. More broadly, her critique privileges works that

oppose accepted modes of evaluating social and artistic concerns, and disrupt inherited

conceptual and interpretive frameworks, while adhering to *form* as "a crucial vessel for

communicating meaning" (7).

These concerns crystallize in her discussion of delegated performance, which involves

"hiring non-professionals or specialists in other fields" to perform "on behalf of the artist" at

particular times and places. Through a detailed formal analysis of the often unsettling

interactions between spectator, participant, and artist, Bishop ultimately locates the importance

of such performances in their capacity to produce "a space of experience where … norms are

suspended and put to pleasure in perverse ways" (238). The "perverse pleasures" underlying

delegated performances thus "offer an alternative form of knowledge about capitalism's

commodification of the individual" (237), and, at their best, produce "disruptive events that

testify to a shared reality between viewers and performers, and which defy not only agreed ways

of thinking about pleasure, labor and ethics, but also the intellectual frameworks we have

inherited to understand these ideas today" (240).

In his discussion of aesthetic communities, Rancière similarly foregrounds the disruptive

effects of aesthetic experience, noting that such experience "has a political effect to the extent

that the loss of destination it presupposes disrupts the way in which bodies fit their functions and

destinations" (*Emancipated Spectator* 72). While he doesn't emphasize the precisely same

perverse pleasures that Bishop identifies, he argues an analogous position, suggesting that "this

political effect occurs under the condition of an original disjunction, an original effect, which is

the suspension of any direct relationship between cause and effect" (*Emancipated Spectator* 72-3). Such uneasy *suspension* of recognizable relationships provides a less Lacanian, and perhaps more conventionally "philosophic" account of the aesthetic effects Bishop describes. For Rancière, as for Bishop, such effects are therefore initially results of "dis-identification," constructing communities on the basis of disconnection rather than consensus. By thereby multiplying the "connections and disconnections that reframe the relation between bodies, the world they live in and the way in which they are 'equipped' to adapt to it … [aesthetic experience thus] allows for new modes of political construction of common objects and new possibilities of enunciation" (*Emancipated Spectator* 72).

Positing Watkins Harper's commitment to the political emergence of the subjugated and silenced black voice *as* her aesthetics suggest that the ways this commitment organizes and surfaces in her poetry is generative of the disruptive effects Bishop and Rancière describe. Such effects also parallel the disjunctive impact of the circulation of Watkins Harper's body, and of her conceptual status as black, female poet and orator. As numerous scholars have shown, audience members often refused to register her blackness or downplayed her status as an African-American; listeners occasionally deemed her "not colored," but "painted," while even noted reformers like Grace Greenwood (Sara Jane Lippincott) emphasized the lightness of her skin in tandem with their praise.[28] Watkins Harper letters also report numerous instances in which she was insulted or physically threatened by white Americans encountered during her lecture tours.[29] Such accounts indicate how Watkins Harper's status was often irreconcilable with or in opposition to inherited frameworks of understanding; the animosity and disbelief

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[28] See Foster 6.

[29] See, for example, Harper 46.

exhibited by her audiences signal their inability to register or accept that a figure excluded from their community could nonetheless satisfy its criteria for inclusion.

Within Watkins Harper's poetry, these disruptive effects cluster around the question of speech. Following Rancière's understanding of politics as a conflict specifically over what separates "speech" from "mere growl," and over how communities perceive and organize space and identity, I understand Watkins Harper's commitment to the legibility of the black voice (as speech) as her politics. However, it is precisely the inability to recognize or accept it as a politics that structures it as a type of *aesthetics* for her audiences, particularly when viewed in respect to the horizon of expectations constructed around U.S. sentimentality. That is, the unsettling relationship between the collaborative, but often exploitive, framework of U.S. sentimentalism and Watkins Harper's unusual emphasis on the speaking black voice reframes and reorganizes the expected order of bodies and things, particularly for white audiences. The following investigation of *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* therefore focuses on the interactions of emerging black and subjugated speech with tropes commonly associated with sentimentalism, paying close attention to how these interactions produce the pleasurable dissonance of Watkins Harper's poems.

Poems on "Miscellaneous" Subjects

At first glance, perhaps, the contents of Watkins Harper's *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* seem to reflect the broad dispersion of topics suggested by the text's title. The *miscellaneous* nature of the collection, however, is misleading, as critics like Melba Boyd and Carla Peterson have suggested.[30] For, while the collection focuses on a variety of topics, it forms

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[30] Peterson, for example, notes that the poems are "unified by a common ethos—evangelical Unitarianism" and contains a "common thread" that unites the themes and social issues it discusses (130).

a far more cohesive unit of expression, particularly seen through the lens of Watkins Harper's commitment to black political speech. As Melba Joyce Boyd points out, "The 'miscellaneous' format of the book centers around human suffering; and when the holistic context of that format is considered, one can more appropriately perceive and appreciate the poet's complexity" (58). I reiterate Boyd's remarks not to reemphasize such holistic complexity, but to further pursue her claim that our understanding of the collection and its individual poems acquire new dimensions when we more deeply consider their interconnected nature. Importantly, such an understanding also reflects Watkins Harper's own perception of her world and her poems. For Watkins Harper, the underlying spiritual interconnectedness of reality functioned as the central organizational component of her activism and writing. As she states in the core theological-philosophical chapter of her long, blank verse poem, "Moses: A Story of the Nile," the "central and the primal truth of all / the universe [is] the unity of God" (Harper 161).

Given Watkins Harper's belief in the spiritual unity of the universe, as well as the evident thematic and lexical continuity of her collection, the collection's title generates something of the disruptive experience traceable in its poems. At the heart of this disjunction is the presumed difference between antislavery activism and sentimentality, which, like the "miscellaneous" categorization of the collection, comes to be revised through and within the poems of the collection. The title, however, points to the instability and tenuousness of such revisions, suggesting that the compositional logic of the volume is tied to the supposition of its miscellany. It thereby seems to illustrate the type of dis-identification Rancière and Bishop locate at the core of aesthetic experience. On one hand, the title signals a certain type of consensual community that the poems frequently disrupt. On the other, it withholds the type of ideological closure that would delineate these disruptions as a unified political project.

The productive tension between the collection's foregrounded sentimentality and its methods of reordering and reframing bodies within this consensual sphere are similarly visible throughout its texts. My earlier investigation of "A Mother's Heroism" identifies three key spaces of investigation for locating and exploring where such dissonance becomes most apparent. The first concerns how Watkins Harper explores the spectrum of sound and speech, specifically in respect to the transformation of various utterances within each poem. While such transformations generally focus on the black voice, certain sentimental figures also undergo analogous developments, as we will soon see in the opening poem of the collection, "The Syrophenician Woman." The second locus of my investigation is Watkins Harper's tactics of revision throughout her poems, whether seen in subtle lexical differences across repeated phrases or stanzas, or in detailed revisions to her textual sources (like those I've already highlighted in "A Mother's Heroism"). Finally, I pay close attention to her methods of deploying recognizable sentimental tropes, particularly in respect to her modes of reimagining sentimental closure.

The opening poem of *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*, "The Syrophenician Woman," provides an ideal subject for undertaking such an analysis. As Carla Peterson's incisive reading explains, the poem is "a highly appropriate inaugural choice" (126) that revises a New Testament story (found in both Mark 7 and Matthew 15) of "the mother who begs Jesus to cast out unclean spirits from her daughter" (126). Peterson further highlights that a fundamental component of Watkins Harper's revisions is that Watkins Harper changes the focus of the poem from a question of demonic possession to that of a child's starvation. While she notes that the poem "allows those readers who so choose to apply these circumstances [the mother's attempts to save her child from death by hunger] to the specific historical experience of African Americans" (127), she seems to underplay the biblical story's original emphasis on the woman's difference,

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which provides more compelling incentive for readers to make this choice than Peterson allows. In the New Testament tale, it is precisely the Syrophenician woman's racial and religious affiliation (either as Greek/Syrophenician in Mark, or Canaanite in Matthew) that causes Jesus to first withhold his healing power from her child. Its central conflict, and the ensuing resolution, thus revolve around difference—a thematic concern already apparent in the title's defining term ("Syrophenician"). The poem does not simply to invite readers to recognize the analogous nature of biblical figure and slave, but attempts to establish the conceptual foundations that would necessitate such a recognition.

From the outset of the collection, then, Watkins Harper constructs a link between the pitiable, domestic, Christian subject and the slave. Yet Watkins Harper's revisions to the parable of the Syrophenician woman reveals this link as a complex balancing act between fulfilling and revising expectations. While Watkins Harper omits any mention of demonic possession from her version of the tale, she draws heavily from the language and structure of the exchange related in Matthew (15.21-28), even leaving intact the possibility of a biblically accurate interpretation of her poem. She thus transforms a strictly religious figure (the mother begging Jesus to exorcise her possessed daughter) into a recognizable sentimental character (the mother pleading for a dying innocent) while preserving this character's ties to her Christian origin, and retaining the sanctity of the New Testament source. This allows readers to acknowledge a continuous, stable logic from the Bible to sentimentalism, thereby setting the stage for them to draw a subsequent connection between sentimental figure and slave.

On one hand, Watkins Harper constructs this link via lexical and structural elements. Perhaps the most telling of these consists in the shift from "Lord" to "Master" in the mother's pleas to Jesus across the third and fourth stanzas, which aligns the mother with the helpless slave

via her apparent willingness to assume a subordinate relationship. Similarly, the mother's

exclamations to Jesus, made in "anguish wild," set the stage for—and directly evoke—the cries,

shrieks, and sobs (of "despair," "agony," and "anguish") voiced by slaves and imperiled figures

throughout *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*. They also openly allude to the subsequent poem,

"The Slave Mother," which begins,

> Heard you that shriek? It rose
>   So wildly on the air,
> It seemed as if a burden'd heart
>   Was breaking in despair. (1-4)

On the other hand, however, Watkins Harper's poem maps a more involved sequence of

transformation, which the lexical/structural components serve more to signal than to achieve.

Attentiveness to the evolution of sound and speech within the poem help us to adequately

isolate and explore this sequence. To begin with, the poem lays out a very specific

metamorphosis of expression. As Peterson and others have discussed, the poem shifts from first-

to third-person after its first two stanzas. At the outset of the initial shift to third-person, the

mother cries out to Jesus, but "as though she was unheard, / Jesus answered not a word" (11-12).

In the subsequent stanza, she renders herself as a supplicant, kneeling before Jesus and calling

him "Master." Jesus, however, dismisses her appeal, stating he is "only sent to seek / Israel's lost

and scattered sheep" (19-20). The penultimate stanza marks the turn of the poem, reading as

follows:

> "True," she said, "Oh gracious Lord!
> True and faithful is thy word:
> But the humblest, meanest, may
> Eat the crumbs they cast away" (21-24)

This turn back to the possibility for a successful resolution to the woman's plight serves to establish the foundation for Jesus's charitable reply, which he offers in the poem's closing couplet, "By thy faith that knows no fail, / Thou hast ask'd, and shalt prevail" (27-28).

I summarize this sequence to chart the progression of speaking and hearing within the poem, and to show how it merges, quite seamlessly, with the type of sentimental closure we examined earlier in "A Mother's Heroism." The initial narratival and temporal shift between second and third stanzas marks not only a move from internal consciousness to mediated discursive construct, as Peterson notes, but also, more simply, a shift from thought to speech. However obvious, this shift is significant in that it grounds the subsequent third-person narration in a vibrant, Christian, and emotion-laden interiority. In other words, the narratival shift across the second and third stanzas bases the exchange between Jesus and the Syrophenician woman in the well-established interiority of sentimentalism, a move further reinforced by the "starving child" motif and the recognizably conventional closing lines. The opening stanzas thereby undergird the verbal (and artistic) expressions of the racialized other, specifically the figure who finds herself in a dependent but critical relationship to virtually absolute power, with a legible form of emotional and conceptual inner life. In her opening poem, Watkins Harper therefore attempts to show her reader that the expressions of the racialized other are more than mere animalistic utterances and actions, stemming from recognizably human (and indeed poetic) impulses rather than savage instinct. She thereby revises the transformative focus of sentimentalism, shifting it from what Barnes calls the "redemptive suffering" (2) experienced by those in a position of strength (in this case, both Jesus and the white reader) to the increasing audibility and legibility of the other's speech.

The form of interiority she initially establishes becomes an essential component of the two primary modes of speaking that emerge after the opening stanzas, both of which first merely register as noise: the initial verbalization of the mother, who cries out "Lord!" at the opening of the third stanza, and Watkins Harper's own verbal and poetic mediation of the interiority laid out in the opening stanzas (which she acknowledges via the shift to third person). As Jesus's continued disregard reveals, the evolution of thought to speech and poetic expression does not render it as such to the listener, particularly to the listener occupying the dominant position of the drastically imbalanced power relationship laid out in the poem. This relationship is also analogous to the exchange occurring between Watkins Harper and her white readers, thereby implicating such readers in Jesus's inability to hear. We can locate the peculiar dissonance of Watkins Harper's aesthetic in this implication; the poem offers and seems to accept a formulaic rendering of Christian sentimentality, yet it repositions the actors in such a way as to revise the operation of this formula. That is, Jesus's turn to true Christian charity is predicated on his fallibility, and his callous, unchristian behavior, and his transformation is accomplished by being forced to heed the voice of those he would exclude from his community.

The unsettling dimensions of such repositioning is further evident in Watkins Harper's staging of the mother and Jesus. Only when the Syrophenician woman makes herself legible through the master-servant relation, both in respect to physical position (kneeling) and language ("Lord" to "Master"), does she elicit Jesus attention (and, perhaps, the reader's, as well). He nonetheless still refuses to help her, citing her difference (whether understood as racial or religious) as the grounds of his decision: "I am only sent to seek / Israel's lost and scattered sheep" (19-20).

In response, the mother follows the same revisionist tactics that Watkins Harper herself uses throughout the text; she reaffirms the legitimacy of the language of power (in this case, Jesus's methods of speaking), and makes her reply in a specialized form of this language that acts in readable/hearable and transformative fashion for the listener. She first states, "Oh gracious Lord! / True and faithful is thy word" (21-22), basing her subsequent argument in the validity and authority of the *word* of the speaking power she will soon rebuff. In suggesting that the fundamental truth of this word depends on its *faithful* nature, whether this indicates its steadfast constancy or its adherence to an underlying absolute, the mother exploits the full force of mid-nineteenth century Christian beliefs, and turns this force upon itself. That is, the validity of Jesus's word as truth depends on the consistency of its message, and, in Watkins Harper's reckoning, therefore necessitates a certain ethical rejoinder to the mother's predicament. This necessary response stems from what the poem identifies as the source of Jesus's authority, which is a mode of speaking we can understand as political, in that it determines how the community perceives and distributes noise and speech, and life and death (in the case of the mother's child). Watkins Harper's sequence here reveals that expression only becomes audible as political speech when it first affirms or seems to affirm the legitimacy, the inherent *truth*, of what already constitutes the political. However, she also reveals that the ways in which this legitimacy can turn back on itself, undoing or negating its own authority, or laying foundations for resistance. In this moment, we see something akin to the "alternative knowledge" of democracy that Bishop alludes to in delegated performance—a productive disjunction generated by Watkins Harper's simultaneous embrace and subversion of Christian authority.

Crucially, the Syrophenician woman then models how to rework this "truthful" language (the accepted mode of expression) to speak in a legible and transformative manner to those who

already use it. The Syrophenician woman's appeals thus instantiate the effective forms of expression and action Watkins Harper more explicitly details elsewhere in the collection, in poems like "Free Labor," "Report," and "Advice to the Girls." Her final words ("But the humblest, meanest, may / Eat the crumbs they cast away") reveal the transformative potential of this form, offering a kind of alchemical formula for transmuting the unheard to the audible, for enabling an interlocutor to cross suddenly into the common world from the spaces that initially evade the governing community's gaze. Unsurprisingly, this process takes place at the fringe of meaning and civilization itself—in the *crumb*. Food and refuse, the final remnant of a community's sustenance and the nagging reminder of its inevitable disintegration, the crumb demarcates the edge of the perceptible world, the hazy boundary of the shared table.

It is at this boundary of the common where the Syrophenician woman finds her initial purchase within Jesus's community, and where Watkins Harper makes her most significant revisions to her biblical source. First, while the plain terms of Watkins Harper's character echo those of the Syrophenician woman in Mark ("Sir, even the dogs under the table get to eat scraps dropped by children" (Mark 7.25-30)), and Matthew ("Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters table" (Matt. 15.21-28)), Watkins Harper carefully reworks the substantive thrust of both these replies. She replaces the "dogs" of the Syrophenician woman's retort with people ("the humblest, meanest"), revealing that the stakes not as some middle ground between human and animal, but as the threshold of the human being. To use the term "dog" would simply reinforce the widely held fallacy that other races (and slaves, in particular) belonged to a more primitive, more animalistic, species of humankind than white

Americans.[31] Watkins Harper's use of "the humblest, meanest" instead transposes the quintessential sentimental Christian subject (the meek that will inherit the earth) into the tale, further reinforcing the link between slave and sentimental figure while sidestepping the potentially ruinous association between slave and animal.

Watkins Harper also has the Syrophenician woman recapitulate this type of revision in her second entreaty to Jesus. The mother's reply seemingly mirrors the structure of Jesus's pithy (and, indeed, callous) snub, in that it repeats the enjambment of its final couplet—the only two instances of enjambment in the poem. If her response replicates Jesus's formal tactics, however, it radically revises the intended meaning of his attempt to dismiss her, a revision perhaps signaled by her flipping of his rhyme structure (half-rhyme to rhyme, which he then adopts in the final stanza). Jesus suggests that her request for aid would ultimately steal from his interactions with his imagined spiritual community; his reproof indicates that he initially perceives her as a disruptive and pillaging outsider, whose intrusion into the community would interrupt its fundamental form of exchange—the flesh-bread of the divine, which she would take from the deserving. The mother, however, sees his fulfillment of her request as a logical corollary to the exchanges taking place in his community. In her estimation, where there is bread, there are crumbs. Just as she affirms his word, then, she similarly affirms the proper function of his proposed world; in her estimation, Jesus's children should receive the sustenance he offers. However, as she argues, such functioning also necessitates that he answer her plea. That is, in receiving Jesus's spiritual provisions, the children of Israel should be positioned to help her own child, regardless of her heritage.

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[31] Take, for example, the assertion by well-respected naturalist and Harvard professor, Louis Agassiz, that "negroes were, physiologically and anatomically, a distinct species" (Menand 106). Agassiz's correspondence also reiterates the biased views he espoused in his public assertions (Menand 105-106).

While there are obvious parallels between this exchange and the incompatibility of the political and religious rhetoric underpinning U.S. democracy and the institution of slavery, I'd like to suggest that, in this case, Watkins Harper targets the structural composition of communal logic rather than specific anti-slavery commitments. In other words, rather than using "The Syrophenician Woman" to make a specific critique of the institution of slavery or those that uphold it (apart from exposing their blatant and inherent hypocrisy), as Watkins Harper does elsewhere, her poem aims to restore broken links within what she considers a fundamentally Christian communal logic as a means to extend this logic past its current boundaries to encapsulate the slave. To a large extent, the mother provides a textual proof for this process by seizing on the lexical "crumbs" of Jesus's words (e.g., the connotations of the term *bread*), and, through highlighting more expansive implications than those recognized by the speaker, using them to generate a larger community than he first seems to perceive. That is, she generates and sustains her appeal with the untidy conceptual remnants of Jesus's initial rejection, reconfiguring the reader's understanding of the relationships between words and things. She further registers her cognizance of the expanded capacities of the *true word* in the final turn of her response, in which the enjambed term "*may*" straddles its meanings as possibility, permission, and threat ("But the humblest, meanest, *may* / Eat the crumbs they cast away").

"The Syrophenician Woman," then, examples how Watkins Harper's emphasis on the emergence of certain forms of speech both provides a formal logic for her poetry, and creates its unusual, often dissonant qualities. In selecting the biblical story of the Syrophenician woman as the basis for her poem, Watkins Harper grounds the collection's first offering in Christian mythology, sentimentalism, *and* questions of racial difference and prejudice. The poem's purposeful allusions to the socio-political questions undergirding her source material,

specifically in respect to the legibility of the racial other, embed these questions within the logic

of sentimentalism, even as they detail how they are supposedly *already* a component of its

natural progression. Harper builds from this revised foundation in a manner that directs the

reader's attention to the sequence by which the Syrophenician woman becomes audible, her

words evolving from disregarded noise to political speech. The seemingly simple and obvious

nature of the poem's syntax both enacts the accepted delivery of the sentimentalist lyric, and

conceals its intense focus on redrawing the boundaries of this lyric to encapsulate the slave.

While much of *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* evidences a similar focus, I'd like to

draw attention to three antislavery poems as particularly emblematic of Watkins Harper's fusion

of politics and aesthetics. From these overtly political poems, I turn to some of the collection's

more traditional sentimentalist and religious texts to diagram how these poems work in tandem

to reinforce the politicized aesthetics/aesthetic politics at play in Watkins Harper's explicitly

antislavery texts. The first two poems I examine, "The Slave Mother" and "Ethiopia," diagram

the evolution of the slave's utterance from noise to audible, political expression, in a manner

similar to what Watkins Harper maps in "The Syrophenician Woman."

To my mind, Watkins Harper precisely identifies this evolution as the primary focus of

"The Slave Mother" through her initial emphasis on the second person address, and through her

subsequent manipulation of this address. Across the first three stanzas of the poem, Watkins

Harper challenges her readers with direct inquiries about their capacity to perceive, scrutinizing

how they process the sensible world through a succession of interrogatory questions ("Heard you

… " / "Saw you … " / "Saw you … "). Her initial query, "Heard you that shriek," then, functions

not simply as a rhetorical mechanism for evoking the slave market for the reader, but also as a

means for shifting the sensory qualities of this scene into an alternative register, in which the

anguish of the slave mother becomes suddenly and jarringly audible as the anguish of *any* mother in the scenario depicted. The sounds and sights to which she directs the reader's attention therefore lose their status as commonplace background (or *white*) noise, and move into the now politicized foreground of the lyric, where their recognizability as elements of sentimentalism render them legible and startlingly immediate.

In almost cinematic fashion, and in language that forecasts "A Mother's Heroism," Watkins Harper narrows her focus from the scene-setting shriek to its localized source, the "fragile" physical form of the mother. The "clasped" hand and "bowed" head of this form simultaneously evoke Christian piety, subservience, and grief, just as the compound image of her clasping her son alludes to the figures of the Madonna and child. Rather than lingering on the physical qualities of this figure, however, Watkins Harper continues narrowing the reader's vision to a single point: the "sad, imploring eye" of the slave. With the reader's gaze locked on the eye of the slave mother, Watkins Harper makes a sudden shift to third-person omniscient narration and details the familial and emotional bonds between the mother and her (soon-to-be-sold) child. This shift is also marked by a move from sense-related verbs to the verb "to be," which she uses at the outset of the following five stanzas ("She is a mother …" / "He is not hers …" / "He is not hers …" / "His love has been …" / "His lightest word has been …"). The eye therefore serves as entry into the foundational domestic space of mother and child, what Watkins Harper deems the "only wreath of household love / That binds her breaking heart" (23-24), and into the emotional and historical ties between these figures. Through her verb use, Watkins Harper portrays both of these private spaces as unadorned and immutable truth, the "being" at the core of the image she depicts.

The poem thus moves from a call for the reader to reexamine and reapportion the sensible world to a seemingly authentic description of the interior zones that would legitimate this reappraisal. That is, the plain-spoken truth of the slave's interaction (as mother) with her child, and of the thoughts and feelings she experiences during this interaction, validate Watkins Harper's request for the reader to hear and see the scene afresh, as they chart a recognizable connection between sentiment and sense, between maternal love and piercing cry—a connection that becomes fully legible thanks to the conceptual apparatus of sentimentalism. With this link consolidated, Watkins Harper then briefly details the main action of the poem: the theft of a child from his mother by slave traders. This separation acquires a violent, sudden force for the reader, who has spent the bulk of the poem constructing and reconstructing the connections that render the mother-child interaction meaningful within the horizon of sentimentalism—a horizon now distorted to nightmarish effect.

The stakes of the reader's jarring experience become clear in the next, and final, stanza, which replays the opening lines with a number of significant revisions. The first and last stanzas read as follows:

> Heard you that shriek? It rose
> > So wildly on the air,
> It seemed as if a burden'd heart
> > Was breaking in despair. (1-4)

versus

> No marvel, then, these bitter shrieks
> > Disturb the listening air:
> She is a mother, and her heart
> > Is breaking in despair. (37-40)

Where the opening stanza begins with an incisive question respecting the reader's perception, the closing stanza suggests that the question has been definitively answered within the preceding

lines. Not only do readers hear the shriek, but they register its ability to "disturb" the now "listening air." Similarly, the potential *seeming* of the cry transforms, through a reiteration of the language of the fourth stanza ("She is a mother … "), into plain-spoken truth. Watkins Harper's seemingly "simple, vernacular phrasing … [and] vocabulary of sentimentality" (Petrino 134) thereby serves as the vehicle by which the slave becomes audible and crosses into political and social relevance as a speaking (domestic) being. While her personification of the air may seem an unusual conceit, by joining the natural world to perception itself, it registers the reintegration of sense and sensible diagrammed by the poem. The air *is* listening because it is a component of the previously fragmented (and flawed) conceptual landscape restored—to tragic effect—by the reader's recognition of the domestic bonds at the heart of the scene. The personification of the air also implicates the previously invisible, unnoticed medium of expression in the process of becoming audible. In some respects, it thereby suggests the emergence of the slave mother as perceivable figure within sentimentalism itself—an emergence that fundamentally disrupts and rearranges the poem's initial conceptual and linguistic order.

"Ethiopia" perhaps most overtly articulates the trajectory of the slave's expression that Watkins Harper aims at in the collection's first two poems. The poem, among Watkins Harper's earliest writings in the collection, originally served as the opening poem of her first published volume, *Forest Leaves*, and is therefore potentially more significant than its later positioning suggests. The text uses the same framing device as "The Slave Mother," in which the final stanza is a revised version of the opening quatrain and provides closure to the issues raised in the

opening lines.[32] In "Ethiopia," this closure is a call to action, a plea for Ethiopia to "stretch [her]

bleeding hands abroad," as prophesied in the first stanza. The opening line states:

> Yes! Ethiopia yet shall stretch
> > Her bleeding hands abroad;
> Her cry of agony shall reach
> > The burning throne of God. (1-4)

The final quatrain makes the following modifications:

> Then, Ethiopia! stretch, oh! stretch
> > Thy bleeding hands abroad;
> Thy cry of agony shall reach
> > And find redress from God. (25-28)

In *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*, Watkins Harper reserves this framing device—common

enough to sentimentalist poetry of the period—solely for "The Slave Mother" and "Ethiopia,"

which suggests it produces a resolution specific to these two poems. In both cases, the initial cry,

whether unheard (in "The Slave Mother") or yet to be issued (in "Ethiopia"), transforms

throughout the course of the poem into an expression with consequential effects. As I detailed

earlier, the shriek within "The Slave Mother" acquires the capacity to disturb the air itself; due to

the progression of the poem, it comes to constitute the expression of a being capable of

influencing the public sphere (the grieving mother). Here, the movement of the poem reveals

why the agonized cry of the slave will not only reach God, but will produce a favorable and just

response ("redress") from him.

Watkins Harper's reasoning for this result becomes apparent when we trace the sequence

of audible expression found in her poem. The slaves' "cry of agony" (3) transforms first into

"shouts of triumph" (12) after God casts off the "tyrant's yoke" (5) and breaks the "fetters" (6)

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[32] It is possible to include "A Mother's Heroism" in this group, if one considers Elizabeth Lovejoy's revision of the epigraph as a similar formal strategy. That said, in *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*, Watkins Harper only uses the specific framing device I describe in the two poems noted here.

on Ethiopia's soul. After an ensuing period of peace, and the cessation of Ethiopia's "sorrows" (16), these shouts evolve into the laughter of playing children and the "joyous psalms" of "aged sires" (19). While this progression reveals Watkins Harper's affinity for racial uplift, for which she is often critiqued, it also charts the increasingly legible and meaningful expressive capacity of slaves. Such development parallels slaves' journey from enslavement, through emancipation, to their own community, which Watkins Harper depicts occurring in the zionistic space "'Neath sheltering vines and stately palms." As "cry" becomes "shout," and finally metamorphoses into recognizable communal expressions of innocence and experience ("laughing" and "psalms"), Watkins Harper diagrams the connection between the initially incomprehensible, potentially animalistic shriek of the slave (a recurrent element in *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*) and the complex, formalized art-speech at white America's ideological core. Between "cry of agony" and "psalm" are shifts in political and communal status, not fundamental differences between "races of man" or biologically defined capacities of knowledge or expression. If this designates a Christian textual form as the telos of the slave's expression, and thereby constructs a hierarchy of expression around a form heavily associated with white America, it also generates an inverse figure, embedding the psalm within the shriek of the slave. That is, the psalm issues from the same individuals, the "aged sires" initially under the yoke of slavery, who first cried out in agony. Circumstance (freedom) and emotional state (peace) alone enable them to reformulate their expression in more legible, controlled manner. The development of the slave's expressive capacity proposed within the poem thus precipitates the reader's immediate recognition of the "cry" as meaningful, even poetic, expression—a transformation confirmed by the closing quatrain's revisions to the opening stanza, which argue that this "cry" is audible and meaningful to God, the wellspring of all earthly truth and morality.

Watkins Harper further explores the interaction between legible, controlled expression and the raw, agonizing realities of U.S. slavery in one of the collection's more widely discussed poems, "Free Labor." While poems like "The Contrast," "Report," and "Lines" outline Watkins Harper's reasoning and appreciation for measured, and direct forms of the sentimental lyric, "Free Labor" most succinctly defines how her politics functions as an aesthetic approach—how her political commitments serve as a mode of thinking and structuring poetry. As Foster and Peterson have noted, "Free Labor" stems from an earlier letter to William Still, and Watkins Harper also incorporates the language of this letter into her 1855 "Free Labor Movement" speech. Peterson highlights the relevance of this cross-pollination of forms, stating "Watkins Harper's canon verse and lectures cannot be considered isolated aesthetic objects that exist separately from one another but must be viewed as coextensive not only with each other but with her essays and fiction as well" (131). I'd further suggest that the coextensive nature of "Free Labor," in particular, marks it as among the most representative of her early poetics, and an accurate articulation of her broader-ranging, even participatory, aesthetic outlook. By occupying the nexus of multiple forms of textuality, aurality, and collaborative involvement, "Free Labor" foregrounds the relevance of this web of relations to the function of the literary itself. That it also accomplishes such foregrounding via its poetic "message" evidences Watkins Harper's awareness of this integration of community, politics, and literature.

"Free Labor" similarly incorporates a variety of elements from other poems in the collection, ranging from the "wreath of household love … rudely torn apart" of "The Slave Mother" to the "sad despairing cry" and "s'mothered sigh" of "The Slave Auction" and "Ethiopia" (among others). If "Free Labor" connects multiple textual and aural forms, then, it also links the miscellaneous poems of the collection—stitching together the collection's various

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free labor textures. For example, "Free Labor" anticipates her depiction of "the Hateful form of Slavery" described in the following poem, "Lines." In "Lines," Slavery as holds a banner "festooned with blood and tears … woven / With the grief and wrong of years" (18-20) and wears "a helmet / Decked with strange and cruel art" (21-22). Conversely, "Free Labor" describes the author's "easy garment" (1) as free of the "stain of tears and blood" (8), and serves as "witness" (25) that she has "nerv'd Oppression's hand / For deeds of guilt and wrong" (27-28). Across these two poems, we see not only common phrases and tropes (*blood and tears*, and *guilt/grief and wrong*), but also a purposeful contrast of lavish adornment and the lighter "unburden'd" garment Watkins Harper selects. This contrast definitively aligns displays of excess, specifically those "woven" into the "texture" of outward, visible symbols, with slavery and its lengthy history, while aligning the form "unladened" with such ornamentation with anti-slavery and Christian morality.

If it is not difficult to recognize this focus on direct, unadorned "form" as a clear representation of her artistic choices, Watkins Harper gestures towards such an interpretation with a number of revisions to her original letter to Still that employ phrases that evoke writing and text. The second stanza states that "no cry to god" will rise from the "ample folds" of her free labor garments, and the penultimate stanza reiterates this emphasis on the absence of such screams emanating from the same "folds." Watkins Harper similarly repeats that her garments will "lightly … press my form" twice across the brief, seven stanza poem. Both the *folds* and *pressing of form*, then, are later inclusions that evoke textuality, emphasized through repetition. On one hand, these allusions to text and page support critical assessments of her poetry as grounded in "incontrovertible forms of narrative authority" and in "a literary philosophy of simplicity and clarity" (Peterson 128-129), and her own claim to "language deep and strong"

(Harper, "Free Labor" 26) as the primary mechanism of self-expression. On the other, however, they illustrate Watkins Harper's subtle way of repurposing this clear, simplistic language as a means to embed the voice of the slave within it. In "Free Labor" she accomplishes this through foregrounding the erasure of the slave's agony. While the slave's "hopeless anguish," "sad despairing cry," and "voice to pierce the sky" *do not* issue from the folds of her free-labor garment, then, they inhabit the folds of the poem itself. That is, Watkins Harper here makes slaves heard by amplifying their silence in the "unburdened" and "free" form she purports to wear. The silenced (in this case, "smother'd") voice of the slave thus becomes audible through the form that purports to herald only its absence.

Taken as an expression of Watkins Harper's mode of aesthetic-political practice, "Free Labor" sets forth an unsettling conception of her poetics, in which the sentimental lyric is both free from the linguistic adornment that she links to slavery, and simultaneously inhabited by and capable of articulating the mute agony of the slave. If this constitutes a potentially problematic conceptual outlook, however, it also provides a key insight into the more traditional poems of the collection. Specifically, it allows us to recognize the issue of slavery present, if silent, within the most innocent, indeed *lightest*, folds of the sentimental or religious poem. This presence, I've argued thus far, becomes sensible for readers through the linking of slave and sentimentalist subject, and through the enfolding of sentimental closure and the end of U.S. slavery. In many of the traditional poems of the collection, *slavery* instead becomes audible through its fundamental incompatibility with sentimentalism. In other words, in the same manner that Watkins Harper's "easy garment" voices the cry of the slave by avowing its freedom from the slave's hopeless anguish, her traditional sentimentalist poems issue and amplify the agonized cries of the slave through their overt exclusion.

I am not suggesting simply a semantic inversion of the claims of "Free Labor," but that *Poems on Sentimental Subjects* is replete with conspicuous absences meant to conjure the silenced voice of the slave. This is particularly true of her unusual religious poem, "The Revel," and the seemingly straightforward sentimentalist poem, "The Contrast." The former, first printed in *Forest Leaves*, expands on an evocative line from Proverbs (9.18) and describes "forms surpassing fair" that wander amid "brilliant lights" and "revelry and show" not knowing that "'Neath that flow of song and mirth / Runs the current of despair" because "the dead are there!" "The Contrast," which relates various perspectives on a woman who has lost her chastity to a wealthy rake, compares the community's harsh treatment of the betrayed woman to their easy forgiveness of the rake. In "The Contrast," members of the woman's community "All coldly pass her by," but few see the rake's sins "through his gold" and consider his "crimes … only foibles, / and these … gently told." The closing five stanzas of the poem inhabit his perspective as he experiences a vision of her death and funeral. This vision erases the "laughter" (39) on his lips and cause a "wail of anguish" (45) and "image of despair" (32) to "strangely" (46) blend with the "soft lights" (47) of the present. Both poems foreground the submerged "solemn truth" (Harper, "The Revel" 19) that disturbs the ostentatious displays that attempt to dominate the narration of the present and past. Likewise, both poems suggest that the banished source of anguish is entwined with and embedded in the situation/persona that disregards it. Beneath the veneer of the present, the dead and despairing issue muted wails that threaten to break forth.

If "The Contrast" and "The Revel" again impugn gaudy displays (and, by extension, overly lavish literature), they also call attention to the gothic miseries at the core of such ornamentation. They thereby further signal the poet's need to strip down her language to its most modest, free, and unadorned as a means to renounce the anguish that sustains the "revelry and

show" of less measured discourse. Such signaling, I argue, also highlights the incommensurability of such modest poetics—sentimentalist poetics—with slavery itself. That is, sentimentalism's claim to direct, "solemn" truths rest on its freedom from both false ornamentation and the anguish of the downtrodden (and, thus, the slave), in part because it draws its conceptual force from the promise of a pure and hopeful realm beyond the "world of strife." When Watkins Harper therefore suggests that young men seeking a wife should "wed not for beauty" (17), and "let not gold allure" (21) them, and should instead seek a woman whose language is "modest" (29) and "manners refined, / And free from deceit" (31-32), as she does in the straightforward advice poem "Report," she also calls forth the shriek of the slave. She accomplishes this not merely through her word choice (e.g., her use of "free") or by obvious allusions to the collection's anti-slavery poems, but by employing a figure similar to that of "Free Labor," in which the inversions of the positive image delineate its positive value. In "Report," Watkins Harper renders the "woman of truth" as much through a description of her antithesis as through descriptions of her positive attributes. The stakes of the poem, then, revolve around its *juxtaposition* of the modest and unadorned "woman of truth" with the wealth and beauty of her counter-image; in other words, what emerges in "Report" poem is both the advised path and its converse, just as "Free Labor" expresses the value of the freely produced garment by emphasizing the muted anguish of the slave. Within the collection, and within the antislavery circles in which it (and she) circulated, what is embedded in the point/counter-point structure of "Report" (or "Contrast" or "Saved by Faith") is the most conspicuous absence—slavery—which comes to delineate the bounds of sentimentalism itself by cordoning off spaces of expression that would degrade or undermine its message. In these poems, the uneasy, dissonant conflict between the collection's miscellany and its cohesion become most palpable. Even as the recognizably

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sentimental offerings seem to designate a space of promise with a clear ethical and moral code, their various connections to the surrounding poems—and the antislavery sphere in which they circulated—signal such space as compromised, and organized in unfamiliar, unexpected ways.

"A Drunkard's Child," I think, serves as a useful text for exploring what I'm aiming at here. In the poem, a drunken father stands by the bedside of his dying, golden-haired child, who tells his father that he is happy that his father has "come to see [him] die" (16). At first, the father tries to speak, "but on his lips / Faltered and died each word" (19-20), and he instead blubbers like a baby. As the father broods in silence, the child implores his father to clasp him closely to his heart and promise to meet him in the "holy city fair" (30), to which "bright angels beckon" (29) him. Finally, the father breaks his silence, crying out "I will! I will!" (34) as he fulfills the child's wish, and presses the boy's now-lifeless body against him. While it is not difficult to draw analogies between the drunkard and the slave owner, or any pro-slavery advocate, the poem makes no overt references or allusions to abolition or slavery. It does, however, chart the emergence of a stifled, ultimately truthful voice, and it links the sudden audibility of this voice to what Watkins Harper stages as a morally right action (the restoration of familial bond between father and son). Thus, if the poem does not mention U.S. slavery, it nonetheless predicates the poem's completed sentimentalist circuit on the same evolution of speech we see in Watkins Harper's anti-slavery poems. At the heart of the drunkard's conversion to righteousness is the vocalization of the muted voice, here rendered as the "sealed fountains" of his "callous heart," which erupt into the scene in tandem with meaningful and just action (his fulfillment of his child's wish). The strange timing of the child's death, seemingly at the same instant of the father's transformation, in fact appears to cement the bond between speech and action, marking their coextensive relation by the simultaneity of cry, embrace, and spiritual release. In "The

Drunkard's Child," then, we see the slave-free folds of the poem issue forth the shriek and cry of the slave, not solely through their omission, but through the release of voiced truth fundamental to the sentimental (and temperance) conversion and circuit. Beneath the father's exclamation, the contrast between the overt trope structure that validates his cry and the muted voice of the slave produce an unsettling tension that calls readers to heed the shrieks of the slave sealed within their own callous hearts. His moment of redemption becomes less about his particular transformation than about the increasing pressure of the stifled voice, and the intense volatility of its release.

The process by which Watkins Harper harnesses her commitment to making stifled, silenced, and subjugated voices audible within her poems provides compelling incentive to recognize her politics as her aesthetics. We can understand this equivalence in a twofold manner. First, Watkins Harper's commitment to revising the status of black speech acts as a primary apparatus for how she "thinks" her art in *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*. Second, she uses the seemingly staid, seemingly stable forms of popular poetry to reposition various components of sentimentalism, refiguring relationships between bodies and spaces, words and things, and voices and the spheres in which they come to be heard. As we have seen, across the poetry of the collection, her political commitments generate unsettling moments of disjunction, as well as paradoxical or conflicting interpretive trajectories—trends that continue into the text's closing prose selections.

"Christianity," "The Bible," and "The Colored People of America"

The final section of the 1854 version of *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* featured three short prose essays: "Christianity," "The Bible," and "The Colored People of America." In Merrihew & Thompson's subsequent 1857 printing, Watkins Harper would combine the text of

the first two of these under the title "Christianity," and add a short letter retroactively entitled "Breathing the Air of Freedom," written September 12, 1856 (and first published soon after). Both sequences illustrate the ongoing exchange between Watkins Harper's modalities of expression and the coextensive nature of her politics and aesthetics. Not only do the selections establish a connection between Watkins Harper's poetry and her other forms of public expression—essay ("Christianity"), speech ("The Colored People of America"), and published letter ("Breathing the Air of Freedom")—but they embed the political and social context of the volume within it, cementing Watkins Harper's literary pursuits with her political commitments to antislavery. Through her prose, Watkins Harper delineates the ideological, ethical, and spiritual foundations of her community, and the particular "circumstances" of the black American within this community (she details her perspective of these circumstances in "The Colored People of America").

It is particularly telling that the essay sequences appear in volumes titled *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*, as though the prose pieces that close the book meshed sufficiently enough with the conceptual or aesthetic framework of the collection that they required no introduction or explanation. In this regard, they further example the inextricable relation between Watkins Harper's political commitments and her aesthetics in that they reveal how the public's perception of her as a literary figure was enmeshed with her status as outspoken antislavery advocate, and as a woman of color in a country where women of color did not necessarily register as a speaking, thinking being in the public sphere. If the essay sequences served as merely a marketable supplement to her poetry, they also acted as a politically saturated point of entry for uninitiated readers; if they served as rationale, justification, or clarification for the

preceding poems, they structured the reader's mode of engagement with the collection and the interpretive horizon on which readers plotted their own understandings of her texts.

To put it other terms, readers would have engaged with Watkins Harper's art through her political commitments and gendered, raced identity, and they experienced its aesthetic impact on this highly charged terrain—a mode of interfacing with literature that Watkins Harper's poetry both registers and anticipates. This claim is further evidenced by her occasional integration of her poetry within her speeches, by the persistent sale of her poetry collections at her lectures, and by her later (if infrequent) recitation of poetry at her speaking engagements; as I've noted, each case details another form of reciprocity, overlap, and mutuality between the political and the literary. Advertisements and notices of the publication of *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* further evidence this exchange. A September 15, 1854, announcement of Watkins Harper's volume in *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, to cite but one example, highlights her gendered/raced identity as "one colored lady," and emphasizes the collection's importance to "certain advancement of our long enthralled and deeply injured people" ("Poems of Miscellaneous Subjects"). It also reprints William Lloyd Garrison's preface to the volume in its entirety without any inclusion of Watkins Harper's poetry alongside of it.

William Lloyd Garrison's inclination, not unlike that of many nineteenth- and twentieth-century literary critics, was to understand such unfamiliar blurring of traditional distinctions between aesthetics and politics as a potential signal of its inherent (if "innocent") aesthetic failures. Thus, he suggests that readers remember that Watkins Harper's poems are "written by one young in years, and identified in complexion and destiny with a depressed and outcast race" (4), and thereby view her poetry with a "friendly eye" and "lenient spirit" (4). I've instead argued how such conceptual zones achieve an unusual of equivalence in Watkins Harper's poetry, and

that it is possible to read and engage with the artistry of her work by attuning our interpretive practices to engage with its political commitments as significant aesthetic elements. Specifically, the equivalence between politics and aesthetics provides a means to more effectively examine and appreciate her formal, structural, and conceptual choices, particularly when we consider the emergence of the voice of free and enslaved blacks. While the title of this chapter suggests a specific interpretive trajectory, potentially problematic in that it enfolds political concerns in aesthetic and literary questions, it could be reversed, provided consideration is given to the interwoven nature of the two. That said, the volume I've examined evinces the same trajectory I've traced here, formalizing Watkins Harper's political, spiritual, and social understandings in artistic productions, thus making them open to specific aesthetic inquiries. *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*, via its title and text, calls on us to first consider poetry as the frame of our engagement with the political commitments and political arguments made by the collection—hence the direction I take within this chapter.

The essay/letter sequences that close the volume provide further evidence of these claims. Broadly speaking, they move through two progressions. The sequence of the 1854 edition ("Christianity," to "The Bible," to "The Colored People in America") charts the evolution of a system of communal thought, through its expression in the written "Word of God," to the emergence of African American as oppressed, but *speaking*, *writing*, and *thinking* beings—individuals legible (in the closing essay) as politically relevant and active members of the community. "Christianity," in fact, negotiates the connection between what Watkins Harper considers the most significant human endeavors (philosophy, science, music, poetry, etc.) and its most downtrodden members, from prisoners, the worn and weary, and the dying, to the slave—those whose "fetters have been broken" or who have been "freed from chains" (97). It thereby

offers a more direct rendering of the peculiar alchemy of the collection's opening poem, "The Syrophenician Woman," which links the quintessential figure of sentimentalism (the mother pleading for her child) to the slave. Watkins Harper then yokes this mode of sentimentality to the plight of blacks in America (as framed by the narrative of racial uplift in "The Colored People in America") through "The Bible," which she identifies as the written word that "contains truths a child may comprehend, and mysteries into which angels desire to look" (98). While Watkins Harper would not claim her own writing as God's word, she obviously takes it as the model of her "deep and strong" language, and her essays identify such text as the bridge between the Christian ideological foundations of the U.S., and the emergence of the slave as speaking, politically relevant member of the U.S. community.

The 1857 edition takes this progression further. In reprinting Watkins Harper's short letter about gazing at the "Free Land" of Canada for the first time, a letter published earlier in *National Anti-Slavery Standard* (October 4, 1856), the 1857 edition connects the slave's freedom to the publication of a black woman's writing in a national newspaper. It extends the initial sequence to a space conceptually inaccessible to the current U.S. public sphere, "a land where a poor slave … would in a moment find his fetters broken" (Harper 45), and suggests that in such a space the voice of the slave becomes wholly legible as a component of political and social discourse. That is, beyond the acceptance and emancipation of the slave lies their unflinching involvement in public discourse (exampled by the newspaper). Watkins Harper's effusive, essentially romantic, language in the letter in part indicates a willingness to employ such adorned phrasing in a space where its relationship to U.S. slavery is severed.

If she indulges in a more romantic tone, however, she does so to make a more compelling point about the type of art that emerges in such a free space. As she writes in the letter, the "land

of Freedom has a lesson of deeper significance than foaming waves or towering mountains,"

beyond the "sublimity" of the "gentle Potomac," or the "strange ecstacy [sic] and delight" of

one's "first view of the ocean" (46). As I understand it, she picks up on the terminology of

Kantian and romanticist aesthetics here to make an important distinction between it her own

concept of aesthetic experience. Canada finally provides the literal and metaphorical latitude to

indulge in soaring, even excessive, poetic language, as such language can be dissociated from

slavery. For example, in relatively uncharacteristic fashion, she writes effusively about the

landscape of the U.S., noting how "the great, the glorious Niagra, may hush your spirit with its

ceaseless thunder" and how "[t]owering mountains, lifting their hoary summits to catch the first

faint flush of day when the sunbeams kiss the shadows from morning's drowsy face, may expand

and exalt your soul" (46). Yet she participates in this discursive mode to subordinate it to her

understanding of the aesthetic; as she states, "none of the sights [of America] have melted me as

the first sight of Free Land" (46). This is a version of aesthetic experience that incorporates

political commitments, and the political itself, into its framework, where the political

composition of Canada generates an experience of its landscape that exceeds the sublimity

produced by the most noteworthy natural phenomenon—that exceeds or redefines the sublime

itself. Her first sight of Canada "carries the heart back to that heroic struggle for emancipation, in

Great Britain, in which the great heart of the people throbbed for liberty and the mighty pulse of

the nation beat for freedom till nearly 800,000 men, women and children arose redeemed from

bondage and freed from chains" (46). Within the collaborative sentiment (the "great heart of the

people") that generates social change is the increasingly audible and legible sound of the

heart*beat*, first throbbing, then pulsing, then beating with intense force. As the moment carries

her heart back, then, it also rewrites its association with sentiment as, instead, the emergence of

felt (and, finally, heard) sound as politically transformative expression.

PIAZZA FIRST: HERMAN MELVILLE'S EARLY MAGAZINE PHASE

AND "THE TOWN-HO'S STORY" AS TOLD IN *HARPER'S NEW MONTHLY MAGAZINE*

On September 29, 1851, a month and a half before the U.S. publication of *Moby-Dick*, Herman Melville rode from his home to nearby Pittsfield, Mass., to pick up his mother, Maria Melville, from the train depot.[33] While in town, he purchased a copy of the October issue of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, a recent arrival in the periodical marketplace that—by its own account, at least—already reached more than 50,000 subscribers.[34] The magazine was a relatively small expense, even given Herman's dire finances, but its contents eclipsed the routine familial reunion. After a long and grueling pursuit, part of *The Whale* had finally surfaced.

Like the monstrous pictures of whales his novel described, the magazine's excerpt of *Moby-Dick*, "The Town-Ho's Story" (Ch. 54), offered a limited view of Melville's mighty book—to get a tolerable idea of the novel's living contour, as he knew, readers would need to go a whaling themselves in its pages. Yet, whatever his misgivings, Melville would have instantly recognized the chapter's compatibility with *Harper's* October issue. Whether or not he had written or revised the chapter specifically as a promotional piece, its self-contained, highly accessible narrative was, for *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*'s middle-class audience, the ideal

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[33] See Parker, *Herman Melville, vol. 1* 866.

[34] *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* specified this number in December 1865 ("Making the Magazine"). The issues of the 1850s (see, for example, "Advertisement" in June 1851) provided less detailed, but equally positive accounts of the magazine's early success.

means to tease *The Whale*.[35] As though confirming this, the cavaliers and intriguantes of Lima,

Peru, the white-walled backdrop of his own excerpted chapter, stared back at him from the

illustrations to another article, titled "Lima and the Limanians." He had not read this piece before

writing "The Town-Ho's Story," but the detailed woodcuts made it seem that he had written his

chapter specifically for *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*—which perhaps he had.

Archival evidence about Melville's purposes for the tale remains inconclusive, as it does

regarding a number of important details about *Moby-Dick*'s U.S. publication history.[36] For

example, Eugene Exman's *The Brothers Harper* (1965), still the most detailed record of the

Harper's publishing enterprise, provides the only extant account of the reasoning behind the

tale's publication in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*. Exman writes, "As soon as proofs [of

Moby-Dick] were ready, someone in the 'Literary Department' was asked to select a portion that

could be printed in the October, 1851, issue" (296). Given Exman's obvious lack of familiarity

with Melville, and the absence of supporting evidence in Exman's files or the Harper's archive,

it is likely that Exman's claim is based on his understanding of the firm's antebellum editorial

practices rather than on any specific record of events.[37] In other words, we know as much about

the tale's inclusion in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* as we do about Melville's reasons for

staging the chapter outside of the main narrative.

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[35] For more on the nature of this audience and the magazine's "nonpartisan stance on politics, social issues, and religious topics" (167), see Post-Lauria 167-176.

[36] For example, we know few specifics about how and when Melville reached his final agreement with the Harper's publishing firm. For a detailed chronology of documented exchanges, see Parker, *Herman Melville, vol. 1*, especially chapters 38-40.

[37] Exman, a Harper's employee who undertook his histories of the firm as a legacy (semi-retirement) project, seemed to know fairly little about "The Town-Ho's Story," which he inaccurately calls "the exciting account of the chase of the whale" (*The Brothers Harper* 296). Archival material remaining from Exman's composition of the two Harper's histories also suggest limited familiarity with Melville. For example, a list of well-known authors compiled by one of his assistants includes a note that "Among [Melville's] 13 contributions to the mag. is "Town Ho's Story" … which I believe is a chapter from Moby Dick."

While frustrating from a historical perspective, the inconclusive nature of existing archival records about "The Town-Ho's Story" serves as a compelling point of departure for the argument of this chapter. The tale's uncertain relationship to the magazine leaves us with open questions concerning Melville's compositional and theoretical intentions, as well as the reasons *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*'s editors and "Literary Department" found the tale particularly suited for their needs. It also invites us to consider the tale's differing functions across mediums of publication, whether for Melville, his publishers, or his readers. At the heart of this uncertainty, however, lies the more pressing question of why the tale so readily lends itself to such a wide range of interpretive and investigative possibilities. As part of the larger claim of this chapter, I suggest that the malleability of "The Town-Ho's Story," particularly as it revolves around the tale's excitatory and anticipatory focus, stems from the magazinistic underpinnings of his conception of promotional literature. That is, in both *Moby Dick* and *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, the story serves essentially promotional purposes in respect to *The Whale* (and *the* whale). As my readings of Melville's early magazine writings make clear, his incentive for pursuing these goals, as well as his understanding of *promotion*, largely constellated around his involvement with periodicals.

This argument serves as the basis of the chapter's more extensive claim about Melville's involvement with print culture throughout the initial phase of his career as novelist and magazinist. Specifically, my analysis points to Melville's fundamentally critical and participatory understanding of the publishing marketplace throughout this phase. By these categorizations, I aim to illustrate, on one hand, Melville's familiarity with contemporary periodicals, both in respect to his reading habits and his in-depth knowledge of publishing and editing practices. His contributions to *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, *Putnam's Monthly*

Magazine, *Literary World* and *Yankee Doodle*, for example, evince considerable awareness of the editorial policies and needs of these publications—a recognition of the stylistic and thematic affinities that, from the editors' perspectives, constituted the specific appeal of each magazine within the periodical marketplace.[38] On the other hand, this phase is marked by Melville's desire to influence and shape the emerging U.S. literary sphere, as conceived through both the book and the periodical. Importantly, at this stage in Melville's writing, he still saw himself as an active participant in the developing idea of U.S. literature, as discursive phenomenon. In other words, Melville's texts both knowingly and inadvertently engage with various political, cultural, and material developments and practices, and simultaneously act to reshape and disrupt how his readers constitute the print cultures in which he participates.

As Meredith McGill argues in her pioneering study, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834-1853*, "changes in the conditions of publication make themselves felt at the level of literary form" (3) and "the politics of culture is played out at the level of form and format as well as in the explicit themes of literary texts" (15). In many respects, "The Town-Ho's Story," which formally and thematically explores questions of mediation, publication, and legitimization, persuasively examples this interplay between the politics of culture—specifically the mechanisms of U.S. print culture—and the literary. However, the nebulous aspects of its publication history, particularly considered in light of Melville's extensive and discerning involvement with the publishing marketplace, suggest a more porous exchange than McGill posits between textual form and format, political and cultural context, and individual writers. The evocative gaps in "The Town-Ho's Story" archive alert us to the uncertain, overlapping, and

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[38] Melivlle's decision to have *Moby-Dick* "printed at his own expense, so he might sell the plates to the publisher who made him the best offer" (Parker, *Herman Melville, vol. 1* 839) further attests to his understanding of the editorial facets of the publishing marketplace.

permeable peripheries of these categories not simply because they are analogous to similar

shortcomings in the bulk of nineteenth-century publishing and literary archives, but because they

are representative of the text's shifting mode involvement in shaping and sustaining the elements

constituting such interpretive schema. Like much of Melville's early (pre-1853) magazine work,

the tale and its archive illustrate simultaneous tensions and fusions taking place between a

writer's attempts to delineate various market-based and literary categories, and the influence of

these categories, as partially legible but mobile discursive formations, on his conception and

expression of the literary. In the push and pull between a text and context, then, the "level of

form" is not a purely legible historical/cultural signifier, but a mercurial middle space where

such divisions are contested and provisionally constituted.

McGill is concerned with a related model, describing her study of reprinting as a means

to detail "the complex reciprocity between the discourses and practices of a particular print

culture—to show how a political struggle over property rights comes to structure the literary

field, and how the question of the cultural status of the literary gets folded into the texts

themselves" (*Culture of Reprinting* 8). As we will see, Melville's magazine work invites us to

modify this paradigm by revealing both the "literary field" and "cultural status of the literary" as

fluctuating conceptual terrains—not simply across different periods and cultural formations, such

as in the shift to the "national literary culture that [Hawthorne] comes to represent" (*Culture of*

Reprinting 221), but within any given temporality or seemingly unitary culture. In other words,

while McGill locates a reciprocal exchange between discourse and practice, she stages these

elements within and against a "culture of reprinting" and its successor, a "national literary

culture"—broader structures that dictate and largely predetermine the nature of this reciprocity.

The works I examine suggest, on one hand, less cohesive, systemic, and pervasive cultural

formations, and on the other, a denser entanglement between cultural fields, material practices, and textual expression.

"The Town Ho's Story" as Lure

The long Vaticans and street-stalls of earth, well-stocked with criticism on the life and works of Herman Melville, reserve a surprisingly small corner for discussions of "The Town-Ho's Story." Half-filled shelves may be familiar sights respecting some of Melville's poetry, but considering the casks of ink tried from *Moby-Dick*, it is unusual that critics have blubbered so little about the novel's longest chapter. However limited, the existing scholarship illustrates why the tale has received so little critical attention: A near uniform commitment to integrating the story with the overall design of the novel implies that, for many readers, "The Town-Ho's Story" seems to have little, if any, connection to *Moby-Dick*. Paradoxically, those who have engaged with it as somehow distinct from the main narrative still read it through the context of the novel, interpreting it as a vestige of Melville's early drafts, a resolution of the novel's opening storyline, or an ambiguous allegory encapsulating or reexamining the novel's themes.[39] Thus, while the tale remains neglected because it appears "complete in itself" (Forsythe 314), critical studies have not effectively engaged with it as such.

Resituating the tale in its original site of publication, the October 1851 issue of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, provides a means to cut the various Gordian knots produced by current scholarship. For the *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* audience, and for the readers of its known re-printings in the *Baltimore Weekly Sun* and the *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, the tale would have

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[39] For more on the ambiguous nature of the tale, see Reddick, Rose, and Spofford. See Barbour for an early discussion of "The Town-Ho's Story" as an early version of *Moby-Dick*. For a succinct summary of some of the traditional approaches to the tale, see Egan 337.

been most recognizable as publicity for a "new work by Mr. Melville" ("The Town-Ho's Story"

658), as the magazine's footnote suggested. The interpretive impasses produced by elements like

Ishmael's uncharacteristic reticence to discuss Moby-Dick because it is "too long a story" (*Moby*

Dick 256) or by his equally anomalous framing of the tale "upon the thick-gilt tiled piazza of the

Golden Inn" (*Moby Dick* 243) in Lima, quickly disappear from view in the pages of *Harper's*

New Monthly Magazine. The full story of the white whale is indeed too long for the magazine,

and the frame tale allows magazine readers seeking quasi-literary entertainment to engage with a

yarn told, seemingly, for their benefit. Considering that "The Town-Ho's Story" would become

one of the most widely anthologized selections of Melville's work in the twentieth-century,

particularly before the surge of critical interest in Melville's later magazine stories, nineteenth-

century periodical readers' initial encounters with the story as an independent work also reflect

more recent experiences with the tale.

While such considerations seem to support claims that the tale is indeed able to "stand

alone" (Paul 212), as Sherman Paul and other critics have suggested, the tale's publication in

Harper's New Monthly Magazine, subsequent re-printings, and twentieth-century anthologies

point to slightly different explanation. "The Town-Ho's Story" is fundamentally *promotional*,

standing "alone" only insofar as its publication context positions it in anticipatory and excitatory

relation to a larger, if momentarily unavailable, network of meaning. Its promotional function is

evidenced not only by its frequent use as a synecdochical lure for Melville's other work, but by

its place within *Moby-Dick*, where it parallels "The First Lowering" (Ch. 52) of the Pequod's

crew as the reader's first, intentionally tantalizing expedition for Moby-Dick. Ishmael announces

the specifically promotional purposes of the tale at its outset, notifying his readers that "To some

the general interest in the White Whale was now wildly heightened by a circumstance of the

Town-Ho's story" (*Moby Dick* 242). By signaling the intended effects of the tale in respect to his

readers' *mode* of interest and engagement, he initiates its function as a means to forestall, and

thereby intensify, the later appearance of Moby-Dick, rather than positioning it simply as an

unconnected, stand-alone sketch. In its promotional capacity, "The Town-Ho's Story" is also

integrally linked to the transatlantic publishing marketplace, particularly the U.S. periodical.

As Eric Lupfer details, *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, like other weeklies produced

by general-interest publishers, "served as an important promotional tool, a means of

communicating the values and prestige of the firm to readers throughout the country" (253).

Amidst the increasing integration of magazine and book production after 1840, publishers

established their own magazines, viewing them "not as independent concerns but as a means to

support the firms' business in books" (Lupfer 251). Additionally, although magazine and

newspaper advertising was still in its infancy during this period, publishers also began issuing

advertisements for their books in other periodicals.[40] In other words, large scale U.S. book

promotion, whether through advertisement or firm-aligned periodical, emerged as a cohesive

concept during the mid-nineteenth century. Because (non-book) product advertising was still

developing throughout the 1840s and 1850s—large display advertisements, for example, didn't

appear in newspapers until after the U.S. Civil War—such book promotion in fact represented

one of the most visible and established forms of all advertising *promotion*.[41]

Moby-Dick, in which oceanic leviathan, material book, and text-as-concept continuously

play off and interweave with one another, invites us to perceive references to the whale in

respect to both novel and animal, a connection that "Cetology" (Ch. 32) makes explicit via the

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[40] As Nelson and Chasar argue, advertising emerged as a "coherent industry in the United States" (134) between 1860 and 1920, but the 1840s and 1850s witnessed the opening of the first advertising agencies.

[41] See Nelson and Chasar 134.

division of whale species into books and chapters. "The Town-Ho's Story," concerned with inciting excitement and suspense about Moby-Dick—and, by extension of the novel's logic, about *Moby-Dick*—and with interrogating the public mediums through which these sensations are produced, thus sports with the indefinite distinction between book promotion and *promotion*, as broader emerging phenomenon. That is, Melville's mode of teasing the whale for his readers draws explicitly on the periodical's methods of generating consumerist anticipation regarding future (serialization or recurring columns) and external (book advertising) content, in part because such marketing "strategies" stem from the evolving commercial facets of the periodical. However, because Melville consistently turns a reflexive gaze on his own methods, the examination of his own promotional methods also acts to disclose and critique the periodical-based foundations of these tactics. Thus, as he undertakes "The Town-Ho's Story," the fish story to set the stage for his own fish story, he is highly attuned to the material and discursive practices that invest his tale with its capacity to stimulate his audience—to the particular frameworks that make his story possible and entertaining. In the case of "The Town-Ho's Story," a tale meant to tantalize readers about Melville's whale-book, these practices are simultaneously those that structure the publisher-driven periodical, a medium built around such promotional teasing.

Similarities between "The Town-Ho's Story" and Melville's "Authentic Anecdotes of 'Old Zack'," published anonymously in *Yankee Doodle* during July, August, and September of 1847, offer a means to explore the links between the anticipatory mode of the magazine and those of Melville's excerpted chapter. *Yankee Doodle* (1846-47), a short-lived weekly established as the American answer to the successful British humor magazine, *Punch* (1841), was edited during the latter half of its year-long run by Cornelius Mathews, an intimate friend of *Literary World* editor Evert Duyckinck, who was also a close associate of Melville's. Although

the magazine "left but little impression on the minds and manners of Americans of the 1840's" (Sealts 468), Melville's anecdotes were reprinted in the New York *Evening Post* (July 23 and August 17, 1847), and praised by J. B. Auld, a fellow *Yankee Doodle* contributor, and by Duyckinck himself. They were also highlighted in a promotional blurb in the bound version of *Yankee Doodle* (1847), which called them "delightful, … copied everywhere, … and enjoyed heartily, even by the venerable old hero himself" (*Piazza Tales* 637). The series of anecdotes, whatever their perceived literary value, are therefore representative of the type of magazine fare enjoyed by readers, and prized by a variety of active and influential—if not always successful— writers and editors.[42]

The anecdotes present a series of bogus first-hand accounts of presidential hopeful, General Zachary Taylor, as related by a magazine correspondent "sent to the seat of war for the express purpose of getting together and transmitting to [*Yankee Doodle*] all reliable *on dits* connected with old ZACK" (*Piazza Tales* 212). These brief sketches, which range from grotesque descriptions of Taylor's physical characteristics and eating habits to an apocryphal letter penned by Taylor to General Santa Ana (amidst the Mexican-American War), typically exploit the type of "low-brow" and Rabelasian bodily humor frequently associated with nineteenth-century humor magazines, and later with sensationalism.[43] Melville, however, frames his ribald anecdotes with a series of claims that establish their overtly spurious reliability. Reiterating the obvious insincerity of the title's assertion that the anecdotes are "authentic," the introductory sketch hyperbolizes the "reliable" and "respectable" (*Piazza Tales* 212) nature of its sources to such an excessive degree that each declaration of truth serves merely to entrench its

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[42] Sealts, for example, deems the anecdotes of "slight intrinsic worth as humorous writing" ("Historical Note" 467).

[43] See, for example, Stewart 376.

satirical charlatanism. The opening sketch even furnishes "a written certificate" (*Piazza Tales* 213) from Taylor "asserting [*Yankee Doodle*'s] columns to be the only true source where an anxious public can procure a correct insight into his private life and little personal peculiarities" (*Piazza Tales* 213). The status of this mode of invented authenticity as *promotion* is made clear through the text's frequent allusions to notorious confidence man and self-publicist, P.T. Barnum, which foreground the concept of self-promotion as a brand of publicized, but potentially counterfeit, authenticity. Melville's Barnum, also counterfeit, attempts to procure the various items described within each anecdote for exhibition in his museum, claiming that "We feel confident, however, in stating that the latter will not be exhibited for the genuine article, unless the genuine article fails to come to hand" (*Piazza Tales* 215). He thereby illustrates the confidence game at the core of publicized—and indeed published—promotion of authenticity, which, through the tautological rhetoric of *confidence*, produces the "genuine" regardless of its ability to be substantiated.

The most evident purposes of the introductory's exaggerated truth claims are to heighten the comic effect of the proceeding anecdotes, and to provide a skeletal continuity for the ongoing series. The humorousness of the descriptions of Taylor's physique, habits, and prevailing bumpkinism is, then, enhanced by the interplay between eye-witness account and overt confidence game. This interplay is also promotional, insofar as the introductory sketch is meant to foster interest in later installments, to intensify the response to the sketch itself, and to identify key thematic elements in subsequent segments. In each function, however, one is left to wonder *why* the tension between legitimacy and manipulation would generate comic and anticipatory excitement. The answer, I'd like to suggest, is bound up in the function of the mass-market magazine, a medium predicated on the validity of both its subjective and factual claims, but

reliant upon generating a market for its particular stylistic, thematic, and editorial approach—or,

in the case of publishing-firm-aligned periodicals, in sustaining a parallel market for a related

product (books). That is, the modes of excitement produced by the exchange between first-hand

account and con exploit one of the central tensions of the magazine medium—the friction

between magazine as a source of information, and as a stylized marketing vehicle for itself, and

for the politics and products with which it was associated.

An article called "Public Opinion and the Public Press," originally published in the

weekly English journal *Household Words* (1851-59) and later reprinted in *Harper's New

Monthly Magazine*, succinctly articulates this tension between periodical as factual source and as

stylized vehicle of self-publicity. The article claims "Among us … even the most ignorant well

know that there is no field for vulgar revolution against such a monarch as Opinion makes.

Arguments must be used for barricades, and we must knock our neighbors on the head with

facts; we must fire newspaper articles instead of cannon-balls, and use colloquial banter for our

small shot" (193). Exalting the position of the "Opinion" to that of successful, indeed

unquestionable monarch, the article strengthens its own claims to legitimacy through an

emphasis on the factual basis of the newspaper and the press with which it is aligned.[44] These

claims are nonetheless positioned within an elaborately stylized martial metaphor that links the

exchange of ideas with the anxious excitement of battle, thereby marking it something other than

factual. The type of satire Melville undertakes in the "Old Zack" anecdotes, familiar in

magazines like *Punch* and *Yankee Doodle*, plays off of the friction between fact and stylized self-

promotion, and is, in this sense, both produced and rendered effective by the periodical format.

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[44] "Public Opinion and the Public Press" also suggests that "every phase of opinion speaks through some book
or journal" (192), thus linking the monarch Opinion to the printed word.

This format embodies the discursive and material practices required to, on one hand, conceptualize and, on the other, appreciate such writing.

It is therefore significant that Ishmael opens and closes "The Town-Ho's Story" with similarly exaggerated testimony concerning the reliability of his sources. The tale itself concerns a series of confrontations between the mate of a whaling vessel, an overbearing Nantucketer named Radney, and his subordinate, a charismatic "handsome sailor" named Steelkilt. Their dispute, which begins over a disagreement about shipboard duties and quickly escalates to Steelkilt's failed mutiny, is resolved in its final act by the seemingly supernatural intervention of Moby-Dick, who plunges into the ocean with Radney in his jaws shortly before Steelkilt would have murdered him. In respect to its themes and substance, the story resembles a number of the novel's other gam chapters, but unlike Ishmael's accounts of these ship-to-ship encounters, "The Town-Ho's Story" is told the tale at multiple removes from the main narrative. Not only does Ishmael base the details of his story on what is essentially an elaborate version of "Telephone," in which one of "three confederate white seamen" aboard the *Town-Ho* relates the tale to the harpooner, Tashtego, who then rambles much of the story in his sleep to the crew of the *Pequod*, but he explicitly assumes an alternative style of narration and positions his telling in a setting wholly foreign to the rest of the novel. He gives readers limited explanation for these disruptive shifts, saying only that "For my humor's sake, I shall preserve the style in which I once narrated it at Lima, to a lounging circle of my Spanish friends, one saint's eve, smoking upon the thick-gilt tiled piazza of the Golden Inn" (*Moby Dick* 243)—an explanation that produces far less confusion in the context of the magazine.

Like the introductory of the "Old Zack" anecdotes, the unusual framing of "The Town-Ho's Story" attempts to build excitement for its narrative via an interplay between reliable source

and confidence game, with a whimsical but genial Ishmael playing the con artist. Where the anecdotes exaggerate their (obviously counterfeit) authenticity, "The Town-Ho's Story" exaggerates the mediation—and the potential unreliability—of its source material, to similar effect. By excessively foregrounding each distortive medium influencing his tale, from numerous cross-cultural exchanges to narrations across different modes of consciousness (sleeping and waking), Ishmael's framing establishes the story in a space where the factual can be consciously stylized and modulated to such a degree as to be entertaining to his listeners, or, alternatively, where its fiction is aligned closely enough with reality as to infuse the real with the possibilities of fantasy. The "Old Zack" anecdotes heighten their humor by staging grotesque caricatures of Zachary Taylor in a recognizably invented relationship to authenticity, specifically through the figures of the first-hand account (the war correspondent) and written record (Taylor's certificate). In like manner, "The Town-Ho's Story" heightens the excitement evoked by its narrative by highlighting its mediated relationship to the first-hand account, in a sense by signaling both proximity to and distance from the very element that would legitimate it.

As I've suggested, this paradoxical relation to the mechanisms of legitimacy is similarly at work in the periodical—a medium that must both circulate authentic information and modulate this information in such a manner as to stylistically or conceptually distinguish itself. The similarities between "The Town-Ho's Story" and "Old Zack" anecdotes, on one hand, support the possibility that Melville revised or wrote the chapter specifically for magazine publication, as they indicate a similar stylization of very different subject matter around the question of authenticity. On the other, they suggest that Melville's concept of promotional literature was—regardless of his intentions for the piece—integrally linked to his understanding of magazine practices, and that "The Town-Ho's Story" draws on these practices to "wildly" amplify the

expectant interest in Melville's whale-book. Melville thus positions his promotional piece within a frame that is structured to further enhance its excitatory qualities.

That the opening frame is specifically intended as both anticipatory and excitatory is evident at the close of the story, when one of the Limanian Dons starts to "press" Ishmael as to whether the narrative comes from an "unquestionable source" (*Moby Dick* 258). Ishmael quickly calls for a priest and the "largest sized Evangelists" (*Moby Dick* 259) available in order to swear to the legitimacy of his story. Contradicting his elaborate introductory, however, he claims, "I trod the ship; I knew the crew; I have seen and talked with Steelkilt since the death of Radney" (*Moby Dick* 259). This announcement indicates that Ishmael is either admitting to lying under oath, or has been lying to his readers since the outset. To further complicate matters, Ishmael issues this claim from within the Lima setting, not through whatever present moment from which he issues its elaborate preface.[45] That is, his admission is part of his story, not part of the address that frames it. The reader is therefore left to wonder whether to trust the initial framing narrative, which inherently aligns itself with the current medium of publication (from which it issues), or to trust the tale framed by this introductory.

In her incisive study of "The Town-Ho's Story" in *Melville's City*, Wyn Kelley states that the reader's "first speculation must be that Ishmael has not in fact met Steelkilt" (185), but she finally considers the tone of Ishmael's description of Steelkilt sufficient proof of his candor. I'd like to suggest that, to a large extent, it doesn't matter which Ishmael we choose to trust. Ishmael's final claim reveals that assertions of truth predicated on the eye-witness account or on similar forms of legitimization can issue from medium of publication or from the content being mediated, but that, in either case, these assertions have distinct rhetorical functions, regardless of

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[45] For more on the multiplicity of Ishmael's temporalities and character, see Bezanson's foundational essay, "*Moby-Dick*: Work of Art"; see also Egan.

their accuracy. Thus, in "The Town-Ho's Story," contradictory truth claims issue from the novel or magazine (the frame, dependent on the publishing locale), and from the content that is framed by these mediums. Although how we understand the tale is, in part, based on how we navigate this contradiction, the tension between content and frame acts to foreground the specifically *rhetorical* means by which these mechanisms establish their supposed authenticity. That Kelley finally bases her argument in the persuasiveness of Ishmael's rhetoric, I think, further supports this reading. In other words, Kelley is convinced by the rhetorical style of Ishmael's descriptions (or, more specifically, Melville's particular mode of fictionalization at this moment), rather than by verifiable evidence, thereby alerting us to the rhetorical underpinnings of any form of textual legitimacy. If "The Town-Ho's Story" is indeed promotional, it suggests—like the "Old Zack" anecdotes, or P.T. Barnum's ceaseless self-promotion—that *authenticity* is, above all, a textual device used to generate or amplify certain modes of attention.

Fake News and the Materiality of Print Mediums

Like much of Melville's magazine work, the "Old Zack" anecdotes and "The Town-Ho's Story" indicate an incisive awareness of the conceits of the magazine medium and the related mechanics of the public sphere. Both texts reveal a distinct perception of the material and stylistic elements that constitute the magazine and its content, as well as of the potential functions and effects of these elements for magazine publics, particularly in regard to the interlinked concerns of authority and marketability. In certain respects, "The Town-Ho's Story" thus seems to engage with what Michael Warner has deemed the "self-organized" nature of publics. That is, through Melville's production of Ishmael's publics via the successive frames of the tale, he renders the illusory layering that generates both the legitimacy of and fascination

with the periodical—and, ultimately, the imagined community that coalesces around it. The tale

thus sports with ways that the magazine organizes a space of discourse through "nothing other

than discourse itself" (Warner 67), specifically in respect to the magazine's mechanisms for

establishing its authority.

Such simultaneously critical and participatory engagement with the publishing

marketplace is further apparent in his frequent attention to the material aspects of publication.

Although he most explicitly explores such themes in the paper-mill/Tartarus section of "The

Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," Melville's early magazine writings provide

regular allusions to publishing practices and the materiality of books and magazines. The "Old

Zack" anecdotes, for example, make unsettling and clever use of typographical, printing, and

correspondence practices in one of the final installments of the series. This installment,

"Anecdote VIII," publishes yet another (bogus) letter from Taylor to *Yankee Doodle*, which

closes with the following:

> I saw that you wish to know my principles! I don't like to commit myself positively; but
> as a printer, and I'm a sort of printer myself, having often made a strong impression—
> you will understand what I say. I shall always endeavor to support the—
>
> ```
> *  *  *  *  *  *  _____ _____ _____
> *  *  *  *  *  *  _____ _____ _____
> *  *  *  *  *  *  _____ _____ _____
> *  *  *  *  *  *  _____ _____ _____
> *  *  *  *  *  *  _____ _____ _____
> _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
> _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
> _____ _____ _____ _____ _____  (Piazza Tales 227)
> ```

In one of the more intriguing moments of the anecdotes, Melville manages to ridicule Taylor's

simplicity and "inability or unwillingness to positively declare his views" (Jecmen 113), as one

commentator suggests, while simultaneously disturbing a wide array of relationships between

textual representation and the world it purportedly represents. Taylor's joking (presumably)

conflation of printing and worldly "impression" attunes the reader to the related fusion of nation, textile flag, typographical image, and text performed by the asterisks and lines at the close of his message. Rather than simply prolonging the joke, however, the typographical flag disrupts the seeming intent of Taylor's statement, making the reader question the literal substance of his claim. Is it print, paper, textile, or nation that Taylor endeavors to support? Not only does Old Zack appear to dishonor the symbol of U.S. nationhood by crudely rendering it via type, but he calls into doubt the connection between nation as represented within the press and nation as elsewhere performed, imagined, and embodied. Taylor's allegiance here is given to the public opinion of an empty cypher, to empty lines and printer's symbols waiting to be filled by the reader's imagination—rather than to any specific set of ideals or ideas. Although the thrust of Melville's satire is ostensibly directed at Taylor, its implications extend across both sides of the relationship between the political and print. Like P.T. Barnum's "genuine article," the printed version of the flag need not be linked to the authentic object it is meant to (transparently) exhibit. Print seemingly provides a means to bypass such authentic sources, thereby generating a political and national realm *not necessarily connected* to the genuine, first-hand accounts/objects that sustain it as a conceptual apparatus. Thus, Taylor's crude typographical play suggests that print produces, rather than represents, a distinct space of political and national affiliation.

Melville's review of Putnam's 1850 edition of James Fennimore Cooper's *The Red Rover* (1827), titled "A Thought on Book-Binding" (1850), exhibits a similar attention to the materiality of print mediums. Essentially a review of the binding of Cooper's republished novel, rather than its text, the short piece begins by addressing the publisher's lack of "propriety" in binding Cooper's novel with "the sober-hued muslin wherewith Mr. Putnam equips his lighter sort of craft" (*Piazza Tales* 237). Later in the review, Melville sarcastically praises the "book-

binders' relievo" that the "tasteful publisher" (*Piazza Tales* 237) has stamped on the covers. He jokingly links this relievo, a "poetical signification and pictorial shadowing forth of the horse-shoe" (*Piazza Tales* 237), to the nautical subjects of Cooper's romance by noting that horseshoes can be "found nailed to the mast" of all "honest and God-fearing piratical vessels" (*Piazza Tales* 238)—which is to say, by suggesting (in Barnum-like rhetoric) that the image has no connection whatsoever to the maritime world. His remarks thus satirically implicate Putnam in "the sad lack of invention in most of our bookbinders" (*Piazza Tales* 238), who do not recognize that "bindings should indicate and distinguish" the "various characters" (*Piazza Tales* 238) of books. In the final paragraph, he appears to excuse his review for literally judging a book by its cover, noting that "at present day we deem any elaborate criticism of Cooper's Red Rover quite unnecessary and uncalled-for" (*Piazza Tales* 238). He concludes, "Long ago, and far inland, we read it in our uncritical days, and enjoyed it as much as the thousands of the rising generation will when supplied with such an entertaining volume in such agreeable type" (Piazza Tales 238).

Hester Blum argues that, on one hand, Melville's closing comments indicate his acknowledgement that Cooper's popularity and reputation "had been well enough established to preclude any late attacks on the novel" (125). On the other, she locates a sly but visible critique of the novel in Melville's contrast between his "present day" critical and nautical awareness and the "uncritical days" in which he "and the large pool of readers included in the royal "we" first read *The Red Rover*" (125). Her perceptive reading nonetheless overlooks the way that Melville's conclusion renews and expands the review's criticism of the Putnam's particular publication, as material object. Beyond simply expressing the literary and nautical deficiencies of Cooper's novel, the conclusion affirms that the review is primarily directed at a specific *printing* and *binding* of the book, not the text itself, which is at least partially caught in the force of

Melville's badinage. In the final paragraph, the "uncritical days" of Melville youth merge with

the reading experience produced specifically by the mass-market book, a product supplied to

generate an "entertaining" and "agreeable" response among a wide, but shallow, audience. The

final sentence thus justifies—rather than excuses—his seemingly superficial inversion of the

review formula. By treating the binding of Putnam's book with the significance typically allotted

to textual content (which, in turn, receives the type of cursory coverage regularly offered to an

edition's material features), Melville identifies Putnam's new edition as a material commodity

rather than as a medium through which the "authentic" product—the text as content—is

provided. While this obviously belies Melville's frustrations with republication and reprinting in

respect to his own novels, as new editions of old works could negatively impact the sale of and

interest in his books, Melville's review is less directed at large-scale publishing practices or

capitalistically aligned aesthetic principles than it is at Putnam's specific handling of *The Red*

Rover. The review endeavors to show that, because Putnam's binding and printing of Cooper's

work—the very elements that would it distinguish it from other editions—show no relation to or

awareness of the textual content bound and printed, *it designates itself* as, above all else, a

commodity. Melville's piece therefore attempts to treat the new addition on the terms that it

dictates, not due to its status as republished work, but due to Putnam's uninventive and cheap

commodification of Cooper's text. The frustrations perhaps apparent in the review do not stem

from being asked (by Evert Duychinck) to reassess an established, well-known text, but from

being asked to discuss the text of a material object that does not appear to acknowledge anything

beyond a material relationship to this text.

Melville amplifies the stakes of the gap between Putnam's publication and Cooper's text

through his "suggestion" that books "are a species of men … living, without vulgarly

breathing—never speaking unless spoken to" (*Piazza Tales* 238). While this statement registers what we might consider an aesthetically minded ideological stance, in which art objects have their own life, Melville's phrasing of his viewpoint as a *suggestion* reveals a more flexible and participatory conception of the literary text than such a stance would allow, even as articulates the core issue of Putnam's mistreatment of the novel. By treating a book like a commodity, Putnam's repositions this type of object as a commodity within the public sphere. Melville's review responds to this shift by repositioning the commentary in like fashion, engaging with Putnam's edition of Cooper's novel as he might with newly designed packaging for a household product. Bound up in his critique, however, is an important connection between the treatment of literary texts and the treatment of human beings, in which the commodification of a text serves to reshape the character of social interactions, reducing potentially vital relationships of the "divinest intimacy" (*Piazza Tales* 238) to merely agreeable entertainment. Melville's claim that books are a species of men is, then, less a declaration of his aesthetic standpoint than it is an attempt to work through and express the ways that various material and discursive practices occurring within the public sphere shape human interactions. The commodification of a literary text leads to a commodification of an individual's relationship to this text, made manifest by the like "commodification" of Melville's critical response to Putnam's edition of Cooper's novel. Melville's alternative "suggestion" to treat the literary object as one might treat a fellow human being instead results in an ability to "circulate in the 'very best society' that this world can furnish, without the intolerable infliction of 'dressing' to go into it" (*Piazza Tales* 238). That is, it facilitates a flattened, participatory, and democratic mode of engagement available to anyone, even those in the "shabbiest coat" (*Piazza Tales* 238), who might "speak" with a text.

However sympathetic the literarily inclined reader might be to the model Melville proposes, I am more concerned with how his overall strategies within the three early magazine works I've examined evince a simultaneously critical and participatory mode of engagement with various facets of the publishing marketplace. The critiques that Melville levels against the periodical's claims to authenticity, and against the increasing commodification of the literary represent his attempts to revise and call attention to such trends. Given his later retreat from the publishing marketplace (specifically *as* marketplace), which coincided with his prolonged engagement with poetry, such attempts also indicate a belief in the capacity of the author to participate in the construction of the *literary*, as discursive entity.

As Melville's correspondence of the period indicates, he harbored negative apprehensions regarding the periodical form, but such apprehensions were not as unequivocal or conclusive as most critical studies suggest. In the final phases of *Moby-Dick*, for example, he wrote English publisher Richard Bentley, "This country & nearly all its affairs are governed by sturdy backwoodsmen—noble fellows enough, but not at all literary, & who care not a fig for any authors except those who write the most saleable of all books nowadays—i e—the newspapers, & magazines" (Leyda, *Melville Log* 417). He thus partially distinguishes *literary* production from the periodical form, even as he conflates the two via the concept of the *book*, a form that he previously elevated to living status in his review of *The Red Rover*. In many respects, this underscores the ways that material practices often subverted and impacted attempts to identify a specifically literary sphere, making it more fluid and more dependent on individual circumstances than a fully developed aesthetic conception might allow. Melville's comments to Bentley also hint at his increasing disillusionment with the publishing marketplace, particularly in respect to publishers' rather unsurprising prioritization of sales over what he considered

"literary" quality. If such prioritization was to be expected, however, it was not necessarily ubiquitous in the party press system still in place, as evidenced by the financial struggles of various abolitionist presses—presses that typically privileged political message over sales and, to a degree, material circulation.[46] As McGill notes of the period, "dissemination ran in advance of, and often stood in lieu of, payment" (*Culture of Reprinting* 2).

The three pieces I've discussed, which lead up to and through his writing of *Moby-Dick*, indicate that the critical perspective Melville expresses to Bentley was tied to a larger, essentially participatory conception of the publishing marketplace and the public sphere. Not only did Melville actively, and sometimes enthusiastically, contribute to magazines during this writing phase, but the practices he associated with the magazine medium were integral to how he understood various aspects of the literary itself—as evidenced by "The Town-Ho's Story." More pointedly, his critical outlook on the marketplace, whether directed at book publishers like Putnam (who wouldn't launch *Putnam's Monthly Magazine* until 1853) or at the rhetorical foundations of the magazine form, suggests that he understood this arena to be continuously shaped by the authors, editors, publishers, and material practices contributing to it. Thus, despite the negative categorization of "newspapers, & magazines" in Melville's letter to Bentley, the thrust of his critique is directed at the periodical's tendency to collapse the "literary" into its commodified embodiment as the "book"—which is to say, at a process increasingly sponsored by a medium rather than at the medium itself. This idea of the *literary*, which would shift dramatically (to a category *already* collapsed into its commodified aspect) across his contributions to *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* and *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, nonetheless

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[46] See, for example, Nerone's discussion of William Lloyd Garrison's *The Liberator*, whose subscription list "dropped as low as four hundred" (235), despite its ability to continually make news via reprinting in other newspapers.

holds out the promise of a space of textual participation capable of regulating and contesting the fusion of economic and artistic concerns Melville considered embodied by both the mass-market book and mass-market periodical.

PIAZZA SECOND: HERMAN MELVILLE'S *BENITO CERENO* AND

THE EVOLUTION OF THE DIPTYCH

The following chapter examines the structures, narratives, and material contexts of

Herman Melville's bipartite tales, often referred to as his *diptychs*, a label first used by Melville

scholar Jay Leyda in 1949.[47] My argument moves through two phases, first undertaking a

detailed analysis of the three bipartite stories, then shifting to a discussion of *Benito Cereno* in

respect to the diptych form. In the first section, I suggest that the diptych is a structural

instantiation of the literary magazine, as conceived by Melville. Investigating his bipartite tales

in respect to periodicals like *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (which featured two of the

diptychs) and *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, I therefore detail how such formal structuring of the

magazine space allows Melville to experiment with and call attention to the various subject and

spectator positions he saw as available within the magazine. These experiments, I argue, prompt

Melville to undertake similar examinations of Romantic interiority (in "The Two Temples") and

the material practices sustaining the publishing marketplace (in "The Paradise of Bachelors and

the Tartarus of Maids"). The latter investigation propels his recognition of the interlinked nature

of observation, representation, and medium, which he subsequently leverages in *Benito Cereno*.

The second stage of the chapter discusses how Melville modulates the diptych structure

in both *Benito Cereno* and "The Piazza," the short frame tale that opens *The Piazza Tales*. I

argue that *Benito Cereno* foregrounds the third-person narrative in a similar manner to his

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[47]See Leyda, Introduction xx.

foregrounding of the spectator narrators of his bipartite tales, thus revealing the narrative's

complicity with and enforcement of Delano's dangerously oblivious and violently oppressive

perspective. The two-part structure of *Benito Cereno* invites the reader to track the implications

of such a complicit position into the tale's deposition sequence, in a sense staging *narrative* in

place of the diptych's flawed *narrator* as a means to render continuity and a homologous

relationship between seemingly transparent legal records and recognizably stylized fiction. The

tale thus attempts to prompt readers to develop interpretive strategies that circumvent such

complicit representational modes. The section closes with an investigation of "The Piazza,"

reading the frame tale as a diptych-like interrogation of novelistic romance and the magazine

(figured in the tale as the piazza itself). Melville's investigation leads not to his exhaustion, a

characterization critics have frequently used to describe a number of Melville's late stories, but

to his understanding of the Romance and tale as potentially exhausted forms.[48] This realization, I

suggest, finally leads him to the overt artifice of poetry as a solution to his narrative impasse, a

trajectory that also serves as the thread connecting the two piazzas (chapters 2 and 3) of my

dissertation.

Melville wrote his diptych sequence shortly after his completion of "Cock-A-Doodle-

Doo!" and "Bartleby, the Scrivener," sometime during the period between "late summer of 1853

and the following spring" (*Piazza Tales* 697).[49] Two of these tales, "The Paradise of Bachelors

and the Tartarus of Maids" (1855) and "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs" (1854),

were published in *Harper's*, while "The Two Temples" was rejected by *Putnam's* editor, Charles

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[48] Merton Sealts's "Herman Melville's 'I and My Chimney'" offers an early example of this characterization. See also Delbanco 222-9 and 244-5; Robertson-Lorant 352-9.

[49] See also Parker, *Herman Melville, vol. 2* 217-24.

F. Briggs. The latter tale, now well known, remained unpublished during Melville's lifetime.[50]

The diptychs each present a two-sided tale, stitched together by a common narrator, a shared

thematic and critical focus, the occasional recollection, and a closing paragraph that references

the bifurcated title of the story. Like the widely discussed final line of "Bartleby, the Scrivener"

("Ah Bartleby! Ah humanity!"), these closing titular references, common to Melville's short

fiction, provide trite, seemingly arbitrary, reflections or exclamations regarding the narrator's

experiences. The narrator of "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," for

example, recognizably borrows from the close of "Bartleby" when issuing his final platitude,

"Oh! Paradise of Bachelors! and oh! Tartarus of Maids!" (335). The tales thereby tend to offer

ostensibly decisive closure to the tale without providing a convincing foundation for this closure.

In her pivotal account of Melville's interaction with U.S. print culture, Sheila Post-Lauria

suggest that both the diptych form and the "final sentimentalized exclamation" (168) draw from

their generic context, specifically the sentimental fiction found in mid-nineteenth century

magazines and novels. She further suggests that Melville frequently adheres to sentimental

rhetorical strategies in order to "reach out and instruct the reader on the limitations of the

sentimental approach to treating social issues in fiction" (175). Post-Lauria and Timothy Helwig

also highlight additional links between Melville's diptychs and sentimental literature, detailing

the influence of texts like Catherine Sedgwick's novel *The Poor Rich Man and the Rich Poor

Man*, and sentimentally inflected magazine pieces like "Pin Money: How It Is Spent; Needle

Money: How It Is Earned" (an illustration from *Godey's Lady Book*) or "Two Paths in Life"

(found in *Harper's*).[51] However, Melville's fixation on the diptych as the primary structural

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[50] For more on the history of "The Two Temples" manuscript, see Melvile, *Piazza Tales* 705.

[51] See Post Lauria 171-173, and Helwig 10

device for three successive tales suggests generic engagement that moves well beyond these texts. As Helwig points out, for example, Post-Lauria's account establishes a questionable distinction between the subversive, "politically engaged and psychologically complex" (1) structures of Melville's *Putnam's* stories and the ways that Melville's *Harper's* contributions "reflect that periodical's preference for a sentimental style of writing and a capitulation to middle-class values" (1). Departing from these claims, Helwig instead explores how the bachelor narrators of "Cock-A-Doodle-Doo!" and "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs" (two *Harper's* tales) "fulfill a subversive critique of hegemonic marketplace values, and thus of sentimental middle-class domesticity" (12). Interestingly, Post-Lauria and Helwig express a shared investment in Melville's *subversion* of dominant, and indeed hegemonic, ideologies, particularly sentimentalism, and both locate the value of Melville's texts in their particular alignment of didactic, subversive, meta-critical qualities.

Their incisive print-culture driven analyses nonetheless overlook or oversimplify the aesthetic compulsions that so frequently drive Melville's writing, what Michael D. Snediker deems the text's modes of "privilege[ing] its absorption in its own beauty over its comprehensibility to readers" (163). While I would revise Snediker's emphasis on beauty to an emphasis on *design*, engaging with such aesthetic compulsions is particularly valuable respecting Melville's diptychs.[52] As a point of reference, Melville's employment of the diptych form for submissions to both *Harper's* and *Putnam's* suggests zones of intersection between the two periodicals, and indicates his interest in a mode of expression directed at the magazine medium rather than at an individual magazine. Furthermore, although the bachelor narrator figure

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[52] Graham Thompson's investigation of Melville's contemporaries' responses to "Bartleby" offer compelling incentive to revise Snediker's terms in respect to Melville's short fiction. According to Thompson, reviewers frequently referenced the *quaint* aspect of "Bartleby," a characterization that Thompson shows was typically understood as indicating "elaborate, detailed, and artfully designed" ("'Bartleby,' and the Magazine Fiction" 109).

connects the two *Harper's* stories, the tales are drastically different, and "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids" stands as Melville's most overtly experimental and radical *Harper's* story—by accepted accounts, it was also among his final submissions to the magazine.[53] Given the diptychs' varied styles and themes, and Melville's submission of the tales to both *Harper's* and *Putnam's*, it is therefore possible identify the diptych structure itself as precisely that which registers the queer, objectless, and disruptive pleasure in the text itself that Snediker highlights in Melville's writing—specifically as that text and pleasure are mediated by its intended medium of publication. In other words, the transmission of the diptych across individual publications implies that its construction concerns the broader form of those publications—the magazine—while the diverse nature of the tales indicates that the diptych structure extends beyond a simply correlative function between form and content. Taken together, these implications allow us to view the diptych as a sort of structural instantiation of "the magazine" on Melville's writing.

Seen in this light, Melville's use of the diptych doubles as both a probing investigation of the magazine medium, and his particular form of aesthetic engagement in the tales. Put another way, through its format and perceived editorial focus, the magazine produces Melville's attention to organization and length as essential components of successful, saleable magazine literature, which subsequently propels his interest in a specific structure (the diptych). At the core of Melville's absorption in structure throughout these tales is therefore an absorption in the dictates and necessities of the magazine itself—that which originally directed him to this type of locus, to this spectrum of awareness and attentiveness. In this respect, the diptychs offer a structural analogy to the abstract conceptual force of the magazine within Melville's imagination. Here,

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[53] See Parker, *Herman Melville, vol. 2* 212-3.

then, I trace how his diptychs reposition the medium of expression (the magazine) as an overt structural component in an effort to disrupt the function of this medium.

"Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs" as Exploration of the Magazine

"Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs," likely the first diptych Melville composed, reveals Melville's developing approach to magazine fiction, the magazine medium, and the question of form. Published anonymously in the June 1854 issue of *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, the tale follows an unnamed narrator across a pair of episodes: an excursion in rural America and a guided outing to the Guildhall building in London. (As critics have been keen to highlight, the transatlantic split between the sketches occurs in each of Melville's diptychs.) The first sketch opens with a conversation between the narrator and his friend Blandmour, a bourgeois poet and family man hosting the narrator at his home in "the country," presumably the Berkshires. Acting on Blandmour's suggestion to eat "Poor Man's Pudding" at "a poor man's table" (291), the narrator visits the home of the Coulters, a local working-class family. The pregnant, sickly Dame Coulter welcomes him into her home, treats him hospitably, and eventually serves him a bowl of pudding. Her husband briefly joins them for dinner before hurrying back into "the soak and the mire" (294) to return to his work for the Squire, a wealthy neighbor. After the husband's departure, Dame Coulter begins to open up about her loneliness and her grief at losing two children, but the narrator, "half choked with but one little mouthful" (295) of her pudding, hastily flees to Blandmour's nearby home. Sitting on Blandmour's "comfortable sofa, before a blazing fire, with one of his two ruddy little children on [his] knee" (296), the narrator considers chastising his friend's opinion of the poor, but he leaves his exact criticism unmentioned.

At first glance, the opening sketch appears to be a straightforward a critique of

sentimental poetry and "the bland platitudes of middle-class ideology" (Helwig 16).

Blandmour's comfortable home and misguided notions of poverty explicitly align him with the

wealthy middle-class, while his hackneyed poetics connect him to the figure of the popular

sentimental poet.[54] In the opening paragraph, for example, he muses, "Nature, is in all things

beneficent; and not only so, but considerate in her charities, as any discreet human philanthropist

might be. This snow, now, which seems so unseasonable, is in fact just what a poor husbandman

needs. Rightly is this soft March snow, falling just before seed-time, rightly is it called 'Poor

Man's Manure'" (289). Not only does his arch phrasing mark him as a bad poet, but his

excessive reliance on literary clichés (e.g., the beneficence of Nature, the dignity of poverty)

causes him to dangerously overwrite the realities these clichés supposedly represent. Indeed,

Blandmour's subsequent description of snow as "Poor Man's Eye-water," what he calls "Poor

Man's Manure" in the opening paragraph, alerts us to the self-contradictory nature of his outlook

long before the narrator confirms its inadequacy at the home of the Coulters.

Blandmour, however, presents only one of the sketch's versions of sentimentalism. As I

detail in chapter 1, sentimental mourning offers a core opportunity to fulfill the promises of

sentimentality, a mode of selfhood "oriented toward community and toward cohesiveness at odds

with the definition of self as essentially isolated and alienated from others" (Kete 149). Similarly,

the loss of a loved one, particularly a child, served as a foundational theme for a wide range of

sentimental writers, from Harriet Beecher Stowe and Susan Warner to Alice Carey and Sarah

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[54] As a point of reference, widely read author Alice Carey provides a similar picture of the "bad" sentimental poet in her tale "Mrs. Wetherbe's Quilting Party" (1854). Pale, slender, and haired, this self-professed "literary man" (47) pens "very original and ingenious verses" (47) for the periodical marketplace. His poem "On the Death of an Infant" provides the same platitudes (and poor writing) that we see in Blandmour's exchange with Melville's narrator. The intentionally insipid poem reads, "A little while the lovely flower / To cheer our earthly home was given, / But oh, it withered in an hour, / and death transplanted it to heaven" (47).

Piatt. In revealing her grief about her own two lost children, Dame Coulter offers the narrator a chance to participate in a more vital, less clichéd mode of sentimentalism. The narrator cannot stomach the "bitter and mouldy" taste of the scenario, however, and immediately exits the Coulters's home—unable to stay "to hear of sorrows for which the sincerest sympathies could give no adequate relief" (295). While we might view his departure as Melville's wholesale rejection of sentimentalism, what the narrator calls "a persuasion … of that sort which much speaking is sure more or less to mar; of causeless self-upbraidings, which no expostulations could have dispelled" (295), his lack of charity, payment, or companionable kindness prevent us from unreservedly approving his actions. In the face of Dame Coulter's intense grief, his claims about the inadequacy of charity or conversation (none of which are offered to Dame Coulter aloud) come across as unconvincing rationalizations of his own callousness. He shows himself incapable of the type of collaborative mourning that is fundamental to the sentimental project. Dame Coulter provides further incentive to distrust the narrator's position. Opening up about her despair, she confesses, "[S]trive how I may to cheer me with thinking of little William and Martha in heaven, and with reading Dr. Doddridge there—still, still does dark grief leak in, just like the rain through our roof" (295). The probable reference here is "Submission to Divine Providence in the Death of Children," by the prolific eighteenth-century preacher and educator Phillip Doddridge, which counsels parents "to borrow the language of the text, when their infant offspring is taken away, and to say … It is well" (102). In citing Doddridge, she signals her recognition of the failings of the mode of sentimentalism that Blandmour espouses at the opening of the tale. That is, she intuitively understands that textual consolations, particularly the types of closure offered by Doddridge and popular sentimental texts, do not appease true anguish. Her lived experiences give her an intimate, inherent understanding of the critical position that the

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narrator occupies—indifferently—at the close of the story. By confessing her grief, she

nonetheless invites the narrator to form a community based on her experiences, to practice the

type of emotional connection promised by more inventive and authentic sentimentalism—an

invitation he does not take up.

Despite his failure to accept her invitation, the narrator is partially able to recognize the

hypocritical and problematic elements of Blandmour's position. Thus, while the text openly

lampoons Blandmour, it offers a multifaceted investigation of the narrator—a depiction that is

not wholly critical. By presenting a nuanced, often sympathetic portrayal, Melville instead

highlights the interplay of forces that factor into the narrator's lapses in judgment. In the case of

Dame Coulter, the narrator evinces an inability to hear—indeed, to "read"—her situation; she

seems to require both the charity and conversation that he withholds. Importantly, he also

overwrites her speech with his own platitudes, although his manipulation of language is far more

complex than Blandmour's "bland" poetics. Leaving the Coulters's home, he notes the "peculiar

deleterious quality" (296) of its air and quickly digresses into a critique of the wealthy's views

about the poor, who are "wiser than we think" (296). Realizing that poor families keep their

homes "ill-ventilated" to keep in the heat, he chastises those who criticize them for such

disgraceful neglect of their own health. His diatribe concludes with a seemingly valid attack on

the upper class: "Of all the preposterous assumptions of humanity over humanity, nothing

exceeds most of the criticisms made on the habits of the poor by the well-housed, well-warmed,

and well-fed" (295). The narrator's critique, however, effaces the real complaints, needs, and

situation of Dame Coulter, and serves to distract the reader from his cruel departure from her

home. It also replays Blandmour's rhetorical strategies, rendering the destitute environment of

Dame Coulter as an example of the wisdom of the poor, and thus attempting to dignify and

legitimize poverty in a manner similar to Blandmour. His redirection of blame via virtually meaningless criticism thus serves to absolve him from culpability and to sustain the status quo.

Such a critical position, here exposed as little more than glib cover for inaction, mimics those regularly occupied by writers in *Harper's*, which, as Post-Lauria describes, not only "catered to the taste of a mixed reading public through a stylistic mode that hoped to assuage more than to criticize" (167), but remained committed "to a perspective that supports raising timely issues, but stops at implication" (168). Indeed, *Putnam's* editors suggested that the magazine took a similar position, noting that "in a popular Magazine, which is a running commentary upon the countless phenomena of the times as they rise—not, as in a newspaper, in the form of direct criticism, but in the more permanently interesting shapes of story, essay, poem and sketch—this local [American] reality is a point of utmost importance" ("Introductory" 2). Through a narrator that seems to embody these ineffectual, but semi-critical positions, then, Melville links his tale to both magazine reader and writer.

In his incisive investigation of the three tales, Aaron Winter describes Melville's magazine work as "angling toward a "cakes and ale" populism that is nonetheless flexible enough to accommodate Melville's ever-sharpening critique of American social and political values" (17). However, while "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs" participates in various types social and political criticism, the sketch is not simply critical, in large part because Melville recognizes social critique as tied to the magazine form, and therefore a mode of rhetorical performance with its own agenda. Post-Lauria, for example, suggests that the bifurcated titles of certain sentimental fiction and magazine writing—what she considers the "generic context" (172) for Melville's diptychs—often refer "to the stark discrepancies in the moral, social, or socioeconomic levels of the main characters" (172). Rather than solely

undertaking such critique, Melville's diptych performs a type of fictional mapping of various subject positions that attempts to render the tensions, contradictions, attractions, and anxieties of the magazine medium visible to its publics. In other words, "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs" stages various spectatorial and critical position not simply as a mechanism for socioeconomic commentary, but as a means to call attention to the ways that such positions operate in the magazine. While this mapping allows for a critical perspective on certain ethical standpoints, the flawed nature of the diptych narrators compromises the very possibility of an objective, independent observer, what Winter aptly calls the "transparent voyeur" (27). In a sense, to critique the narrators is to align oneself with them. As Melville employs the diptych form, its structure relies on the concept that all subject positions are ultimately untenable, particularly those that attempt to issue from a detached perspective. Like the eminently "safe" lawyer of "Bartleby," the diptych narrators thus thwart the possibility of a programmatic, didactic, or expressly critical reading.

The function of this compromised perspective becomes further apparent in the second sketch of "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs." In the "Picture Second," the narrator recounts "one hour's hap" (297) in London in 1814, during the summer after the scene described in the first tale. Under the guidance of a friendly "civic subordinate" (297) who has led him to a handful of the "noble charities of London" (297), he makes a final stop at Guildhall to observe "one of the most interesting of all … [the] Lord Mayor's Charities" (297). There, "a mass of lean, famished, ferocious creatures" (298) await a chance to scavenge the remains of a massive feast, partially consumed the previous evening by "a mob of magnificoes, made up of conquering field marshals, counts, and innumerable other nobles of mark" (299). The narrator soon witnesses the charity in action, watching as a "line of liveried men [keep] back with their staves

the impatient jam of the mob" while "gowned and gilded officials" (299) hand out the leftover food—what he calls "the cold victuals and crumbs of kings" (299). Because of his "fouled and torn" (300) coat, the narrator is eventually mistaken for one of the poor by an official. The guide rescues him from excessive embarrassment and, after a "grand crash" signals the end of the scraps, he flees as the "yet unglutted mob" break through the barriers holding them at bay.[55]

Like the "Poor Man's Pudding" section, "Rich Man's Crumbs" quickly identifies the targets of its satire: the "institutionalized philanthropy of London charities" (Winter 25), and the wealthy nobility of Europe. The narrator unimaginatively underscores these targets throughout his exchanges with his guide. After his escort enthusiastically inquires about an unnamed event from the previous day, for example, the narrator asks, "That sad fire on the river-side, you mean, unhousing so many of the poor?" (297) The guide replies, "No. The Guildhall Banquet to the Princes" (297), a response that the narrator has seemingly anticipated in his sanctimonious answer. Similarly, as his guide admiringly wonders about the dignitaries who might have eaten various scraps of food, the narrator responds with judgmental sarcasm. His snide remarks seem intended solely to show that he, in fact, knows better than to revere such false charity or idolize the departed nobility.

The most powerful elements of his attempted social critique concern his recognition of the ways that London charity neglects the actual needs of its participants and instead serves to dehumanize the impoverished. As the narrator asks, "And do you really think that jellies are the best sort of relief you can furnish to beggars? Would not plain beef and bread, with something to do, and be paid for, be better?" (300) Later, noting the contrast between the "splendid spectacle" (299) of Guildhall's celebratory decorations and the strewn remains of the nobles' feast, he

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[55] Despite the 1814 date Melville uses for the tale, this section draws heavily on Melville's experiences in London in 1849; see Melville, *Piazza Tales* 698-99, and *Journals* 14-16.

declares that the floor "was foul as a hovel's—as a kennel's" (299). He thus links the Guildhall

charity's treatment of the poor to the confinement of dogs, a comparison reinforced by carceral

and coldly methodical character of the proceedings. The narrator offers a kind of reductive

Foucauldian model, in which "charity" legitimates plutocratic and monarchial power structures

via an insubstantial form of relief that, in treating the starving poor like animals, accentuates

their so-called "animalistic" behavior.

The first sketch nonetheless attunes the reader to the narrator's complicity with the

systems that he critiques. Indeed, his descriptions of the assembled crowd anticipate the

Guildhall charity's dehumanizing treatment. This is apparent not only in his depiction of them as

"creatures," "beings," and "cannibals," but in his use of terms like "roaring" and "howls" to

describe their ostensibly inhuman utterances. Given Melville's extensive engagement with

cannibals in *Typee* and *Moby-Dick*, the narrator's pejorative comparison between the poor and

the cannibal further signals the compromised nature of his position as "simple spectator" (300).

Even the narrator's most compelling criticism of Guildhall shows an intense distaste for the poor,

in that the simile "foul as a hovel's—as a kennel's" implies established, condemnatory beliefs

about the living conditions of the poor and locates them (within the narrator's understanding) in

close conceptual proximity to caged dogs.

Melville eventually foregrounds the hypocrisy of the narrator's position in the closing

moments of the scene. Mistaken for one of the poor by an admonishing official because of his

shabby appearance, the narrator indignantly complains to his guide, "Surely he does not mean *me*

… he has not confounded *me* with the rest" (300). The insulted, shocked emphasis on *me*,

pretentiously directed to the guide rather than the official, suggests that the official has made a

preposterous social gaffe, and signals the narrator's perception of class difference as a product of

qualities that transcend both circumstance and appearance. The text hints at the real-world implications of these preconceptions when, amid the chaos of the mob's revolt, the narrator's guide commands him to strike a man down. Fittingly, we witness only the guide's subsequent outcries, rather than the strike itself, but the narrator's escape relies on his willingness to substantiate his prejudice in physical violence. While Melville reveals that the narrator's position to be susceptible to reversal through language and modes of observation, the narrator proves unable or unwilling to recognize the tenuous nature of his class status—or its reliance on the situation and the position of the observer/spectator. He therefore reinforces his entrenchment in and complicity with the structures of power that sustain the monarchial systems he overtly critiques, as these systems are what sustain his status as observer. Perhaps more importantly, he also reveals his obliviousness to the ways that the observer, through his/her mode of framing, regulates that which is perceived.

Rejecting the biographical readings that characterized many early investigations of Melville's short stories, recent studies have become increasingly attentive to the function and complexity of these "detached" first- and third-person narrators.[56] While most of these investigations consider such narrators in respect to the critical dimension of the tales, I highlight the compromised nature of their spectator status to explore the ways that the diptychs register Melville's evolving reflections on their intended medium of publication—the magazine. As Winter suggests about "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs," the diptych's moral challenge "is pharisaical, insofar as the demolition of the narrator's illusory medial status, and perhaps also the reader's illusory medial status, is launched from the equally illusory medial space of an anonymous magazine article" (28). Winter links the narrator, reader, and magazine

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[56] See, for example, studies by Bohm, Helwig, and Winter.

space in order to illustrate how Melville interrogates the relationship between writing/observation and power, but the linking itself is, I think, a more provocative claim. That is, Winter's reading suggests that the primary critical function of the tale relies on its position as an "anonymous magazine article," and implies that the tale's critique may be directed at the mode of reading generated by the magazine itself. Underlying both of these claims is the assumption that the diptych principally develops out of Melville's perception of the magazine, as medium, and his understanding of the magazine's audience's mode of engagement with this medium.

While this distinction might seem relatively trivial, it suggests that Melville's magazine pieces are not simply influenced by the publishing marketplace and the content of contemporary periodicals, but are, to a large extent, *about* the magazine itself. Nor are these pieces solely an attempt to find "an aesthetic that could adequately serve both the demands of the spectacular world of antebellum publishing … and his own higher literary ambitions" (762), as Michael James Collins suggested in one of the more probing analyses of Melville's negotiation of the magazine format. More accurately, they are an exploration of the potential aesthetic (and therefore disjunctive) function of textual elements like narrative structure and perspective as they operate in respect to the magazine. The magazine stories mark Melville's deepening investigation of such formal elements as viable mechanisms for expression and political action— in a sense, of the capacity of short fiction a site of generating and/or disrupting the shared world. Returning to the narrator of "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs," then, we recognize that the tale stages a particular type of reader—the imagined periodical reader, the "simple spectator"—in a scenario that reproduces the pages of the magazine. "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs" revitalizes a predictable magazine form (the "diptych") by imagining it as

an analogue to the magazine reader and the magazine. As this reader shuttles from enclosure to enclosure (the Coulters' home or the mobbed, claustrophobic scene of Guildhall), essentially traversing from story to story, he makes a series of semi-viable observations, but he proves inept at altering his mode of engagement in order to perceive the nuances of the "texts" placed before him. While we might view this as a critique of magazine readers, it is better understood as an experimentation with Melville's assumptions about these readers and their approach to the medium. On one hand, then, the tale serves as a subtle parody of the magazine format. On the other, it maps a series of relationships between enclosed form, observer, and various modes of community for Melville, and, potentially, his readers.

"The Two Temples": Romantic Interiority and Marketplace Geniality

"The Two Temples," submitted to *Putnam's* in 1853 and eventually rejected, shows significant shifts in Melville's estimation of the magazine format, and his perception of the diptych as a means to stage and interrogate structural interactions between author, observer, and medium. Like the diptychs published by *Harper's*, the tale stages its narrator in a pair of enclosed spaces separated by the Atlantic Ocean: the bell-tower of a cathedral resembling Grace Church in New York City and the "lofty gallery" (314) of a London theater.[57] These enclosures, in a manner similar to those found in "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs," delineate a separation between a public and private space. It should be noted, however, that this division is somewhat illusory, as both public and private spheres are on display for the reader, and Melville employs seemingly intimate spaces to interrogate public conceptions of intimacy and

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[57] For more on the connection between "Temple First" and Grace Church, see Melville, *Piazza Tales* 700. Rowland suggests that Melville's inspiration for "Temple First" also included Trinity Church, and a September 1853 *Putnam's* article ("New York Church Architecture") that featured images of both churches (339-46).

domesticity. As Dame Coulter's grief makes evident, Melville is highly concerned with the chasm between lived experience and a reader's access to this experience. He frequently voices such concern through Ishmael in *Moby-Dick*, who tells readers that "the only mode in which you can derive even a tolerable idea of his living contour, is by going a whaling yourself" (Ch. 55). The diptychs nonetheless advance this question in respect to new considerations produced by the magazine format, examining not simply the disparity between representation and reality, but the gaps produced by the medium and mode through which this representation is accessed.

Where "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs" explores the capacities of the magazine medium and its readers, "The Two Temples" investigates an author figure's interaction with competing print mediums: book and magazine. Discussing Melville's "The Fiddler," a tale published in *Harper's* in 1854, Collins writes that the story establishes "a dialogue between romantic authorship, associated with the internal world of the intellect, and the dynamic sphere of the street, associated with the marketplace and the carnival" (768). Collins further connects the dynamic sphere of the street to the magazine form, a medium which "relied upon a heterogeneity and diversity of content" (768), and which antebellum readers and writers often understood "as the textual analogue of theater" (761). His argument thus aligns the carnival, theater, and magazine, and positions them in a productive, if often troubled, relationship to romantic authorship. "The Two Temples," written during the same period as "The Fiddler," understands this dialogue in structural terms. That is, "The Two Temples" organizes romantic interiority and the public space of the periodical marketplace as its spatial framework. Moving between these "private" and public enclosures is an author figure reminiscent of *Pierre*'s titular character—flawed but sympathetic, and more elusive than Melville's reader-aligned narrators.

The tale itself consists of a pair of episodes experienced by an impecunious, if not quite destitute, narrator. The first of these sketches finds the narrator attempting to gain entrance to a Manhattan church that he has travelled three "long" miles from the Battery to attend.[58] There, a "great, fat-paunched, beadle-faced" (303) church official reproaches him for his poverty, and refuses his entrance to the "marble-butressed, stained-glass, spic-and-span new temple" (303). Guardedly blaming his shabby appearance on a "false tailor" (303) that has failed to deliver his new coat in the promised time, the narrator nonetheless spots a small, vaulted side door that "leads up into the tower" (304) of the church. He enters, ascends a "narrow, curving stairway" (304), and arrives on a "blank platform" (304) enclosed on three sides by "Gothic windows of richly dyed glass" (304). The kaleidoscopic effects of these windows make it first seem like the inside of "some magic-lantern" (304), but the narrator quickly realizes it is "but a gorgeous dungeon" (304) because he is unable to look out, "any more than if [he] had been the occupant of a basement cell in 'the Tombs'" (304). In search of "a curious little window high over the orchestra and everything else" (304) that will afford him an opportunity to "take part in the proceedings" (305), he ascends higher, mounting "another Jacob's ladder of lofty steps" (305).

At the top of this second flight of stairs, he discovers the window he sought, but he is surprised to find that it is covered with a "sheet of fine-woven gauzy wire-work" (305) rather than glass. "When, all eagerness, and open book in hand" (305), the narrator approaches this window, a hot blast of air leads him to realize that it provides ventilation for the hot church below. He decides to tolerate the heat of the window, and watches the remainder of the church service. After it ends, he descends the tower, only to find himself locked inside. "Hardly

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[58] Grace Church was consecrated in 1846, and Melville had lived in New York, near the church's "well-known sexton, Isaac Brown" during "his residence at No. 103 [Fourth Avenue] between 1847 and 1850" (*Piazza Tales* 700). Melville's description of the church official provides an acerbic, but essentially accurate, depiction of Brown.

conscious" (307) of his reasoning, he climbs the steps again, and looks out on the "hushed desertedness" (307) of the church, which he compares to a secluded wood. Looking out on the scene, he spots a painting of the Madonna and child that seem to show "the sole tenants of this painted wilderness—the true Hagar with her Ishmael" (308). He again descends the stairs and, presented with the prospect of spending the night alone in the tower, inadvertently trips a mechanism that rings the bell. The "beadle-faced man" quickly reappears, drags him from the tower, and has him arrested. Despite the narrator's "coolest explanations" (309), the judge presiding over his case reprimands him and charges him with a large fine before releasing him.

The sequence, which picks up on contemporary complaints regarding the extravagance of Grace Church is generally read as an indictment of "the hypocrisy of American religious institutions in general" (Winter 21).[59] While the exact tenor of this critique depends on the sincerity of the narrator, most critics consider the sketch's satirical goals intact regardless of the narrator's reliability. As Winter succinctly puts this perspective, "the credibility of the narrator is not really at issue" (23) because the narrator's geniality, no matter how affected, only serves to make the tale's "barbed satire" (23) more palatable for readers. Indeed, the sketch stands as a clear critique of systematized and institutionalized Christianity. However, recognizing the sequence as also a structural rendering of romantic interiority, specifically the type of interiority explored in *Pierre*'s authorial protagonist, reveals that the narrator is more than "merely instrumental" (Winter 23) and that the tale's satire serves a more complex function.

First and foremost, "The Two Temples" offers important biographical incentives to connect the tower enclosure to Melville's own understanding of authorship. Broadly speaking,

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[59] See, for example, Briggs's comments (*Piazza Tales* 700), or the critical assessment of Grace Church's appearance made in "New-York Church Architecture," which describes the building as "no credit to the architect who built it" (247). See, also, Cook 10.

the trajectory of the two sketches replicates the course of his experiences as a writer: The narrator, seeking a way to participate in an idealized form of high culture, finds entrance through a side door and, after gaining an alternative (but uncomfortable and limited) perspective on the proceedings, is unceremoniously expelled from the magic-lantern/dungeon that provided access. Later, in debt and looking for employment, the narrator receives charity from a "working-man" (312)—a theater ticket—and finds acceptance and serenity amid the "most acceptable, right welcome, cheery company" (313) of London's working-class theatergoers. In light of the analogous relationship Collins notes between antebellum theater and magazines, it is possible to read the narrator's journey as Melville's path from the novelistic romance to the anonymous, genial space of the magazine. Understood in this manner, the narrative thus allegorizes the course of Melville's writing career, including his fortuitous "side-door" success with *Typee*, his "expulsion" from the ranks of respected authors via the critical censure of *Pierre*, and his well-received involvement in the "cheery" (313) and "pleasing" (314) spaces of *Harper's* and *Putnam's* magazines.

Such a reading helps us understand Melville's attention to the design of the tower in the first sketch, and to the narrator's modes of perceiving the so-called "elite" audience of the church. As Judith Hiltner suggests in her investigation of the existing draft of "The Two Temples," Melville's magazine writing contains numerous instances of a "pattern of imagery suggesting the distortion or limitation of elevated perspectives" (77). While the distortive nature of such elevated standpoints is amplified within his magazine stories, Melville's use of these perspectives both pre- and post-dates his magazine work, from the mastheads of his various sea novels to "In a Garret," from *Timoleon, etc.*[60] The most notable of these elevated perches in

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[60] Examples of Melville's discussions of mastheads include *Moby-Dick*, chapter 35, and *White Jacket*, chapter 92.

respect to "The Two Temples," however, are the paired windows of *Pierre*: the "lofty window of that beggarly room" (270) that Pierre and Isabel inhabit, and, across a small quadrangle, "one of the loftiest windows of the old gray tower" (291) of the "Church of the Apostles," occupied by Plinlimmon, a "blue-eyed" mystic often linked to Emerson and transcendentalism. The latter tower, "twice the height of the body of the church" (265) with which it shares a wall, greatly resembles the tower enclosure of "The Two Temples," which also abuts the adjoining church. Pierre's room is also a church tower of sorts; although it is located in a "lofty plain brick structure" (265) separated from the main church building, "the public" (268) considers it part of "the Apostles" (268).

Both "lofty" tower rooms of *Pierre*, then, offer potential templates for the ornate tower Melville describes in the opening sketch of "The Two Temples." Significantly, both are occupied by author-figures: Pierre futilely attempts a "courageous wreck" (339) of a novel (what the text calls "his book"), while Plinlimmon authors the transcendentalist pamphlet "Chronometricals and Horologicals" (210). In *Pierre*, the elevated perspective is specifically an authorial one, pairing the failed romantic novelist with the strange and foreboding transcendentalist guru. This link between elevation and authorship is further substantiated the text's repeated references to the "loftiness" of Pierre's intentions and insight as he pens his novel, and in its discussion of the inhabitants of the upper floors of Pierre's building as "mostly artists of various sorts" (267).

As I have already alluded, considering the narrator of "The Two Temples" in respect to the two author figures of *Pierre* generates a productive understanding of the tower space itself. Its reality as "gorgeous dungeon" (304), despite its appearance as "some magic-lantern" (304), paints a grim picture of the mode of interiority it structuralizes. The narrator's primary issue with this space is his inability to "look out, any more than if [he] had been the occupant of a basement

cell in "The Tombs"" (304). If Bartleby, who dies huddled against a wall within "The Tombs,"

details the suppressive and ultimately annihilatory function of such a limiting enclosure, the

narrator of "The Two Temples" offers an equally constricting view of the type of egoistic

subjectivity that *Pierre* enables us to connect to romanticism and novelistic authorship. The

claustrophobic vision of romantic interiority is further evidenced by the narrator's ascent of

"another Jacob's ladder of lofty steps" (305), undertaken to gain a view of the church interior

through "a small window in the otherwise dead-wall side of the tower" (305). Jacob's ladder, the

path to spiritual enlightenment, typically grants a type of critical insight, and thus completes the

typical plot of Romantic discourse in which the intellectually/spiritually fallen subject attains a

"consciousness higher than the lost innocence" (Milder 31).[61] Here, though, this consciousness is

still imprisoned, and the ascending and circular journey of the Romantic individual occurs within

an enclosed space—inside an edifice built against and alongside the church (Milder 31).[62]

Furthermore, the fulfillment of the narrator's ascent reveals only an illusionary version of

spiritual enlightenment; the narrator looks out on a "sly enchanter's show" (306) and the

"*theatric* wonder of the populous *spectacle* of this sumptuous sanctuary" (306, my italics).

Melville specifically links his investigation of this flawed interiority to the *book* through

the narrator's frequent mentions of his prayer book during his time in the tower. The narrator

opens this book each time he attempts to take part in the church service, as the "book in hand"

allows him to participate "in spirit, if not in place" (305). During these scenes, the prayer book

acts as a mediating object for the "devout exultings" (305) taking place within the church,

serving to authenticate the proceedings and the narrator's inclusion in them. The book itself,

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[61] For further discussion of Jacob's ladder, see, for example, Dillingham, *Monumental Melville* 171-2; Cook 11.

[62] For a detailed discussion of the Romantic circuit I describe here (following Milder), see Abrams, especially chapters 4-6.

then, becomes the narrator's mode of access to the wealthy, spectacle-driven community that will not bodily interact with or acknowledge him, just as it becomes the focal point of the religious service. In a sense, Melville's emphasis on the narrator's book performs a similar function to his depiction of the history of the Church of the Apostles in *Pierre*; just as the artists and philosophers come to occupy the heights of the towers abandoned by the devout, the "book" co-opts and transforms the spiritual power of the service. This is underscored by the narrator's recognition of the text of the ensuing sermon, despite his inability to hear it, "owing to the priest's changed positon from the reading desk" (*Piazza Tales* 307). The shared *text* wholly absorbs the immediacy and relevance of the lived spiritual event, and at the same time links the narrator, albeit abstractly and imprecisely, to the readers below—with whom he nonetheless cannot truly engage. Melville, then, performs a sort of double move in which he seems to reiterate Carlyle's notion that literature would replace religion, while simultaneously revealing the ways that both forms (the literary text or the religious institution) generate mechanisms of segregating individuals (in this case, based on capital) through their modes of participation.

Melville's emphasis on the artificial nature of the proceedings, which is to say on the structure's status as artifice itself—as art—are also visible in his emendations to the text. After the narrator re-ascends the stairs to look upon the empty church, he falls into a brief reverie that closes with the following image: "A Puseyitish painting of a Madonna and child, adorning a lower window, seemed showing to me the sole tenants of this painted wilderness—the true Hagar and her Ishmael" (308). Winter sees this section as drawing on Sheridan Knowles attack on the "ritual illusionism of the Catholic Church and the Puseyite Anglican Church" (20).[63]

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[63] Hiltner's investigation of Melville's textual revisions to this section offers a similar interpretation, noting that Melville's changes "seem designed to reinforce the narrator's mounting disillusionment regarding the sincerity of worship in 'Temple First'" (74).

Notably, however, the fair-copy manuscript of the text shows that, among his other changes, Melville altered the phrase "*mild* wilderness" to "*painted* wilderness" (*Piazza Tales* 707). To a degree, then, Winter seem to overlook the painted forest for the trees, in that he recognizes the intentionally illusory nature of the scene, but overlooks the way the adjective *painted* aligns illusion with not only the religious, but the artistic.

The narrator's recognition of the illusory promise of art is further evidenced the unusual reference to the *tenants* of this wilderness, the *true* Hagar and Ishmael, which evocatively inverts the position of artifice and reality (using two central figures within Melville's imagination). In the narrator's final gaze, the maudlin spirituality of the painting reveals—by overtly obscuring the real world beyond the window—the exiled, *true* figures now inhabiting the evacuated space of the church. Thus, what is exiled by the "ritual illusionism" of pandering artistry comes to haunt its ultimately empty space, as the narrator's perception of the vacuity of the illusion shows him precisely that which it has excluded. Like the outcasts Hagar and Ishmael, the exiled sacred is doomed to inhabit a space to which it has no claim nor connection. The term *tenants*, which suggests the relationship between a landlord or lord and the temporary holder of a habitable space, further emphasizes the mediated, detached relation between the exiles and the church space. If we understand the narrator's solitary investigation of the church interior as charting an essentially Romantic circuit, this moment marks its vacant culmination. He achieves the "higher consciousness" produced by the elevated perspective, but the paradisiacal perch is also enclosed and imprisoning.

Melville again alludes to the narrator's affiliation with his own (problematized) romantic figures in the opening sequence of the second sketch, "Temple Second." The narrator staggers "[f]orlorn, outcast, without a friend" (310) through the crowded streets of London as though on

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the ocean, "the unscrupulous human whirlpools edd[ying] him aside at corners" (310). His status

as outcast evokes both Pierre and Ishmael, and his statement, "Better perish mid myriad sharks in

mid Atlantic, than die a penniless stranger in Babylonian London" (310), playfully refigures

Ishmael's language from the "Lee Shore" chapter of *Moby-Dick*, where he states, "better it is to

perish in that howling infinite, than be ingloriously dashed upon the lee, even if that were safety"

(107). Where the opening sketch interrogates the romantic position, however, the second sketch

seems to reveal Melville's cautious and qualified acceptance of the carnivalesque marketplace,

and, by extension, of the magazine itself.

It is important to recognize that Melville's understanding of the ensuing scene differs

significantly from that of his narrator, despite various biographical elements within the sketch.

However sympathetic, and despite his affiliations with earlier phases of Melville's writing, the

narrator serves as a vehicle to stage romantic interiority and, in "Temple Second," to investigate

its complex response to the marketplace. Hiltner provides compelling evidence of the distance

between Melville's position and that of his narrator. She argues that Melville's most extensive

revision to the existing fair-copy manuscript (a complete substitution of an entire paragraph in

the closing sequence of the second sketch) "suppresses [the narrator's] skepticism and reinforces

[his] willingness to be uncritically absorbed by the 'theatric wonders' surrounding him" (78).

Looking closely at biographical elements within the tale, she also highlights the difference

between Melville's and the narrator's responses to Macready, the "chief actor of the night" (314)

in "Temple Second," and a well-known mid-century performer. Where the narrator declares

Macready as "combining the finest qualities of social and Christian respectability, with the

highest excellence in his particular profession; for which he had conscientiously done much, in

many ways to refine, elevate, and chasten" (314), Melville noted in his journal that he "painted hideously … didn't like him very much upon the whole—bad voice, it seemed" (*Journals* 79).[64]

In light of the distinction between Melville and his narrator, moth sections function as more than sophisticated parody of the religion and theater. That is, they expose more than the "illusory" and "deceptive" nature of various forms of social theatrics. Not only does the narrator's open embrace of the theater space again replicate the Carlyle-like formulation of a transference of the power of the "sacred" from church to theater (from religion to art), but the sketches chart a romantic's move across mediums and modes of expression. The narrator enthusiastically accepts this shift, feeling satisfied and serene in the theater, and gazing at the scene "[w]ith an unhurt eye of perfect love" (315), but the tenor of his wholehearted embrace of the carnivalesque world of the theater provides insight into Melville's qualified acceptance. As he describes the finale of the performance,

> The curtain falls. Starting to their feet, the enraptured thousands sound their responses, deafeningly; unmistakably sincere. Right from the undoubted heart. I have no duplicate in my memory of this. In earnestness of response, this second temple stands unmatched. And hath mere mimicry done this? What is it then to act a part? (315)

His description recapitulates the questions raised in the Hagar/Ishmael passage from "Temple First." Where the religious institution of the first sketch affords sight of the (exiled) sacred via the obvious hypocrisy of its ostentatious, pandering artifice, however, the theater/marketplace elicits genuine response by openly acknowledging its artificial nature. Yet the narrator's exaggerated emphasis on the *sincerity* and *earnestness* of the audience's response, particularly as it is juxtaposed with the subtly critical phrase "*mere* mimicry," alerts us to his reservations about its character. He further registers his concerns about the authenticity of his experience through his frequent, almost hallucinatory, flashbacks to the church tower, which collapse the tale's

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[64] See also Hiltner 79.

formalized boundary between the two scenarios. Despite these concerns, however, the narrator is ultimately too enthralled by the geniality of the theater space to engage with its uncertainties. The romantic subject, then, sees something amiss in the intentionally artificial space of the marketplace, but is ultimately persuaded of its validity by receptive, sociable inclusion.

The excerpt above suggests, however, that romanticism examination of the theater/marketplace is bounded by the implications of its inclusion—by the aesthetic ramifications of the concept that "acting a part" can produce real experience. In other words, the audience's sincere response to intentional artifice implies foundational flaws in romanticism's critique of artifice (particularly as refracted by Emersonian transcendentalism). The basis of the first sketch's critique of the *illusory* promise of organized religion begins to disintegrate, as the success of "mere mimicry" indicates an ultimately empty distinction between sincerity and truthfulness, between the painted wilderness and the "true" exiles.

Although the narrator of "The Two Temples" seems to pose his final question rhetorically, suggesting his embrace of the collapsing distinction between performance and authenticity, Melville obviously takes a more critical position of the scene. That is, the narrator seems largely swept up in the audience's response to Macready, implying that there is something beyond "mere mimicry" in the actor's performance, while Melville's exaggerated language indicates his partial remove from this position. That said, he becomes increasingly preoccupied with understanding the implications of what it might mean to *act*, rather than inhabit, a part. In other words, he seems to sense something potentially more genuine in overt artifice. The question itself stems from his investigation of the publishing marketplace, in that he began to recognize important innovations and results from playing the part of magazinist, but its repercussions would soon apply to future productions. What might it mean to "act" the part of

magazinist in light of the discovery that it could produce genuine results? What might it mean to his writing to occupy a limited and limiting form for aesthetic, rather than financial, purposes? The dizzying masquerade of *The Confidence-Man* (1857), an intentionally circumscribed novel in which the central character slides in and out of limited personae, makes it evident that Melville was eager to explore these questions far past the threshold of his magazine work.

Superscription in "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids"

Where "The Two Temples" explores and contrasts the interior logics of Romance and the magazine, "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids" leverages the diptych form to examine the relationship between the magazine and the material processes and practices that produce and sustain the magazine as a conceptual space. What Melville comes to recognize, particularly as he interrogates the impact of his narrator's representational strategies, is that such strategies are already embedded within the processes, practices, and mediums they seem to superscribe. The tale, frequently considered the most complex and important diptych, thus pushes the capacity of the diptych form in new directions, and, as I will detail, sets the stage for *Benito Cereno*'s innovative use of the third-person narrative.

Like the other diptychs, the "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids" presents a partially reliable bachelor narrator in a part of transatlantic scenarios. Working in opposite fashion to the other stories, the bachelor moves from England to the United States— travelling first to Temple-Bar in London, then to a paper mill in New England. He is, however, akin to the other narrators in his limited ability to read the situations presented to him. In the first sketch, the narrator, "sallying from [his] hotel in Trafalgar Square" (319) on a pleasant afternoon in May, heads to a dinner-appointment in Temple, the previous home of the Knights Templar,

now inhabited by lawyers. Hosted by the "fine Barrister, Bachelor, and Bencher, R.F.C." (319), a "companionable Englishman" (319), the dinner-appointment takes place in a tastefully furnished apartment "well up toward heaven" (320). In this lofty residence, the narrator meets and dines with eight other bachelors. They eat course after course of food, and drink glass after glass of ale, wine, and liquor. As the wine continues to flow and the company of bachelors grows more and more genial, they relate "all sorts of pleasant stories" (321) to one another. Eventually, the ever-decorous bachelors make their exit, leaving the narrator as the "last lingerer" (323). In an outburst of "admiring candor" (323) that closes the sketch, the narrator declares the proceedings "the very Paradise of Bachelors" (323).

In the second sketch, which inverts this so-called "Paradise," the narrator travels to a paper-mill "not far from Woedolor Mountain in New England" (323). The journey and locale draw heavily on Melville's accounts of Mount Greylock, in the Berkshires, and his expedition to a nearby paper mill in Dalton, Massachusetts, in 1851.[65] Suggestively identifying himself as a "seedsman" in need of envelopes for his business, the narrator traverses a landscape that his descriptions exaggeratedly liken to female anatomy.[66] After passing the "Black Notch" into the "Devil's Dungeon" on his sperm-like horse ("white as a milky ram, his nostrils at each breath sending forth two horn-shaped shoots of heated respiration" (325)), he arrives at the paper-mill. There, voiceless, virginal, and "blank-looking" women (328) perform repetitive, mechanistic tasks alongside massive machines in an "intolerably" (328) lit factory. The narrator quickly acknowledges the extent to which the factory conditions dehumanize the female workers,

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[65] For more on Melville's original visit to the paper mill, see Melville, *Piazza Tales* 710. Thompson ("The 'Plain Facts' of Fine Paper") provides an elaborately detailed account of Melville's visit and the Dalton paper mills; see especially 511-14.

[66] Given the overtly sexualized nature of Melville's descriptions in this section, Winter asks "how on earth did [the tale] sneak into the more cautious *Harper's*" (34).

declaring that the women "did not so much seem accessory wheels to the general machinery as mere cogs to the wheels" (328). He nonetheless tours the facilities, witnesses the birth-like process of paper-making, and, after concluding his purchase, exits the mill.

Instead of following the progression of "The Two Temples," from interiority to the genial, lofty public space that we have connected with the marketplace, "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids" begins in the latter space—later descending into the nightmarish realm that, in the narrator's estimation, figuratively gives birth to it. The "cheery" atmosphere of the public theater of "The Two Temples" is, however, replaced with the interior of a lawyer's apartment, a locale whose forms of sociability and position between private and public spheres more precisely maps onto the magazine. In this semi-public space, acquaintances and strangers of a specific elite class share forms of intimacy, such as shared drinking and eating, and expressing "tender concern for each other's health" (321), and engage in an open exchange of stories that is both personal and intentionally stylized. Melville again recapitulates the scheme of the Church of the Apostles, in which lawyers (and, per their authorization, artists) co-opt a structure originally inhabited by a religious order (the Knights Templar). This structure, however, takes on a new character, as the second sketch prompts us to see that the narrator's claim that "the iron heel is changed to a boot of patent-leather; the long two-handed sword to a one-handed quill" (317) is not precisely about contractive transformations of power. It reveals the inherently feudalistic and militaristic lineage of mid-nineteenth century life, and shows that mid-nineteenth century power structures develop out of, rather than in opposition to, this lineage. Despite the Templar's "tumble from proud glory's height" (318), the patent-leather boot serves the same oppressive function of the iron heel, just as the one-handed quill is an instrument of potentially devastating violence.

As Helwig suggests, "stories and illustrations featuring bachelors in the early 1850s editions of *Harper's* tend to lampoon and, at times, even demonize the bachelor" (4), thereby making the bachelor figure an imprecise analogue to the magazine reader. However, the bachelor's frequent appearance in mid-century periodicals, as well as his seemingly abundant leisure time, closely linked him to the space of the magazine for mid-century audiences.[67] "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids" offers further reasons to extend such a connection to a particular mode of magazine readership. As we have seen, Melville regularly presents the elevated perch as a space of interpretation, where characters read (however imperfectly) the scenes put before them. Here, this perch is an apartment "so high with a view to secure the prior exercise [of climbing so many stairs] necessary to the due relishing and digesting of it" (320). Similarly, the bachelors assembled in this lofty apartment trade "[c]hoice experiences in their private lives … brought out, like choice brands of Moselle or Rhenish" (321). Melville's simile not only signals the central importance of sophisticated, selective story-telling within the space, it also retroactively links the scene's constant flow of wine to the flow of words—the telling of tales—between the dinner guests. Wine and words, in a sense, become interchangeable. The narrator's brief account of the bachelors' stories yield no direct connection to pieces found in *Harper's* or *Putnam's* during the period, and the dinner setting very likely stemmed from his experiences dining at Temple in London, during his 1849-50 trip abroad.[68] However, the subjects of the bachelors' exchanges cover a variety of well-trodden magazine

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[67] Thompson, for example, notes a criticism of *Putnam's Monthly* by *New York Times* editors, in which they insultingly align *Putnam's* writers with the bachelor, declaring that, "Most of these [stories] one would judge to be written by gentlemen of taste and leisure—dreamy men, who go out occasionally to see life, not who are daily in contact with life's hard realities" (qtd. in "The 'Plain Facts' of Fine Paper" 505).

[68] Melville referred to his December 19, 1849, dinner as "The Paradise of Batchelors [sic]" (*Journals* 44). For more on the biographical source of "The Paradise of Bachelors" section, see Melville, *Journals* 43-5 and *Piazza Tales* 709-10.

subjects: foreign architecture and scenery, "wonderful antiquities" (321), amusing literary excerpts, and "various spicy anecdotes of most frank-hearted noble lords" (321). Similarly, the posturing stylishness apparent in the bachelors' anecdotes recapitulates the approach often used in *Harper's*. The editors' initial 1850 introduction to the magazine, "A Word at the Start," for example, also privileged such refined discernment, describing its future contents as "the choicest and most attractive of the Miscellaneous Literature of the Age" (1-2).

The narrator's "admiring" (and, one suspects, extremely drunken) final outburst indicate the pleasurable satisfaction he experiences in this eminently tasteful realm, but his delight is not without reservations. Near the close of the feast, the narrator tells us that "The thing called pain, the bugbear styled trouble—those two legends seemed preposterous to their bachelor imaginations" (322). Recalling the hasty silencing of Dame Coulter's grief in "Cock-A-Doodle-Doo!", this statement reproaches (if somewhat whimsically) the sections of society the bachelors represent—those replete with "liberal sense, ripe scholarship in the world, and capacious philosophical and convivial understandings" (322) but incapable of engaging with the stark (if perhaps exaggerated) realities described in "The Tartarus of Maids."[69]

It is tempting to aim this critique squarely at the segments of mainstream U.S. print culture familiar to Melville, particularly *Harper's*, which advertised that its editors would exercise "special care … in admitting nothing into the Magazine in the slightest degree offensive to the most sensitive delicacy" ("Advertisement"), and which made frequent use of the connection between its "Editor's Table" and a dining table.[70] Indeed, the preface to Evert A. Duyckinck's short-lived *Yankee Doodle*, for which Melville had also written, similarly leveraged

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[69] See Allen for a detailed description of the complexities of factory life for workers in the Lowell mills.

[70] The December 1851 "Editor's Table," for example, asks the reader not to "entertain any fear of being treated to a dish of indigestible metaphysics" (128).

dining-related language: "Thus says YANKEE DOODLE to an expectant world: The feast is spread—laugh and be happy!" To do so, however, risks undercutting the significance of the second sketch and the extent of its impact on the opening section. Melville's depiction of the bachelors' culture emerges, at least in part, from his understanding of the magazine, as both an author and a reader—an understanding that includes, by this time, a qualified acceptance of and partial comfort with the genial, but willfully oblivious, atmosphere of the periodical. However, while his concerns with the magazine medium surface in a muted critique of the dinner party exchange, they also generate a particular mode of relation between the first and second sketch. To recognize the magazine space in the bachelor-pad, and vice versa, is to become aware of the second sketch as an examination of processes and practices that render this space possible and, more importantly, expose the magazine—and the magazine story—as a persistent, constitutive network of material and authorial practices rather than as a transparent vehicle of expression. The latter insight eventually produces *Benito Cereno*'s radical narrative development—the shift from the complicit first-person narrator to a third-person voice that reveals the complicity of supposedly objective representational strategies—and, later, sponsors Melville's move to the overt artifice of poetry (a mode whose intentional artistry reduces the risk of a text that "masquerades" as reality).

That the paper mill in the "Tartarus of Maids" helps sustain the lawyer's sphere is evident in the narrator's description of the eventual purpose of the foolscap produced there: "All sorts of writings would be writ on those now vacant things—sermons, lawyers' briefs, physicians' prescriptions, love-letters, marriage certificates, bills of divorce, registers of births, death-warrants, and so on, without end" (333). However important it is to contend with the uses listed that disrupt the "correspondence" between the two sketches, as Graham Thompson has proposed,

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more than half of the documents that the narrator cites pertain to legal matters or the lawyer's profession. Accordingly, critics like Sidney Bremer, Brooks Thomas, and Winter, have posited that the tale identifies an "interconnected," "transatlantic" market system in which the "actions of rich men in Europe … can have an impact even upon factory maids in America" (Winter 31). Such an interconnected system, however, does not enhance human connections. Instead, it amplifies the alienating effects of modernity, rupturing interpersonal bonds and associations rather than augmenting them. Leland Person perceives this rupture as "not only the estrangement of men and women from one another—their relegation to separate spheres, but the alienation of both genders from their own vital energies" (234), and deems the paper-mill a space where "[l]ove, like the human voice, has been banished" (234). Marvin Fisher offers a similar interpretation, viewing the scene as "permeated by a similar sense [to Henry Adams' "The Dynamo and the Virgin"] that technology … has irrevocably severed the continuity of culture and obviated the function and dissipated the power of religion, love, and femininity" (445).

The narrator's vertical trajectory across the two sketches supports such these accounts, as his descent from heaven to hell indicates the potential for the type of archeological investigations we see in *Pierre*'s excavation of "superinduced superficies" and "surface stratified on surface" (285). Indeed, the paper-mill ultimately primarily yields such surfaces, whether in the blank paper or the blank faces of the female workers, although it is mechanical and material practice that the narrator finds inside the sarcophagus. "The Two Temples," which has the appearance of downward social motion, nonetheless features the narrator in two lofty perches (the church tower, and the balcony section of the London theater). "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs" seems to follow the opposite social trajectory (upward mobility), from hovel to banquet hall, but the narrator is, in both locations, confined to the same level as the poor he observes. In

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these two diptychs, the narrator's motion therefore works to flatten the scenarios, so that their seemingly disparate settings reveal the same underlying epistemological structures. To some degree, "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of the Maids" achieves a similar flattening, likening the genial bachelors' decorous, indulgent lifestyle to the robotic repetitions of the blank-faced maids. This flattening is most apparent in the moments of the "Tartarus" sketch, reminiscent of "Temple Second," where "something latent, as well as something obvious in the time and scene" (326) produce a dreamlike blending of the two scenarios, dissolving the boundaries between them. But "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of the Maids," as its title implies, also performs a vertical movement—from heaven to hell and from phallic height to vaginal depth—that renders it, in the narrator's words, as "the very counterpart of the Paradise of Bachelors" (327). Critical readings attuned to the economic relation between the two sketches draw heavily on the concept of the *counterpart*, as the term reveals precisely the interconnected system of activity and oppression that they recognize between the two sketches. This system, while lateral/flattened in its function—in that it entangles and homogenizes all individuals, regardless of country, gender, or class, within its network of economic interaction—is nonetheless hierarchical in its execution, thereby producing vastly disparate conditions for different groups despite their abstract similitude.

As the earlier two diptychs make us aware, however, the narrator's observer status issues from within (rather than outside of) the systems it identifies, meaning that the "economic correspondence" he registers between the two sketches is at least as much his critique as it is Melville's. In other words, the elements of the tale that allow the reader to recognize a relationship between the two sketches, such as the short list of uses for foolscap, are produced by the narrator's perception and representation of the scene. A number of critics have highlighted

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the problematic aspects of the narrator's position. Winter notes, for example, that Melville again "offers a narrator who posits himself in the role of a voyeur, discovers social guilt in his complicity with the exploited condition of the working class, yet in the end does absolutely nothing" (30), while Post-Lauria stresses the "distant" and "ambivalent" stance of the narrator towards "the horrors of the social realities" (174) he nonetheless perceives. Thompson, remarking on the narrator's resemblance to some of Melville's more noticeably suspect spectator-speakers, writes, "Given the propensity of the narrators in Melville's short fiction … to offer a version of events that is subtly convincing and yet as interrogative of the narrators themselves and their subject positions as it is of the events narrated, it is important not to simply trust a narrator who continually reaches for symbolic correspondence when faced with the plain facts of papermaking" (523). Despite the prevalence of such recognitions, as Thompson further notes, criticism tends to be split between accounts that dismiss the "thinly veiled" (Eby 100) symbolism and obvious sexual imagery of the tale, and historicist investigations that "[make] use of Melville's symbols of sex and gender, labor and leisure, for the purpose of allegorizing in the broadest possible fashion the story's representations of hierarchies of gender difference and of market conditions for writers" (510). In other words, regardless of the illusory nature of the narrator's "simple spectator" status, critical accounts tend to engage with the tale's literary devices as distinct from the narrator, treating them as signposts for Melville's artistic intentions or the historical backdrop of the tale. However, by recognizing the illusory nature of the narrator's "objectivity," but not treating such devices as similarly complicit, such accounts take up positions analogous to that of the narrator, in that they overlook the embeddedness of the "literary" in the social issues it aims to critique.

I'd like to suggest that the split in critical interpretations of the story in fact stem from the way that the Melville employs the complicit observer position of "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of the Maids" to complicate and muddle the "literary" register of the tale. His innovation in "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of the Maids," used to devastating effect in *Benito Cereno*, is to yoke the subject position of the complicit spectator to the literary device (symbolism, allegory, etc.)—or, we might say, to the "literary" itself. That is, the tale aligns the "literary" with the problematized "simple spectator" position, revealing it as a similarly embedded form of observation and representation. The two predominant modes of contemporary critical response to the tale, attuned specifically to engaging with "literary" elements (one aimed at evaluating the implementation of the aesthetic, another at weighing aesthetic analysis against historical implication), thus alternate between dismissive critiques of the tale's heavy-handed use of symbolism, allegory, and sexual imagery, and in-depth analyses of the historical symptoms producing these "literary" qualities. The diptychs, in general, and "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of the Maids," in particular, however, thwart such modes of interpretive resolution by rendering social and historical critique, and various forms of aesthetic evaluation, as illusory "outside" positions. In other words, they situate social criticism, and in "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of the Maids" literary authorship, as precisely the discursive approaches employed by voyeuristic, but complicit, narrators.

Where, then, is Melville in this tale? Suspended from privileging literary, historical, or social elements in order to locate the author's perspective, how can we identify the intentions and concepts that move alongside, and in proximity with, these elements? In many senses, "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of the Maids" primarily sets out to raise and engage with such questions by exploring the points of intersection between material context, narrative

structure, and the subjects of narrative inquiry. We see just such a point of intersection in the narrator's depiction of the final stages of paper-making in "The Tartarus of Maids," a scene expressly concerned with the processes that maintained the material context of the story's publication (the magazine) as they relate to the question of authorial intentions. While touring the paper-mill, the narrator marks a bit of paper with his guide's name, Cupid. He then drops it into the pulp, a mass of "white, wet, woolly-looking stuff, not unlike the albuminous part of an egg, soft-boiled" (331), and watches it slowly become pressed into foolscap. Foolscap, notably, was used in magazine publication, but not for book publishing (although we hear clear echoes of Romantic notions of authorship in the "birth" of the marked page).[71] Exactly nine minutes later, after a "scissory sound … as of some cord being snapped" (332), the sheet of "perfect foolscap" drops from the paper-making machine, "still moist and warm" (332), with the Cupid's name "half faded out of it" (332). In this sequence, the narrator's allusions to insemination, gestation, and birth overwrite the paper-making process itself, transforming it from mechanical and labor practice to sexualized allegory of authorial creation and publication. From the "seedsman" narrator's perspective, authorship records an aspect of experience (his "mark" of Cupid's name), and, after an elaborate sequence of seen and unseen processes ("now in open sight … then again wholly vanished" (332)) that he equates with the nine-month reproductive cycle, his inscription is "published" on foolscap—partially effaced, if nonetheless still visible.

This brief scene illustrates, in microcosm, the narrator's representational strategies regarding the entirety of his visit to the paper-mill. Presented with the dehumanizing mechanical processes that make his trade as "seedsman" possible, he literally stamps his mark, and organizes his portrayal around a "text" superimposed on these processes. This text, "Cupid," the

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[71] The opening chapter of Charles Dicken's *David Copperfield*, titled "I Am Born," serves as a particularly clear example of the connection between certain conceptions of Romantic authorship and birth.

manipulative intermediary who violently injects the erotic into interpersonal interactions, serves as an analogue to the narrator's sexualized characterization of the landscape and the paper-mill. Just as "Cupid," and the attendant questions of authorship, are superimposed on the paper-making process, the narrator stamps the landscape and conditions of the paper-mill with sexual imagery. He expressly reveals this in his description of the what he will do with the paper he purchases: "It need hardly be hinted how paper comes into use with seedsmen, as envelopes … [which,] when filled, are all but flat, and being stamped, and superscribed with the nature of the seeds contained, assume not a little the appearance of business-letters ready for the mail" (324-5). This seminal, masculinized mode of marking—and marketing—is likewise apparent from the outset in his overabundant allusions to female biology (from the "Mad Maid's Bellows'-pipe" anus to the vaginal "purple, hopper-shaped hollow … called the Devil's Dungeon" (324)). Like Cupid, however, who "rather impudently … glid[es] about among the passive-looking girls" (329) but performs no visible offense, the narrator's mode of superscription is rendered "plain" through its conspicuousness. More pointedly, we see an underlying scene and what is written over the scene, rather than recognizing this bifurcated environment as the composite produced by the same processes that sponsor the act of superscription—the superscribed text, like Cupid's name or the seed in the envelope, is already embedded in the practices, mediums, and material forms that it marks.

The first sketch identifies this "transparent" style with the terrain of the magazine; at the very least, the "Paradise of Bachelors" section connects the stylized (and, in the case of one of the bachelors, "spicy") biographical anecdote to the tasteful, leisured, carefree individuals generally considered to comprise a significant segment of the magazine's readership and contributors. Through his narrator, then, Melville gives us a magazine story that the larger

diptych structure reveals as such—a tale seemingly written by the "gentlemen of taste and leisure" (qtd. in Thompson, "The 'Plain Facts' of Fine Paper" 505) supposedly writing for *Putnam's*, *Harper's*, and related magazines. This story, the "Tartarus of Maids" sketch, is the conspicuously absent tale of the ninth bachelor (the narrator), the "[c]choice experience" of his private life stylized for the audience at hand—omitted from his account of the dinner party. By directly (the paper-mill) and indirectly (the bachelors) engaging with the space and practices of the magazine, Melville generates a potential means of recognizing of the seemingly non-intrusive medium and its potential impact on the reader's interpretive strategies. He augments this effect through use of the two-part structure, which, through its combination of disconnected action and thematically interlinked narrative, generates the conception of a position alongside each sketch. On one hand, this detached position allows the reader to occupy an alternative perspective from the narrator, thereby foregrounding the narrator's mode of overwriting, or superscribing, each individual scene via problematic representational strategies. On the other, by associating the sketches with the terrain of the magazine, and by positioning the narrator as a spectator nonetheless complicit with the scenarios he critiques, Melville implicates the similarly "detached" magazine reader in the narrator's process of superscription.

Anticipating Melville's later shift to poetry, we can distinguish a number of significant conclusions that he reaches through his evolving engagement with the diptych structure. The most notable of these insights concern substantial shifts in his perception of the interplay between narrative architecture, medium of publication, and various aspects of the publishing marketplace. Specifically, as evidenced by his diptychs, he saw a structural mechanism for aligning his narrative with the material context, thereby generating a potential means for readers to perceive the shaping effect of the medium of publication. This, in turn, speaks to his

developing interest in the potential of structure to disrupt, rather than enforce, the boundaries of literary production being established and policed by the marketplace gatekeepers (editors, critics, publishers, readers, and other contributors). It also indicates his recognition of the interrelated function of structure itself, as an element of authorial production whose effects worked in tandem with—not apart from—other facets of such production, including seemingly "transparent" material, economic, and interpretive practices. In the context of his move to poetry, and to increasingly selective avenues of publication, these developments reveal his lengthy investment in verse as a series of attempts to evade what he increasingly viewed as market-based interpretive protocols, and instead forge new modes of engagement with text.[72]

Benito Cereno and "The Piazza": Repurposing the Diptych

In terms of narrative arrangement and Melville's trajectory as a writer, both *Benito Cereno* and "The Piazza" emerge from his experiments with the diptych form. While neither strictly adheres to the formulaic design of the diptych, and both were written more than a year after the likely composition of the diptych sequence, they borrow heavily from its bifurcated structure. *Benito Cereno*, generally regarded alongside "Bartleby, the Scrivener" as one of Melville's most important pieces of short fiction, stretches and distorts this structure well beyond its original parameters, frequently to stunning effect. By contrast, "The Piazza" seems to treat the form—and, quite possibly, fiction itself—as an exhausted experiment.[73]

Putnam's first published *Benito Cereno* as a three-part serial in its closing issues of 1855 (October, November, and December). Editorial correspondence between *Putnam's* new owner

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[72] For further discussion, see chapter 4.

[73] Note that "The Piazza" was intended solely for book publication, as a frame story for *The Piazza Tales*, rather than as a magazine piece.

and publisher, Joshua A. Dix, and his editorial advisor, George William Curtis, help date

Melville's composition to the winter of 1854-5, more than a year after his completion of the

diptych sequence. As many contemporary readers are aware, the tale draws extensively from

Captain Amasa Delano's account of "the Capture of the Spanish [slave] ship Tryal" (*Piazza*

Tales 812) in his *A Narrative of Voyages and Travels in the Northern and Southern*

Hemispheres.[74] In both Melville's and Delano's versions of the event, Delano ventures aboard a

slaver whose crew is seemingly in need of assistance, oblivious to the slave revolt that has

occurred on board. Delano spends a considerable portion of the day aboard the vessel, remaining

unaware of the revolt thanks to an expert performance by a former slave named Babo, now the

leader of the rebellion. As Delano departs from the ship, its original captain, Benito Cereno,

makes a desperate, panicked escape and reveals Babo's deception. A short skirmish soon ensues

between the former slaves aboard the Spanish vessel (called the *San Dominick* in Melville's tale)

and Delano's crew, who eventually retake the ship and violently detain the surviving slaves.

These events unfold through a main literary narrative, a sequence of largely copied (but

purposefully edited) depositions, and a brief, but significant coda (which uses the initial

rhetorical mode).

Interestingly, Curtis's initial recommendation of the tale to Dix expresses his reservations

about its unusual arrangement. His comments even suggest that the story's disjointed structure

may have factored into the delay in its publication: "It is a great pity he did not work it up as a

connected story instead of putting in the dreary documents at the end.—They should have made

part of the substance of the story" (Leyda, *Log* 500-1). Curtis considered the inclusion of what he

called the "dreadful statistics at the end" of *Benito Cereno* a result of Melville writing "too

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[74] Facsimiles of pertinent sections of Delano's text are reprinted in Melville, *Piazza Tales* 809-847. I use these facsimiles as my primary source for Delano's *Narrative*.

hurriedly" (Leyda, *Log* 501)—an impression that seems to haunt some contemporary interpretations—but Dix obviously knew very little about Melville's writing habits.[75] Melville's production as a magazinist falls short of his output as a novelist, whether during the (roughly) three years in which he wrote *Moby-Dick* and *Pierre*, or the single summer in which he composed *White Jacket* and *Redburn*. Although the agreement between Melville and *Putnam's* (which paid Melville approximately five dollars per page) undoubtedly influenced his decision to include the deposition section, its addition was not the result of hurried or careless judgement. As indicated by Melville's frequently precise emendations to Delano's text, such as his change of the original date and ship name, the deposition section is a calculated and essential part of the tale.[76] How it works is particularly apparent if we consider the tale in relation to the diptych.

The opening of *Benito Cereno* shows how Melville modulates both the diptych form, and the investigation he undertakes at the close of "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids." Specifically, it works to foreground third-person authorial style in the same way the earlier tales foreground the seemingly simple spectator-narrator, bridging this connection through a narrative that is frequently complicit with its deeply flawed central character, Captain Delano. In other words, just as the three diptychs regularly, but subtly, allude to the complicity of the simple spectator position, *Benito Cereno* makes analogous suggestions respecting the complicity of narrative itself. While this is primarily accomplished via the use of third-person and purposeful stylistic exaggerations, the diptych-like structure of the tale—particularly in respect to the deposition section—dramatically expands the implications of such complicity.

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[75] Hayford, MacDougall, and Tanselle's notes on the tale offer a compact description of the exchange between Curtis and Dix. See Melville, *Piazza Tales* 580-2.

[76] See Sundquist 140-154, or Stauffer 227-8.

Although I am primarily concerned with the third paragraph, I quote the entire opening for

analytical purposes:

> In the year 1799, Captain Amasa Delano, of Duxbury, in Massachusetts, commanding a large sealer and general trader, lay at anchor with a valuable cargo, in the harbor of St. Maria—a small, desert, uninhabited island toward the southern extremity of the long coast of Chili. There he had touched for water.
> On the second day, not long after dawn, while lying in his berth, his mate came below, informing him that a strange sail was coming into the bay. Ships were then not so plenty in those waters as now. He rose, dressed, and went on deck.
> The morning was one peculiar to that coast. Everything was mute and calm; everything gray. The sea, though undulated into long roods of swells, seemed fixed, and was sleeked at the surface like waved lead that has cooled and set in the smelter's mould. The sky seemed a gray mantle. Flights of troubled gray fowl, kith and kin with flights of troubled gray vapors among which they were mixed, skimmed low and fitfully over the waters, as swallows over meadows before storms. Shadows present, foreshadowing deeper shadows to come.

As a point of reference, I'd like to compare this to a well-known passage from "The Paradise of

Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," which subtly prefigures Melville's wordplay in the

sequence of *Benito Cereno* above. Shortly after entering the paper-mill in "Tartarus," the

narrator remarks, "At rows of blank-looking counters of blank-looking girls, with blank, white

folders in their blank hands, all blankly folding blank paper" (328). His excessive use of the

adjective *blank* reiterates the same tendencies apparent in his exaggerated sexualization of the

mountain setting of the paper-mill. However, this passage—rendered alone as a paragraph—

extends his hyperbole into recognizably absurd dimensions. Thus, while the passage registers his

horror regarding the dehumanizing working conditions of the paper-mill, it also absorbs these

oppressive material practices within a humorous, indeed farcical, phrasing that undercuts the

obvious despair of the female laborers. The situation is rendered in such hopeless—or possibly

such allegorical—terms as to appear purely fictional, even ludicrous. As my previous discussion

of the tale suggests, this is no accident. The passage accentuates the seedman's narrative

strategies to make them visible, however briefly, at a key point in his story. While the narrator

overwrites the predicament of the mill-workers, Melville nonetheless exposes, via the term

blank, the very process taking place. The narrator's discursive strategies literally and figuratively

render the women as virginal, blank paper, awaiting his inscription—and the passage

foregrounds the absurdity of such superscription.

The opening description of the sea and sky from *Benito Cereno* presents a similar, but

much more subtle, use of these narrative tactics. Both *gray* and *shadow* receive the same type of

hyperbolic emphasis—slightly muted, but still obtrusive—Melville places on *blank* in the

passage from "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of the Maids." The effects are equally

disorienting. Where the narrator of "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of the Maids"

offers a lengthy introduction that anticipates his stylistic intrusion, however, *Benito Cereno*

provides little context for the reader. In contrast to "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus

of the Maids," then, which highlights the shortcomings of the narrator's stylistic superscription,

Benito Cereno foregrounds a narrative approach that is, among similar sounding *Putnam's*

stories, otherwise imperceptible. This foregrounding therefore draws attention to potential

limitations or deficiencies inherent to such narrative style itself, or, put another way, to the

potential ways that any narrative approach impinges on and obscures what it portrays.

The closing sentence of the passage further conveys this, suggesting an immanent

distortion of visibility—the "shadows present" in a seemingly clear scene—that presages more

noticeable distortion "to come." Indeed, the remainder of the narrative builds upon this prophetic

pronouncement, for, as the slave revolt aboard the *San Dominick* becomes more apparent to the

reader, the nature of the "shadows" within the narrative itself become likewise visible. Rather

than precisely symbolizing ambiguity or lack of clarity, as numerous critics suggest, the

paragraph's exaggerated emphasis on *gray* and *shadows* accentuates and clearly displays the

limiting function of the narrative's mode of representation.[77] Just as the narrator of "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of the Maids" renders the female laborers as blanks awaiting imprinting, the narrative of *Benito Cereno* suppresses color and sound, producing a reified, "troubled," and indeed *gray* landscape, replete with shadows created by its mode of representation. The repeated use of *gray* makes visible and literal the effects of the tale's narrative approach, which reduces a complex scenario filled with various subjectivities to a singular, suppressive perspective.

Melville explicitly unites the suppressive perspective of the narrative with Delano's worldview in the paragraphs surrounding the sea/sky description. Readers view the seascape only when Delano rises, dresses, and emerges on deck, just as they first see the slave ship, the "stranger," as Delano eyes it through his looking glass. In the latter description, Melville foregrounds the congruence between Delano's mode of perception and the narrative's seeming objectivity to near-comic effect: "To Delano, the stranger, viewed through the glass, showed *no colors*" (46, my italics). Delano sees only the black, white, and gray world depicted by the overtly stylized narrative. However, by also drawing attention to the seeming transparency of the representational medium ("the glass"), the text implies that the relationship between observing and representing extends beyond analogy. The representational medium that enables Delano to see also *produces* what he sees. This suggests an essentially tautological relationship between representation and observation, as Eric Sundquist notes. Tautology, he suggests, "defines not just the perceptual apparatus that occludes Delano's recognition but also the relationship of Benito Cereno and Babo, whose enacted revolt has been contained as something that *is* and *is not*" (156). In other words, what Sundquist describes as "the virtual equivalence of potentially

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[77] For a recent discussion of such "ambiguity," see Steverson 174.

different authorities or meanings" (155)—a.k.a., tautology—constitutes Delano's primary mode of seeing and understanding the world, just as it functions to stifle and negate the revolutionary significance of Babo's actions. Melville similarly uses tautology to *schematize* the composition of the relationship between representation and observation for his readers. The passage's inclusion of "the glass," for example, offers a mechanism for understanding how Delano's way of seeing couples with the supposedly beneficial and neutral instrument through which he perceives the scene. The interjected clause "viewed through the glass" momentarily manifests the narrative's (and Delano's) mode of perception as both a textual impediment (the clause), and a substantial, tangible mediatory object (the "glass"), allowing readers multiple ways to experience the limiting effects of its neutral—and indeed colorless—representational-perspectival mediation.

Melville's opening emphasis on the distortive effects of the eye that simultaneously observes and represents culminates in his subsequent description of the sun, which enters the harbor "in company with the strange ship" and "wimpled by the same low, creeping clouds [as those mantling the Spanish vessel], show[s] not unlike a Lima intriguante's one sinister eye peering across the Plaza from the Indian loop-hole of her dusk *saya-y-manta*" (47). The solitary and "sinister eye" cynically evokes Ralph Waldo Emerson's exhaustively discussed and oft-caricatured "transparent eyeball" (well-known by Melville), just as the Plaza setting refigures the "bare commons" that initiates Emerson's deployment of the image in his essay "Nature."[78] For Emerson, immersion in a singular, all-encompassing perspective divests individuals of "all mean egotism," and allows them to behold something "as beautiful as [their] own Nature" in "the tranquil landscape, and especially in the distant line of the horizon" (Nature 6). The sun of *Benito*

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[78] See Sealts, *Pursuing Melville*, especially "Melville and Emerson's Rainbow." Notably, Sealts remarks that "there is nothing but internal evidence … to suggest that [Melville] ever read Nature" (254).

Cereno, as an element of the horizon, also mirrors the onlooker's "own Nature," but reveals this nature—Delano's—to be limited, menacing, and partially blinded ("wimpled"). Conversely, as that which illuminates the scene through its act of "peering," the sun also *renders* the subjects of its observation—and, like the narrative, it does so through the same obscuring veil (the ever-present "vapors") through which it observes.

While the opening sequence indeed suggests a certain type of ambiguity and a lack of clarity, it nonetheless *clearly* implicates both the narrative and Delano in generating such a flawed misperception and misconception of events. *Benito Cereno* does not simply foreshadow its revelations; it announces this foreshadowing. Which is to say, Melville calls attention to the text's use of literary devices, and suggests that these devices are similarly blinded and blinding mediums of observation and expression. The tale further implies that the problematic elements of Delano's mode of perception—and of the narrative—stem from its assimilative ("graying") function and its adherence to a singular, unitary conception of reality. However skillfully Melville disguises the ensuing events from new or inexperienced readers (like the many undergraduate students have asked to read the tale), those more familiar with the story should cease to be surprised that both Melville and his text are openly at odds with the severely limited, and racist, views expressed by Delano and the main narrative. I stress this in order to identify this opposition as the *starting point* of Melville's narrative design, rather than as merely one of the shadowy aftereffects of its implementation.

Curtis's initial comments suggest, however, that the text's implications of Delano and the main narrative function in a "thoroughly magazinish" way without the "dreadful statistics" at the

close of the story.[79] As we have seen, from his perspective, *Benito Cereno* was "striking & well-done" but would have been better suited to publication had the court documents been incorporated into the "substance" of the tale.[80] The stylistic departure evident in the heavily plagiarized depositions identifies that Dix's concept of "substance" is the narrative itself; presumably, the inconspicuous meshing of these documents with the narrative would have produced a far more "Poeish tale," as the *Literary World* had deemed "Bartleby" two years earlier (in December 1853).[81] Curtis's complaints about the story thus indicate that its arrangement disrupts its expected functions as a magazine piece, while its main narrative acts in accord with such expectations. To an extent, then, the depositions work against the sustained stylistic virtuosity of the primary narrative, rendering its stylistic variances as more than cleverly positioned clues regarding what critics refer to as the "mystery" of the *San Dominick*.[82] That is, by undercutting what Curtis imagined as the literary integrity of the tale, Melville disturbs the type of magazine-oriented reading strategies Curtis exemplified. In keeping with the text's extensive play on *masters*, this disruption calls into question the artistic mastery of the main narrative, recalibrating Melville's impeccable craftsmanship to the type of assimilative and unitary perspective that plagues Delano.

I highlight Curtis's comments in order to underscore the central importance of *Benito Cereno*'s essentially diptych-like structure—that of two disparate but intertwined movements

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[79] As Sealts, Dillingham, and others have noted, Curtis used this positive endorsement to describe Melville's short story "I and My Chimney," which he considered a "capital, genial … [and] thoroughly magazinish" sketch (Leyda, *Log* 507). See Dillingham, *Melville's Short Fiction* 271; Sealts, *Pursuing Melville* 173.

[80] Melville did, in fact, incorporate certain details and passages from the depositions in the closing sequence of the main narrative. See the marginal references in the Appendix ("Melville's Source for 'Benito Cereno'") of *The Piazza Tales* for a detailed account of these inclusions.

[81] See Melville, *Piazza Tales* 576.

[82] See Sundquist 180, Delbanco 242.

followed by a brief coda. Andrew Delbanco notes, "To the casual reader, *Benito Cereno* is a story with the pace and intrigue of good suspense writing in the genre of Poe's 'The Purloined Letter' (1845), about a mystery hidden in plain sight" (242). For the publics typified by Curtis, however, the diptych largely structure prohibits such "casual" reading across its latter half. The bipartite structure is precisely the mechanism that unsettles the type of interpretive strategies frequently employed for texts like "The Purloined Letter" and, by counteracting the narrative's "literary" qualities, prompts readers to reassess the function of authorial style itself. Curtis's continued mentions of the tale, sent to Dix over a six-month span, show that it remained on his mind, and evince its capacity for producing such reassessment; his final recommendation, sent two weeks before its publication, called it "ghastly and interesting" (Leyda, *Log* 508).

The stories of the original diptych sequence employ thematic, spatial, and social distinctions to differentiate paired sketches, then undermine the intelligibility of these ostensible boundaries through the increasingly problematic narrative style of the "simple spectator" relating the tales. *Benito Cereno* reconfigures this design, differentiating his sketches stylistically—even going so far as to openly plagiarize his source to achieve this effect—while blurring such stylistic differences through the causal and thematic continuity between each section. This arrangement produces a homologous relationship between court depositions and the primary narrative. The homology renders seemingly transparent legal records as recognizably *stylized* fictions, and exposes the initial narrative's reliance on the superficial objectivity of legal process and the language of the law. Respecting this dependency, I mean that the diptych structure reveals that it is the eye-witness account, and the language through which this account is given and authorized, that sanctions the legitimacy of the mode of expression Melville foregrounds in the opening section—a mode that readers like Curtis saw as "literary" and magazinish.

In theory (if not in practice for Curtis), then, the diptych structure sponsors magazine readers to interpret Melville's deft literary maneuvers as mechanisms of actual suppression extending well beyond the text, rather than as clever artistic devices meant to conceal the mystery of the *San Dominick* (notably a *fictional* vessel). His narrative contortions not only hide the truth from the reader, but they reflect the type of semantic posturing needed to sustain the *status quo* precariously restored at the close of the tale—and it is the tale's arrangement that renders the latter point partially visible. If, as Sundquist notes, "the legal deposition acts retrospectively to explain and endorse, in stately legal phrases, the urgent suppression of the slaves' revolt" (179), it also retrospectively locates this urgent suppressive force within the type of literary language Melville employs in the main narrative. The dialectic exchange between the two sections further links this inherently suppressive quality to such "stately legal phrases," revealing the "shadows present" in the legal mode of expression. Indeed, the text openly displays these shadows through the asterisks and italics that populate the deposition documents. Overtly marking omissions and authorial/authoritative paraphrase, these typographical elements serve as manifestations of that which is concealed, distorted, and unseen. They thereby call attention to the "partial" (103) character of the translated extracts—the incomplete *and* biased aspects of the "official Spanish documents" (103) that a "connected story," such as Curtis preferred, would have effaced. Thus, when the narrative selectively incorporates the court documents to "shed light on the preceding narrative" (103), their visibly fragmented arrangement reveals this "light" to be that of the wimpled sun.

The tale's coda re-emphasizes this distinction, while simultaneously staging something like the "device of multiple-choice" (276) that F.O. Matthiessen famously ascribed to Hawthorne. As critics have extensively discussed, in the final moments of the story, Benito

Cereno responds to Delano's question "what has cast such a shadow on you?" (116) with "The

negro" (116). Readers like Delbanco see this reply as an obvious retort to Delano's "[staggering]

stupidity" (242), while Rogin and others see it as an indication of the "philosophic

understanding" (218) acquired by Benito Cereno, but inaccessible to Delano. In the latter

reading, the "shadow" articulates a space of knowledge and suffering hidden (in plain sight)

from the type of consciousness Delano represents. Benito Cereno is not simply dejected because

of the traumas inflicted on him and his crew by the escaped slaves (and, quite possibly, by the

traumas he and his crew have inflicted), but, due to the new mode of understanding produced by

his ordeal, he occupies a position partly obscured to Delano. If we accept this interpretation, the

text also suggests that it is precisely Delano's "benevolent" (47) perspective on the "negro," both

as concept and body, that produces his inability to see Cereno's position clearly. From Cereno's

more informed vantage, it is specifically the "negro" that obscures Delano's sight.

What has been less remarked upon is the role Blandmour-esque language plays in this

sequence. The text prefaces Delano's final question with the following exchange:

> "… But the past is passed: why moralize upon it? Forget it. See, yon bright sun has
> forgotten it all, and the blue sea, and the blue sky; these have turned over new leaves."
> "Because they have no memory," he [Benito Cereno] dejectedly replied; "because
> they are not human."
> "But these mild trades that now fan your cheek, do they not come with a human-
> like healing to you? Warm friends, steadfast friends are the trades" (116)

Delano again invokes the sun, the wimpled eye and veiled/veiling observer that, by his account,

has somehow *forgotten* the horrific events detailed in the preceding pages—an amnesia perhaps

produced by the codification performed in the depositions. Rogin argues that Delano "turns to

nature" (326) at this moment, but he more specifically turns to a tritely romanticized and

sentimentalized, and presumably "literary," conception of nature. His sentiments echo

Blandmour's opening comments on the "beneficence" of nature from "Poor Man's Pudding,

Rich Man's Crumbs," while his arch-phrasing (such as the use of *yon bright sun* or *Warm friends, steadfast friends*) replays Blandmour's declamatory remarks on "soft March snow" (289)—a.k.a., "Poor Man's Manure," a.k.a., "Poor Man's Eye-water." Like Blandmour, he also reveals himself as a hack, employing the colloquialism "turned over new leaves" so woodenly that the reader either ignores its incongruous literal meaning or recognizes its implication regarding the pages being turned. The latter interpretation further cements the link between Delano and the narrative, revealing the process of erasure (forgetting) occurring simultaneously within the oblivious and still-happy Delano and via the continuation—the turning of pages—and completion of the tale.

Despite the obvious criticism levelled at Delano here and elsewhere, Melville carefully details the viability and potential legitimacy of Delano's position alongside this critique. The "multiple-choice" that he offers readers is not marked by the type of "persistent, almost pedantic pointedness" (207) that Sacvan Bercovich finds in Hawthorne's "multiple-choice" technique, nor are the choices themselves forms of closure and certainty. According to Delano's final account, the "more than commonly pleasant" (115) temper of his mind prevented the slaves from killing him "at times when acuteness might have cost [him his] life" (115). However suspect, Delano's statement complicates our estimation of his "singularly undistrustful good nature" (47), leaving even the most "eagle-eyed readers" (*Piazza Tales* 251) unsure as to whether the text encourages or undermines their powers of discernment.[83] Thus, the text leaves open its initial question respecting Delano: "Whether, in view of what humanity, such a trait implies, along with a benevolent heart, more than ordinary quickness and accuracy of intellectual perception, may be left to the wise to determine" (47). The obvious response would be that Delano is, as Delbanco

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[83] For more on the phrase, "eagle-eyed reader," see Delbanco 243.

contends, staggeringly stupid. The text, however, proposes that we weigh our conceptions of "intellectual perception" against the experiences that purportedly legitimize them, in much the same way that it asks us to weigh Delano's conception of "the negro" against Babo's expert machinations and Don Benito's despair. This distinction is reiterated in Cereno's reply to Delano above, which differentiates between the trite, static conceptions of nature embedded in textuality ("leaves"), and actual *human* experience ("because they are not human"). Hence, if Delano's apparent stupidity keeps him alive and successful, what marks it as such?

As I've suggested, the tale's bipartite structure generates a space where such a judgement is possible and, for some, necessary, even as it revises notions of judgement and legitimacy. *Benito Cereno*'s coda offers readers important opportunities to occupy and employ this space beyond evaluating the viability of Delano's character, specifically in interpreting Benito Cereno's final words and the tale's closing passage. Each of these moments provides an occasion to register the function of the "wimpled" observational-representational modes of the text. That is, the coda encourages readers to interpret two phrases—"the negro" and "followed his leader"—in respect to the juxtaposition of the styles of the preceding sections. By accentuating the effects of the observational-representational medium, this juxtaposition exposes the fundamental variability of both phrases. In doing so, it also prompts readers to develop interpretive strategies that circumvent or otherwise engage with such effects—sponsoring not the "certainty" that Bercovich ascribes to Hawthorne's readers, but a means to work outside the territory of the known.[84] Critics have wavered between the idea that *Benito Cereno* offers "no way out" (Rogin 321) and the notion that the tale's "atmosphere of suppressed articulation and failed communication is itself a form of expression" (Sundquist 181) that produces sight of

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[84] See, for example, Bercovich 194-197.

viable alternatives for the reader. While my argument aligns with the latter contention, I'd also like to suggest that this "form of expression" is better understood as a product of the disruption of two key modes of "objective" discourse (third-person narrative and legal report) achieved by the text's primarily structural interaction with certain mediums and reading tactics.

The concerns emerging from *Benito Cereno* thus constellate around structure in a manner that anticipates both *The Confidence Man* and Melville's eventual shift from prose to poetry. If the imaginative vitality of his deepest diving novels stems from their stylistic richness, from his own brand of the "'bold and nervous lofty language' that Nantucket whaling captains learn straight from nature" (7), as Alfred Kazin and others have claimed, *Benito Cereno*'s power results from Melville's increasing reservations about style itself. These reservations eventuate in an interrogation of the relationship between expression and medium, which he executes through the formal mechanisms made available by the diptych. As I have argued, *Benito Cereno* implicates various modes of stylized expression in the structures of suppression that the tale seeks to counteract. Similarly, it focuses excessive attention on the role of representational mediums in dictating perception. In *Benito Cereno*, nondescript (or seemingly transparent) representational approaches and observational modes therefore emerge as deeply problematic, while structure acts as an obtrusive mechanism that, by obtruding, evades and counteracts their "wimpling" effects.

Moving forward, Melville engages with a number of the possible directions that the completion of *Benito Cereno* presented to him. In *The Confidence Man*, he largely abandons the conventions of the novel book-form (its medium), such as character and narrative cohesion, and almost entirely avoids "the bold and nervous lofty language" that characterizes *Moby-Dick* and *Pierre*. By thus flattening the text, he seemed to be attempting to negate or mute the "literary"

qualities privileged by Curtis and many nineteenth century readers. Melville's poetry takes an alternative approach. Although at times similarly flattened, it is often noticeably—even intrusively—literary and referential, particularly in the works written after *Battle-Pieces*. As the themes and subjects of these works make plain, however, Melville turns to various dated conceptions of art, aesthetics, and philosophy (primarily classical antiquity and the Italian Renaissance) for inspiration. Rather than solely evincing an absorption in artistic concerns, as many critics have suggested, his later works examine and emphasize the role of art, as a variable and shifting conceptual apparatus, in generating the interpretive standpoint of the reader. The often intrusive verse forms Melville employs, functioning in similar fashion to the diptych structure of *Benito Cereno*, foreground the "literariness" of his poems. On one hand, such foregrounding produces what many critics refer to as his jarring poetics—modulations and distortions of already unsettling(ed) forms. On the other, the irregular elements of his poetry render its literary qualities (particularly its structure and style) as opaque, thereby emphasizing— rather than disguising or otherwise mystifying—the effects of their mediation.

"The Piazza," the only short fiction written specifically and definitively for book publication during Melville's magazine phase, represents one of Melville's earliest experiments with the potential directions that seemed viable after completing *Benito Cereno*. Stylistically distinct from his magazine pieces, "The Piazza" nevertheless plays off his entire magazine corpus, as well as his core organizational concept during the magazine phase—the diptych. Indeed, even a brief summary of the tale reveals the extensive influence of his other magazine work. On a horse-bound journey that inverts the trajectory of "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," the narrator (presumably, but not conclusively, a version of Melville) leaves his recently built piazza for a "spot of radiance" (4) high up Mount Greylock, which he views

daily from his north-facing "piazza deck" (12). Although the narrator imagines this spot as "some haunted ring where fairies dance" (5), he instead finds "a small abode—mere palanquin, set down on the summit, in a pass between two worlds, participant of neither" (8). Both in its interstitial location and poor condition, this "rotting" house recalls Merrymusk's shanty from "Cock-A-Doodle-Doo!", just as its inhabitant, a melancholy "pale-cheeked girl" (8) named Marianna, evokes Dame Coulter from "Poor Man's Pudding, Rich Man's Crumbs." After Marianna invites the narrator into her home, the pair share a fanciful and discordantly abbreviated conversation concerning shadows and perspective, topics that seem to purposefully anticipate *Benito Cereno*, found later in the volume. The narrator tells Marianna that she has "sat so long at [her] mountain-window" that, to her, "shadows are as things" (11), but their exchange complicates his insensitive portrayal of her situation. Significantly, Marianna announces her desire to visit a house in the distance and meet its inhabitants. This house, which "appear[s] less a farm-house than King Charming's palace" (9), is the narrator's own, a fact that he quickly realizes but withholds from her. His account of their encounter concludes mid-conversation, as he wrenches the narrative away from Marianna's home, declaring "—Enough." (12) and offering a final reflection on the piazza—a space that the reader suddenly suspects the narrator has not left.

Much of the tale consists of the same type of introspection found in the concluding paragraphs, often respecting the narrator's decision to build a piazza and his discovery of the distant, radiant location he intends to visit. As his self-absorption makes clear, the narrator's excursion to Marianna's home is also—and perhaps *only*—a journey inward, directed toward a space of the imagination that he repeatedly refers to as a "fairy-land" (*Piazza Tales* 6). His fixation on this imagined "fairy-land," as well as what Scott Kemp's nuanced study of the tale

calls the "baroque" (52) style of his account, reveal him as unwilling or unable to differentiate between imagined and real worlds, leaving the reader unsure about the actual nature of his journey (and, characteristically, his reliability). The text sustains this uncertainty throughout; as the narrator tells us early in the tale, his travel up Greylock is "A true voyage; but, take it all in all, interesting as invented" (4). Typifying the tale's frequent distortion of the boundaries between the conceptual and the corporeal, this subtle inversion of the real and the imagined invites readers to question the authenticity of his narrative while disrupting the mechanisms that legitimize and constitute empirical conceptions of truth. The passage's various surfaces play against one another, unsettling what seems the most likely interpretation of the narrator's statement ("This really happened, but it is going to sound like I made it up."). The term *true*, for example, circumvents the question of empirical validity, just as the narrator's use of *as* fuses two antithetical interpretations (*interesting as though it was invented* and *interesting when it is invented here*). Similarly, the colloquial "take it all in all" merges the tale itself with what it purportedly represents, implying a lack of distinction between the overt artifice of the narrator's depiction and the world he describes.

As Kemp has argued, numerous allusions to Spenser, Shakespeare, and Cervantes, as well as the text's "elaborately constructed" sentences and "elevated diction" (51), associate the narrator's quixotic mode of "invention" with Renaissance poetics. Noting the narrator's heavy embellishment and his often archaic diction, Kemp further suggests that the narrator's "Old-World preoccupations" indicate a specific investment in the late Renaissance, particularly "in ideations characteristic of Romance" (61). However, this is not the full extent of the text's allusions. As exemplified by the narrator's repeated use of the term *yawl* to characterize his horse-bound journey, his narrative also associates the "inland voyage" with Melville's sea

novels, especially the Shakespeare-laden *Moby-Dick* and the failed romance *Mardi*. *Yawl*, which

denotes both a ship's boat or small cutter-class sailboat, and a shout or yell, not only emphasizes

the maritime imagery that populates the text, but also acts to merge the narrator's spatial

movement with the imagined movement achieved by expression.

The Whitman-like interchange of imagination, expression, and physical presence,

reminiscent of the transmutations of textuality and embodiment found in sections like the

celebrated "Twenty-ninth bather" sequence, nonetheless produces opposite effects from

Whitman's verse. Where Whitman frequently uses text as a means to manifest sensual presence

and an interchangeably egoistic and democratic selfhood, in "The Piazza," the body fades from

view and the real dissolves into the imagined.[85] That is, the text's regular distortion of spatial and

physical boundaries does not serve to apostrophically evoke an imagined presence in the reader's

immediate physical space, but instead repositions the domain of the real from a space in

diametric opposition to the real to one organized and contained by structures of the mind.[86] This

move is significant not only in how it repurposes the Emersonian logic underlying Whitman's

project, but in how it stages material distinctions (such as, we will see, between the novelistic,

poetic, and magazinistic) as simultaneously spatial and conceptual. Thus, where the tale

organizes various types of textual mediation as space, the very notion of space becomes merely a

consequence of designation of conceptual parameters—"The Piazza" renders space itself as a

cordoning off of textual elements.

What I suggest is that "The Piazza" stages an exchange between the novelistic, poetic,

and magazinistic through the movements of its narrator, but also reveals these "movements" as

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[85] For a compressed investigation of this type of exchange in Whitman, see, for example, Moon 36-47.

[86] Bradford, for example, suggests that "Apostrophic styles of address were a staple of Whitman's early career" (144) in his detailed study of this mode of address. See Bradford for further discussion.

modal shifts of figuration and thematization. "The Piazza" therefore allows us to understand the conceptual via spatial terrain, but it also complicates the legibility of this terrain by suggesting that the narrator's outward journey is actually imagined. On one hand, this cyclical logic offers readers a metaphorical apparatus for understanding the factors that distinguish various types of content; readers perceive what belongs in a magazine and what belongs in a poem by differentiating the piazza from the "fairy land" beyond it. On the other, like *Benito Cereno*, the tale problematizes the perspectival and textual markers authorizing such distinctions. The ability to distinguish between piazza and "fairy land" relies on a logic that integrates position and descriptive mode—the seemingly tangible boundaries of the landscape are produced by how the narrator articulates his position within it.

If such logic seems to be categorized by a sort of reflexive stranglehold, an inescapable turn back into the mind, it is because it engages with the types of reflexive mechanisms Melville had discovered at play in the publishing marketplace during his interrogation of the magazine medium. *Putnam's* "Introductory," as an example, primarily discusses the magazine in spatial terms, as a place entered by a "portal," wherein "poets, wits, philosophers, critics, artists, travellers [sic], men of erudition and science, all strictly masked" (2) decorously and anonymously worship "that invisible Truth which all our efforts and aims will seek to serve" (2). The opening lines of this "Introductory," however, also compare the formation of a new magazine to the production of stars, "churned" in a "celestial dairy" from the "nebulous mist with which the ether is formed" (1). The "Introductory," then, deems the magazine both a space and the product of space, the site of a masquerade and the amalgamation of the latent presence of the cosmos—what the writer calls "infinite star-dust." While Melville likely isn't drawing from

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the opening issue of *Putnam's*, he is interrogating the elusive understanding of space, presence, and text that the "Introductory" exploits.

To get a better sense of this interrogation, I'd like to look at the ways that "The Piazza" arranges space as textual mediums and genres. As the title of the full volume implies, Melville associated the piazza with the space of the magazine. That is, *The Piazza Tales* are expressly the *Putnam's Monthly Magazine* tales, generating a somewhat obvious interchangeability between piazza and magazine. Like the magazine, the piazza is simultaneously the space where the tales were composed and, hearkening to "The Town-Ho's Story," the space where they come to be told. The narrator's reasoning for building the piazza further substantiates this association. Analogizing the piazza to a bench in a "picture-gallery," he figures the surrounding hills as "hung, month after month anew, with pictures ever fading into pictures fresh," further noting that "beauty is like piety—you cannot run and read it; tranquility and constancy, with, now-a-days, an easy chair, are needed" (2). Reading, repose, and *vogue*, a term Melville picks up in the following sentence, serve here as the central elements of the passage. Like *Putnam's* itself, which understood the magazine as "a running commentary upon the countless phenomena of the times as they rise" ("Introductory" 2), the landscape offers a monthly renewal of images, characterized specifically by their immediacy ("pictures fresh"). Similarly, the description emphasizes the importance of leisure to the project of "reading" these pictures, specifically as such leisure is exemplified by the "easy chair," a furnishing that not only served as the prototypical locale of magazine consumption, but also, as in the *Harper's* column "Editor's Easy Chair," as one site of the magazine's address.[87] The "tranquility and constancy" that the narrator highlights further suggest the type of reading scenario particular to the magazine, which, as I've

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[87] See, for example, Helwig 7-8.

discussed in respect to *Harper's*, claimed to take "special care" not to offend the most delicate sensibility, and which also provided a constant stream of entertainment.

If we accept such schematization, in leaving the piazza, the narrator also ventures forth from the space of the magazine, into a realm associated with both poetic and novelistic romance. Emphasizing the poetic and romantic cast of the space outside the piazza, he reveals that he first sees the "fairy land" on "a mad poet's afternoon" (4), which, owing to a disastrous fire in Vermont (roughly twenty miles away), transforms the landscape into what he envisions as a mythic and poetic realm, making the sky "ominous as Hecate's cauldron" (4) and two sportsmen seem "guilty Macbeth and foreboding Banquo" (4). The inverted syntax of his regularly repeated refrain throughout this section, "Fairies there, thought I" (5), reinforce the distortive qualities of the poeticized and romanticized landscape. In one iteration, "Your rainbow's end, would I were there, thought I" (5), the Miltonic inversion borders on the absurd, revealing how such narrative strategies eventually undermine our capacity to make and communicate sense of the world. Melville's contemporary viewers picked up on what they also understood as the poetic aspects of his language, deeming the tale "a poem—essentially a poem—lack[ing] only rhythm and form" (Melville, *Piazza Tales* 481) and noting its "romantic and pictorial" (Melville, *Piazza Tales* 481) style.

The narrator's movement from magazine to the domain of romance also literalizes Melville's return to the terrain of the book. The tale initially seems to capture Melville's jubilance at this return, and the narrator seems likewise to revel in the "sea-room" of book writing—taking every occasion to explore his descriptive and poetic impulses. A single passage will suffice to illustrate this tendency:

> Time passed; and the following May, after a gentle shower upon the mountains—a little shower islanded in misty seas of sunshine; such a distant shower—and sometimes two,

and three, and four of them, all visible together—as I love to watch from the piazza, instead of thunder storms, as I used to, which wrap old Greylock, like a Sinai, till one thinks swart Moses must be climbing among scathed hemlocks there; after, I say, that gentle shower, I saw a rainbow, resting its further end just where, in autumn, I had marked the mole. Fairies there, thought I … (5)

The passage consciously foregrounds the narrator's digressive nature: The em-dashes mark a parenthetical phrase within a parenthetical phrase, only to emerge—unexpectedly—into a further digression ("instead of thunder storms, as I used to") that closes with an extended (and near-epic) simile. The sentence, in fact, travels so far from its original trajectory that the narrator rhetorically signposts its intended course, reiterating the preposition *after* as a means of reorienting the reader. All of this closes with the refrain of the tale's central section ("fairies there, thought I"), again gesturing toward its rhythmic—rather than narratival—function.

A cluster of such protracted and digressive passages, linked via refrain, populate the narrator's description of his "inland voyage," which culminates in a paragraph-long sentence detailing various scenic elements along his journey. The aggregate effect of these descriptions, however, counteracts their initial playfulness, transforming the landscape from a realm of open poetic promise to a place oversaturated—to the point of effacement—by literary language. The distortive, destructive excess of the narrator's style, analogous to the poetry-producing fire in Vermont, is further accentuated by the abundance and bluntness of his literary allusions. He muses upon his fairy land only in the time he is able to "spare from reading the *Midsummer Night's Dream*" (5), jokes about correspondence with Edmund Spenser, and whimsically claims Don Quixote is the "sagest sage that ever lived" (6). As intentionally comical as these references are, they nonetheless characterize the speaker's dependence on such allusions as means to perceive, understand, *and* describe his environment.

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The rich density of his language is reminiscent of sections of *Pierre* and *Moby-Dick*, and most immediately recalls Melville's ebullient correspondence with Hawthorne. However, we should not mistake the author of "The Piazza" for his earlier incarnations.[88] As the closing section of the tale indicates, the narrator's excessively allusive and encompassing poetics represent a failed project. This is readily apparent in the narrator's inability to perceive Marianna's impoverished situation through any terms but his own, and in his insistence, throughout their conversation, on overwriting her responses in exaggeratedly literary manner. Thus, when she complains about the condition of her roof, he tells her that "Yours are strange fancies, Marianna" (10), to which she replies "They but reflect the things" (10). He quickly attempts to revise his comment by saying "Then I should have said, 'These are strange things'" (10), but Marianna merely responds, "As you will" (10). Not only does the narrator continue to confuse the real and imagined, but Marianna's response indicates that he fundamentally misrecognizes the impasse between them. What is at stake is not the narrator's categories of *things* and *fancies*, which, we have seen, are largely indistinguishable (and ultimately textual entities), but that he perceives and represents her practical point of view as *strange*. There is nothing at all *strange* about her comments, except that they don't mesh with his idealized, fanciful, and, yes, *strange* portrayal of her home. Her curt dismissal of his comment alerts readers to her recognition of the, ultimately insuperable, impasse generated by his discursive mode, and reveals that she sees no point in continuing to gratify his desire for fantasy.

That Melville aligns himself against the narrator's position is most apparent in the final moments of the story, which show Melville as unwilling (and perhaps unable) to sustain his interest in the story he began. To a large degree, the story suggests that Melville's waning

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[88] The purposefully exaggerated language of "The Piazza" is nonetheless reminiscent of *Pierre*'s stylistic excesses. For a nuanced study of these excesses, see Otter, "The Overwrought Landscape of *Pierre*."

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interest in his own narrative revolves around Marianna's return gaze at the narrator's house. It is ultimately this gaze, which prompts the narrator to first withhold the truth and then to lie to her, that repeatedly disrupts his attempts to romanticize, sentimentalize, or otherwise fictionalize her experience—and, which, in its last appearance makes the narrator unable to continue. This moment of narrative exhaustion produced by rupture appears in a few of Melville's late prose works, most notably in the final sentence of *The Confidence Man* and, to a lesser extent, in "The Apple-Tree Table," which Warner Berthoff suggests "quite noticeably runs out of steam and drags to a flat anti-climactic ending" (Melville and Berthoff 362). "The Piazza," I think, offers insight into these moments.

Few places in literature does the quest object/subject itself look back so hauntingly and disturbingly on the space of its own genesis. Critics have regularly seen Melville's narrative exhaustion here as the result of various biographical causes, such as depression, writer's block, or frustration with the publishing marketplace.[89] The narrative, however, gestures toward a causal relation between Marianna's gaze and the narrator's abrupt completion of the tale. Given such a relationship, we are left to wonder why continuation of the tale becomes impossible after Marianna expresses her longing to visit the narrator's home and the narrator answers falsely. The reasons the final exchange between Marianna and the narrator generates a fundamental obstacle to the continuation of the narrator's specific mode of storytelling hinge on the mechanics of the scene. Marianna, the unexpected inhabitant of the central space of the narrator's fantasy, longs for precisely the space that the narrator left. To sustain his fantasy and her longing, he resorts to what we can label as a sentimentalized lie. That is, he lies outright, but does so in order to sustain Marianna's hopes and to generate a feeling of community between them. The structural relation

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[89] See, for example, Delbanco 228-30.

at play therefore exposes the mode of creative longing embodied by the author (the impetus driving, say, renaissance poetics) as mistaken. Whether Marianna is fantasy or reality, she is not the fairy the narrator supposed. Yet this mistake does not entirely destroy his project. The force of negation stems from the realization that the core of fantasy (specifically the fantasy that is "literature") exists in similarly desirous exchange with the site of story/fantasy production, that the fantasy sustaining the literary is predicated on a reflexive, longing gaze, on a gaze that looks back at itself. Put another way, the fantasy sustaining the literary is predicated on a longing for the space of production of the literary—literature, as "The Piazza" understands it, is ultimately produced by the desire for a certain sphere of activity, rather than on the truth that supposedly inhabits that sphere. Such "literary" activity is perceived as the spatial and tangible only because of its movement (we might say, its circulation), but is ultimately an internal motion. That the narrator must ultimately lie to sustain this relation thus exhausts his motivation to narrate. In lying to Marianna to sustain her fantasy, then, the narrator intuits the lies that sustain his own imaginings—an intuition that he (unsuccessfully) attempts to negate through his abrupt completion of the tale.

In the closing paragraphs of the sketch, when the narrator decides to "stick to the piazza" and launch his yawl "no more for fairy land" (12), he reveals Melville's recognition of this lesson. Thus, when the "scenery is magical" and the "illusion so complete" during the day, the primary actor of the scene (a meadow lark) seems to issue her "sunrise note" from the golden window, thereby distancing him from the "*weary* face behind it" (12). This weariness is the exhausted core of the artistic mode at play. Instead, "truth comes in with darkness" and "No light shows from the mountain" (12); this is not a pronouncement of authorial exhaustion but of the emptiness of narrative itself. The light from the mountain, the beauty underlying the its theatric

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appearance, stems from an illusion of perspective. The final line of "The Piazza," which reads,

"To and fro I walk the piazza deck, haunted by Mariana's face, and many as real a story" (12) is

not a lament over the *inability* to write, as it seems to imply. It is a confession of being haunted

by a certain type of tale—"many as real a story"—but being *unwilling* to write them. Its

melancholy stems from the truth that there is nothing magical in the lightless mountains; there is

only a weary face staring from behind the theatric illusion generated by the observers gaze. And,

because the stories that emerge from this site are based on an ultimately weary gaze, this gaze

haunts the narrator in tandem with them. The final line collapses Romance and something like a

burgeoning realism, as the writer-narrator becomes haunted by both the desire to pursue his

imaginative inclinations—to tell stories in the fashion of "The Piazza"—and the sudden need to

relate the weary realities he has discovered within his original desire.

"The Piazza" thus represents a significant moment in Melville's trajectory beyond the

outcomes of *Benito Cereno* in that it expresses his motivation for making a definite departure

from novelistic Romance. It also reveals why the poetic modes he associated with this type of

production—specifically Shakespeare and other late renaissance writers—would not become his

chosen approach after his shift to poetry. As "The Piazza" articulates, Melville's earlier

enthusiasm for the type of writing undertaken in *Moby-Dick* and *Pierre* was altered by his

involvement with *Harper's* and *Putnam's* magazines. In triggering his investigation into the

capacities of the magazine medium, his tenure as a magazinist also produced his engagement

with the literary modes he associated with book publication—leading to his eventual

dissatisfaction and disillusionment with the literature that he had, Pierre-like, sacrificed so much

to pursue.

CHAPTER 4

THEN, "AS NOW": ART AND POLITICS IN HERMAN MELVILLE'S *TIMOLEON, ETC.*

In the final spring of his life, Herman Melville began assembling and further revising the

forty-two poems that comprise the text of his final printed book, *Timoleon Etc.* (1891).[90] As he

had done with his previous volume, *John Marr and Other Sailors with Some Sea-Pieces* (1888),

he opted to print only twenty-five copies. Despite the minuscule print run—and an even smaller

list of intended readers—Melville devoted considerable time to his revisions, both before and

during the proofing stages. However private his purposes for printing *Timoleon*, he still

understood the *book* as a medium necessitating exact and exacting artistry.

The following chapter explores the poetry of his final printed volume, in part, to

understand why Melville would focus such careful attention on refining and printing a text he

didn't intend to make public. While my argument is ultimately more textual than material, it

reveals that Melville's decision to print only twenty-five copies of *Timoleon* serves as an

important analog to his poetry's attempts to interrogate and ultimately rework the prevailing

perception of art as an idealized, pure form of expression, particularly as he saw this form

aligned with capital in the public sphere. As I suggest, the collection represents an attempt to

construct a literature capable of generating the type of disjunctive experience that Melville

considered inaccessible to mass-market publications. On one hand, then, Melville's choice to

print *Timoleon* as a book mirrors the text's suggestion that the formalization of creative

expression is integral to its capacity to produce dissensus. On the other, the limited printing

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[90] See Tanselle 565-578 for a detailed description of the known aspects of Melville's printing of *Timoleon Etc.*

reflects the text's critique of the sacralized connection between art and truth, in that its controlled

scope signals both the provisional nature of this connection, and Melville's resistance to the

ways that the publishing marketplace reified this provisional link as ideology. Melville's poems,

I argue, instead stress the importance of *committing* to art as a mode of speaking to power and to

community, while frequently working to short-circuit the substantive basis—the supposed

principles of *art* that Melville saw as at odds with its dissensual capacity—of this commitment.

My investigation begins with the posthumous publication of five poems from *Timoleon* in

The Century Magazine in 1892, a relatively minor occurrence that nonetheless marks the

volume's most significant appearance in mainstream U.S. print culture during the nineteenth-

century. Examining these poems in context, particularly in respect to editorial and advertisorial

dimensions of the magazine, offers a clear picture of the problematic coupling of market and

art/literature that Melville resists, both in the poems of *Timoleon* and through his private printing

of the volume. It also succinctly examples how easily print culture assimilates his complex,

defiant poetics, bringing only certain facets of his work to visibility within its framework.

This initial investigation provides the foundation for the subsequent analysis of the

collection's titular poem, "Timoleon," which most explicitly links the text's aesthetic claims to

radical political (and social) dissent. "Timoleon," a text deeply relevant to our current historical

moment, questions the value of a "virtuous" act of political resistance in a community whose

shared modes of understanding foreclose the intended meaning of the act. In other words, the

poem asks whether it is prudent or consequential for an individual to resist tyranny when this

resistance is not perceived as such. As I argue, the text also invites us to see Timoleon's act of

political resistance as equivalent to Melville's insurgent aesthetics. Timoleon's choice therefore

replays Melville's decision to pursue his own artistic goals, despite their seemingly widespread

illegibility among his contemporaries. Melville's investigation of this choice also sheds light on the strange interplay between his poems and *Century Magazine*, helping us perceive a related misappropriation of Melville's aesthetics by the publishing marketplace. It also hints at the dangers Melville seemed to recognize in the publishing marketplace, in which the increasing integration of literature and money foreclosed its radical and, to his mind, aesthetic potential.

Where Melville's poem provides a wealth of questions, its answers are (characteristically) less forthcoming. I nonetheless suggest that its indirect response to Timoleon's (and Melville's) predicament primarily respects the ways his character's "transgressive" virtue occasions a mode of poetic speaking capable of engaging with the shared understandings at the heart of politics and art, the communal modes of visibility and thought I discuss through Jacques Rancière's notion of *primary aesthetics*. While unable to produce specific political results, this formal speaking offers a mechanism for interrogating and (indirectly) altering the shared world. This response is exampled not only by Melville's decision to retell Timoleon's story in formal verse, but by Timoleon's final, unrequited speech to the mute and potentially absent "Arch Principals" presumably governing human action.

The final sections of the chapter extend this argument to other key poems in *Timoleon*, claiming that the volume's aesthetics emerge from a purposefully unresolved tension between art as an ideal, inviolable sphere of truth (and true speaking), and as the space through which a community's seemingly self-evident principles establish their persistent, intrusive visibility. Put in a slightly different way, Melville stages the promise of art, and his provisional commitment to this promise, against the madness-inducing recognitions of art's hollow, complicit, and/or easily exploited foundations. Where such recognitions provoked despair during Melville's late novels (particularly *Pierre*), *Timoleon* leverages them as the primary vehicle of its alluring, yet

disturbing poetics. In a sense, the peculiar aesthetics of the volume coalesce around the ways it takes readers to the precipice of Timoleon's interrogation of unresponsive gods.

99.44 Percent Pure Poetry

Proctor and Gamble Company's full-page advertisement in the May 1892 issue of *The Century Magazine* mentions very little about Ivory Soap, the product it covertly advertises. It instead details submission guidelines for a poetry contest, announcing a "Premium for Verses" submitted by readers—with prizes ranging from $25 to an exorbitant $300 (more than a half-year's wages for many laborers). The opening line of the announcement offers a vague justification for these excessive awards, declaring that "As many of the best verses used in the advertisements of Ivory Soap have been sent to us by those who recognize its merits, we have concluded to offer twelve premiums for contributions from the many who have used the 'Ivory' and know its value" ("Premium for Verses"). If readers accepted the pretext implied by the evocative phrase "best verses," the premiums were an investment in brand quality and future marketing success. To our branding-saturated senses, however, and likely for a considerable portion of the nineteenth-century periodical audience—similarly inundated with advertisements and jingle-writing contests—the marketing strategy is fairly transparent. Under the guise of a contest announcement, the advertisement markets a product whose "merits" and "value" appear self-evident, a product that supposedly sells itself.[91] Much like a wide range of contemporary marketing campaigns, such as Apple's recent "The Only Thing That's Changed is Everything"

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[91] Nelson and Chasar suggest, "Pioneering the aggressive use of logos and slogans in branding, soap manufacturers were among the first to have prominent, full-page advertisements in magazines and experimented with every possible way of drilling their brand names into the public's mind, establishing the use of premium giveaways, free samples, redemptions and popular, widely publicized jingle-writing contests as standard marketing practices" (16).

(2015) or "Your Verse" (2014), which depict individuals using the company's hand-held devices in myriad personal and professional settings, Proctor and Gamble Company's contest hawks a commodity that they claim is already integrated into the lives of its potential customers.

Earlier in the issue, positioned well before the magazine's one-hundred-plus ad pages, an inconspicuous two-page spread features five poems seemingly without a product—whether a book or a reputation—to sell. Herman Melville, the author of the poems, had nothing to gain from their publication; he had died in September of the previous year, and despite the brief introductory's claims that an "outpouring of articles" (Stedman and Melville 104) had followed his death, his passing went largely unnoticed within the public sphere.[92] The poems, too, had been culled from two late volumes of poetry wholly unavailable to the consumer, both of which had been printed in minuscule runs of twenty-five copies, and partially distributed to friends, family, and acquaintances—the rest gathered dust in the Melville household.[93]

Yet the positioning of a brief poem by Julian Hawthorne directly preceding the selections of Melville's poetry suggests that perhaps these selections marketed *something*. Written by the son of Melville's close friend Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Altar and Idol" apostrophizes dead "Fathers of Freedom" through an overt allusion to Edgar Allen Poe ("Speak, departed ones, / From your grave by the sea!") and laments the contemporary decline of the nation. Its implicit link to the subsequent poems by Melville, and its recognizable invocation of Poe locate Melville within a by-then well-known U.S. literary tradition centered around Hawthorne, even as the poem's text designates this tradition as an integral component of a sanctified, unrealizable past

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[92] Parker, for example, calls the obituaries for Melville "few and predictable" (*Herman Melville, vol. 1* 921), while Robertson-Lorant notes a number of glaring inaccuracies even among these limited accounts (614).

[93] All of Stedman's selections come from Melville's *Timoleon, etc.*, but his introduction notes that "Near the close of his life he had printed for private distribution a few copies of two little books of miscellaneous poems, the last fruit off an old tree, entitled 'John Marr and Other Sailors' and 'Timoleon.' From these volumes the following pieces have been selected" (Stedman and Melville 104).

(the yardstick against which the present is measured). The *Century Magazine*, whose editor and staff aligned their project of "the molding of public opinion, and the elevation public sentiment" ("The Century Magazine") with the high literary culture that Julian Hawthorne invokes, thus subtly marketed their brand and its conceptual foundations through deft layout maneuvering.

Others had a more direct, if less visible, stake in this posthumous publication of Melville's poetry, particularly Arthur Stedman, who had submitted the poems to the *Century* and had written their short introduction. A frequent visitor to and self-professed "friendly family acquaintance" (Stedman xxix) of the Melvilles in the late 1880s, Stedman had written a "Biographical and Critical" introduction to the 1892 illustrated reissue of Melville's first novel, *Typee; A Real Romance of the South Sea*, which he had also edited. Stedman's possession and publication of essentially unavailable poems spoke of precisely the same intimate knowledge of Melville's life he laid claim to in his introduction to *Typee*, and therefore provided important credentials for his discussion of Melville's personal and literary history.[94] Both Melville's poems and his introduction, which referenced *Typee* by name, therefore served as an advertising plug for the reissued novel.

Such promotional uses of literature were—and are—commonplace. Yet their prevalence has perhaps inured us to their distinctive manner of positioning artistic practice within the public sphere. The two-page spread of Melville's poems provides a complimentary, if inverse, illustration of the relationship between stylized words and material practices already visible in Proctor and Gamble Company's Ivory Soap advertisement. Which is to say, it yields the counter-image of "literature" that the contest announcement leverages to make manifest its cultural and aesthetic associations. This counter-image depicts the literary as a sphere distinct from its

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[94] Arthur Stedman also published a short description of Melville's funeral in the *New York Herald* (1 October 1891).

mediums of publication and from the network of individuals and practices sustaining these

mediums. It sets apart Melville's poetry from its material contexts, designating it as a sanctified

realm akin to the lost past of Julian Hawthorne's poem. In the same manner that the Proctor and

Gamble Company's advertisement carefully avoids the term *poetry* (instead using *verse*),

Stedman and the editor of the *Century* are careful not to openly advertise the reissue of *Typee* or

the connection between Hawthorne and Melville. That is, advertisers attempted to retain the

integrity of the literary in order to exploit it, while editors of "literary" magazines did their best

to distinguish their magazine's *content* from the advertising that littered its pages and supported

its publication. Across this dual-image of poetry is a similarly dual conception of, more broadly

speaking, literature and art. On one hand, art was a pure, static realm of the imagination with

specific rules and purposes. On the other, it was a mutable tool-category active in everyday

practice. If the Ivory Soap advertisement shows how the literary was operative in market

practices, the two-page spread of Melville's poems reveals how market practices pervaded the

literary. Yet neither market practices nor the literary necessarily links advertisement and

magazine item. It is instead a shared aesthetics, by which I mean a shared mode of parsing and

understanding the world that keeps these spheres distinct, and simultaneously enables their

constant interaction. Ironically, as my discussion of *Timoleon, etc.* seeks to explain, it is

precisely this unspoken alliance between market and art—and the attendant modes of

interpreting, understanding, and evaluating poetry—that Melville sought to sidestep via his

intimate publication of the volume. It is also the shared aesthetics sustaining this alliance that he

interrogates through the poems in the collection, including those published in the *Century*.

Although the Ivory Soap advertisement differs from the majority of ads in the May 1892

issue, the use of poetry was a common marketing strategy throughout the late-nineteenth century.

As Cary Nelson and Mike Chasar write in their recent discussion of advertising from the period, "For a period of time in American culture there was literally no product … deemed inappropriate for poetic promotion" (144). While the pages of the *Century Magazine* do not quite example their assertion that there was "a poem for every product" (135), poetry, jingles, and versified slogans frequented the magazine's lengthy advertising section.[95] Even the most seemingly direct, unpoetic advertisements showed a fastidious attention to the function of the word; not only did advertisers seek to distinguish their product through the specific arrangement of concise language, but the process of branding was, above all, a semantic project aimed at defining and redefining terms. Striking at the connection between word and world, companies marketed the character of their business with claims about language and the relation of language to material products. Thus, a saddle maker advertised that "'Whitman' *means* perfection in saddles" ("Whitman Saddle Co.," my italics) while a furnace manufacturer stated that its lengthy, dependable company history "has made 'Boynton' *synonymous* with all that is best in Heating Appliances and Apparatus." ("Boynton Furnace Co.," my italics). Like the Yale and Towne Manufacturing Company, which insisted that "All genuine 'YALE' Locks have the word 'YALE' in some form on lock and key" ("Yale & Towne Mfg. Co."), most advertisers also stressed the importance of understanding the link between proper noun and product as a literal one; only a product stamped with the appropriate trademark could be considered genuine and, yes, as advertised.

The legibility and efficacy of poetry and poetry-like language used across both the advertising and literary sections of a wide range of U.S. periodicals, as well as the particular relationship between words and things leveraged by advertisers and editors, suggests a common

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[95] The May 1892 issue of *The Century Magazine* contains only a handful of advertisements that use poems or jingles to market their products, despite its extensive advertising section.

understanding of the link between language and reality. That is, the capacity to adapt poetry to the marketing of consumer products alongside its use as a "literary" form implies a shared set of conceptions of what the category of *poetry* constituted, and a shared perception of how language and objects interacted via this category—an interaction that also extended far beyond literature. Chasar and Nelson persuasively argue that for "more than half a century" companies hired poets to write advertising copy when they aimed "to give [their] woefully material product aspirations to a higher life … to supplement the apparently mundane life with whimsical pleasure … to promote sales by appealing to [their] buyer's potentially broader cultural inclinations … [or] to create a readerly community bemused by rhetorical excess yet curious about the product nonetheless" (135). Conceiving or accomplishing these purposes, however, relied on a shared mode of identifying and interfacing with poetic and literary language, a mode based on a shared understanding of the connections between word, world, and artistic practice.

This mode is similarly traceable in some of the prevailing systems of antebellum U.S. literature—romanticism, sentimentalism, and transcendentalism. The political and cultural efficacy of these approaches relied on the ability or potential to speak certain types of truth about the world and and the community at large, domains antebellum writers (and readers) considered susceptible to distortion by society or collective institutions. In *Nature*, for example, Emerson writes that "Words are signs of natural facts … Every word which is used to express a moral or intellectual fact, if traced to its root, is found to be borrowed from some material appearance" (13), an assertion he nonetheless complicates by describing nature as itself a "symbol of spirit" (13). An equally slippery Nathaniel Hawthorne regularly used the prefaces of his "romances" to situate them between fiction and reality, deeming the realm of romance "essentially a day-dream, and yet a fact" (*Blithedale Romance* 4) capable of revealing the "truth of the human heart"

(*House of the Seven Gables* 1) through fanciful circumstances invented by the author. Meanwhile, periodical readers, reviewers, and editors regularly praised sentimentalist writers like Harriet Beecher Stowe, Alice Carey, and E.D.E.N. Southworth for the "genuine" and "instructive" quality of their works—for their ability to speak truthfully about human nature and the "heart of humanity" ("Mrs. Stowe and Her New Book").[96] Common across these interlinked systems is an implied connection between a genuine reality and an ideal literature/language that can access and express this realm, the idea that a practice understood broadly as "literature" was a mode of speaking linked directly to the natural world. This relationship between words and things established literary speech as an inviolable sphere integrally tied to a reality often obscured by society, culture, and individual desire.

The Fresh Project of *Timoleon, Etc.*

The five poems Arthur Stedman contributed to the *Century Magazine*—"Art," "Monody," "The Night-March," "The Weaver," and "Lamia's Song"—seem to share in this understanding of the relationship between words and things, and of the role of artistic practice respecting this relationship. All selected from Melville's final published volume of poetry, *Timoleon, etc.*, rather than from his final *two* volumes, as Stedman claims in his introduction, the poems (particularly "Art" and "The Weaver") appear to endorse *art* as a privileged, ideal mode of making and speaking with special access to truth, and to suggest reverence for the sanctity of artistic production. "Lamia's Song," in which the mythic figure of the lamia tempts a mountaineer to "descend" from their "lonely Alp / With the wintery scalp," further appears to

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[96] See, for example, "Alice Carey's 'Lyra and Other Poems'," which contains reviews of Carey's work from numerous sources that all highlight its "genuine" quality. On Stowe's novel, the *National Era* suggests, "The story spoke for itself, and its truthfulness was attested by the heart of Humanity" ("Mrs. Stowe and Her New Book").

situate this rarefied realm of art in opposition to the lower world of sensual experience—thereby reiterating the apparent division between the real world accessible to the artist and the fallen realm of the everyday.

Whether directly or indirectly, Stedman's selections have left a permanent mark on critical studies of *Timoleon*, establishing a compact—if incomplete—narrative of the collection. "Art" remains Melville's most discussed and anthologized poem, and is frequently heralded as the central expression of Melville's views of his own creative practices.[97] Similarly, the contrasting perspectives of "The Weaver" and "Lamia's Song" serve as the lynchpin of a multitude of contemporary investigations, while "Monody" is often referenced in respect to Melville's relationship to Nathaniel Hawthorne.[98] Yet these poems only reveal part of the project of *Timoleon*, and studies often downplay their subtlety and complexity in order to align them with prevailing interpretive paradigms. Furthermore, most studies overlook the significance of the titular poem to the collection, preferring instead to delineate "Art" as the theoretical foundation of Melville's final publication. While *Timoleon* appears to endorse the type of relation between words and things emergent in the postbellum U.S., it instead attempts to engage with, unsettle, and reimagine this shared aesthetics—intervening in the mode of parsing reality that, on one hand, understood an absolute connection between language and natural fact, and, on the other, split art into an ideal expression of this relationship and its veiled inverse, a mutable

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[97] Hershell Parker, for example, writes, "A pondering autodidact all along, he had needed to define an aesthetic credo, in 1862, when he was still an unpublished poet. In "Art" he described the creative process in eleven lines" (*Herman Melville, vol. 2* 817). In a similar vein, Dillingham notes that "The challenge of the artist is to select materials that manifest these oppositions and then mate them in a work of art that leaves the impression of being less finished than it could have been. Melville's adherence to such a theory is clearly stated in a late poem, one that … he called 'Art'" (*Melville and His Circle* 8).

[98] See, for example, Marovitz 125-127, Tamarkin 172, Dillingham 8, or Wallace 360.

tool-category operative in everyday life. As I will explain, it is in this sense that *Timoleon* is political.

As nearly a century of scholarship on Melville's poetry (complimentary or otherwise) has recognized, *Timoleon* exhibits a different relationship to language than the vast majority of nineteenth-century poetry. That said, the current critical revival of Melville's poetry has nonetheless emphasized its involvement with cultural and literary history. For example, Elizabeth Renker, one of the central voices of this revival, connects Melville to mid-nineteenth-century U.S. literary culture, citing "Ball's Bluff" as "an excellent example of Melville's skilled and careful sense of craft and his vital engagement with the culture of poetry in his own day" (Renker, "Melville the Poet in the Postbellum World" 132). Samuel Otter, following Walter Bezanson's seminal work on *Clarel*, deems it "a Victorian poem of faith and doubt articulated on a global scale" ("How *Clarel* Works" 468). Others, such as Douglas Robillard, Robert K. Wallace, and Elisa Tamarkin have detailed the links between Melville's poetry and contemporary and historical traditions in the visual arts, from Greek antiquity to New Path painters of the mid-nineteenth century. Melville obviously courts these connections through the titles and subjects of his poems, which directly and indirectly reference contemporary paintings, artists, and authors, as well as an extensive range of historical figures and artworks.[99] Such situating, however, tends to obscure the ways that Melville's work often functions at a remove from this tradition. Like the titular exile of "Timoleon," Melville voices his arguments in an intimate locale that operates differently than the shared world of his community.

The emphasis on identifying and validating Melville's historical poetic credentials is in part a response to the long-established critical narrative that categorized Melville as an inept and

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[99] Cook, for example, similarly notes the "allusive density" (5) of Melville's work. See also discussions by Berthold, Robillard, Sten, Tamarkin, or Wallace for more on the role of visual arts in Melville's poetry.

"negligible poet," and viewed postbellum poetics as a "dead zone" (Renker, "Melville the Poet in the Postbellum World" 129). Yet alongside these attempts to situate Melville within literary and cultural tradition, is the acknowledgment that Melville's idiosyncratic use of poetic resources marks a what Renker calls a "fresh and unfamiliar project" ("Melville the Poet in the Postbellum World" 131). The startling, unsettling, and radical aspects of Melville's poetry have, in fact, been visible to critics throughout their limited engagement with it—often serving as the basis of their dismissal of Melville's career as poet. For example, William Elery Sedgwick's 1944 study *The Tragedy of Mind* suggests, "The form of *Clarel* was prop or support to his new state of consciousness, in which his spontaneous ego or self-consciousness no longer played an all commanding role" (202), an argument which Robert Penn Warren later extended to all of Melville's late poetry.[100] Warren's daughter, Rosanna, puts this most pointedly, noting "Melville found himself writing poems of undeception … not so much jettisoning poetic decorum as insisting on a new standard of fitting language to fact" (Rosanna Warren 115-16). If, as Robert Bergstrom argues, "It is Melville who attacks the medium of poetry, not the medium which hamstrings him" (80), the attempts to locate Melville's place in and against literary tradition have hamstrung our ability to engage with this "fresh and unfamiliar poetic project," and this "new standard of fitting language to fact."

Below, I examine what I understand as the *political* register of Melville's *Timoleon* collection as a means to detail the scope of his innovative and often unnerving poetics. By politics, I continue to refer to Jacques Rancière's discussion of the term as "the construction of a specific sphere of experience in which certain objects are posited as shared and certain subjects regarded as capable of designating these objects and of arguing about them" (Pol of Lit 3). As

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[100] See Robert Penn Warren 210.

I've already discussed in an earlier chapter, Rancière understands political activity as "a conflict aimed at deciding what is speech or mere growl; in other words, aimed at retracing the perceptible boundaries by means of which political capacity is demonstrated" (4). Here, however, I move away from the emphasis on specific political commitments. Instead, my exploration of the "politics" of *Timoleon* engages with the ways that Melville's collection identifies and intervenes in his community's methods of parsing and apportioning the sensible world, particularly in respect to how these methods exploit creative practice as a means to consolidate and legitimize certain modes of speaking and to define the relationship between words and objects (as outlined earlier). The collection specifically lends itself to this investigation in large part due to the ways that the titular poem "Timoleon" yokes artistic and political concerns, and thereby establishes the political grounds of its subsequent poems about art, form, and architecture. As I will detail, *Timoleon* registers the problematic apportioning of *art* as a mode of making and speaking distinct from the network of practices that bring it to visibility, and from the aspects of the shared world that it helps render visible. While the collection attempts to unsettle this division, it nonetheless ascribes value to the act of positing art as a separate realm of individual and communal activity. Melville's poems instead propose that understanding art as a separate realm of activity is a core component of how art enables a community to recognize and question the principles of their collectivity. However, the collection also emphasizes the lack of substantive basis of this understanding, suggesting instead that it is a provisional move performed by readers and artists, predicated not on an ideal or sacralized connection between art and truth, but on a mode of delineating certain forms of creative practice.

As I've suggested, the following study draws from Rancière's recent examinations of the relationship between aesthetics and politics. Via his own terms and literary-critical methods,

Melville offers formulations quite similar to those Rancière proposes, and appears to conceive of

the interaction between art and politics in a related manner.[101] While much Rancière's work in

this regard is aimed at revising the notion of modernity, what he deems an "incoherent label"

(*Politics of Aesthetics* 24) that masks a deeper shift in how communities experience and

understand art, I focus on two concepts integral to his critique: primary aesthetics and the

aesthetic cut. I return to both of these terms within the following section, but a few introductory

remarks are necessary. Primary aesthetics are, as we will see, a community's system of defining,

organizing, and interfacing with the sensible world. By locating aesthetics at the locus of a

community's ability to delimit the common, shared world, Rancière establishes the basis for his

claim that there is an aesthetics "at the core of politics" (*Politics of Aesthetics* 13). Aesthetic

practices, which essentially draw special attention to the ways that art intervenes in prevailing

systems of organizing and carving up what is common to the community, thereby acquire a

capacity to "contest, impact, and alter what can be seen and said" (Tanke 73). In other words,

because aesthetic practices alert us to other modes of conceiving of the sensible world, thereby

unsettling "traditional patterns of assigning meaning to that which appears to our senses" (Tanke

73), they generate the possibility of dissensus with what appears to be the obvious—the

seemingly natural—order of things within a community.

However, if "aesthetic art" and its written form, *literature*, have a political capacity, this

capacity is distinct from the "personal engagement of writers in the social and political struggles

of their times" (*Politics of Literature* 4). Literature, in Rancière's lexicon, "is not some

transhistoric term designating everything ever produced by the arts of speech and writing"

(*Politics of Literature* 4), but rather a system of relationships between certain practices (primarily

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[101] Respecting the critical inflection of Melville's poetry, see Shurr's discussion of "Melville's use of poetry as *Kritik*" (246-7).

of writing) and the community that develops throughout the nineteenth century. The composition

of this system and its network of relations (specifically as an historical formation) produces an

alternative realm of signification to that offered by other social modes and practices, thus

allowing for "a different power of language to signify and to act, a different relationship between

words and the things they define as well as the subjects that carry them" (*Politics of Literature*

14). Because of this difference, it also establishes a different common world where different

shared conceptions of bodies, spaces, and capacities are active. Where literature therefore "does

politics simply by being literature" (*Politics of Literature* 3), however, what Rancière describes

as the *aesthetic cut* creates a chasm between an artist's intention and the political effects of their

artwork. That is, although art/literature provides another, competing arena in which to

reconfigure, redefine, and otherwise interact with the sensible world, an artist's intentions do not

prescribe how the observer undertakes this redistribution of reality. Speaking of "critical art," for

example, Rancière notes that there is "no reason … why the understanding the state of the world

should prompt a decision to change it … [and] no direct road from intellectual awareness to

political action" (*Emancipated Spectator* 75).

My opening discussion of Proctor and Gamble Company's Ivory Soap advertisement

sketches the relevance of *Timoleon*'s explorations of aesthetic and political concerns to the

organization of art, language, and the sensible operative within postbellum U.S. print culture

(and beyond). The political and theoretical stakes of Melville's late poetry consist of its

mechanisms for intervening in this complex, and in proposing alternative arrangements. This is

not to suggest that *Timoleon* had widespread influence at the time of its publication, or even

throughout the twentieth-century; the scope of its publication and its readership—even today—

precludes such impact. Yet much of Timoleon's political significance stems from its remoteness

from the public sphere, from its repositioning and reconfiguration of art outside of the manner in which it was (and is) conceived in mainstream print culture. The collection's continuing ability to evade critical capture and to remain an a relatively obscure text, despite Melville's reputation, indicate the persistent effects of this remoteness respecting its ability to carve out a space of thought and political action distinct from those extant. Which is to say, the shared modes of parsing and organizing the sensible alongside which and against which Melville arranges his poetics are still operative, both in the relatively cloistered realm of literary study and in the public sphere.[102]

The Politics of "Timoleon"

The opening of "Timoleon" poses a question both hypothetical and historical: After an "egotist" has violently and unscrupulously seized power, and his rule has been legitimized by the law, "Shall the good heart whose patriot fire / Leaps to a deed of startling note, / Do it, then flinch?" (2-4) The poem tenders a rider: "Shall good in weak expire?" (4) At first glance, the two queries appear little more than repetition, both concerning the same "good heart" who challenges the tyrannical egotist. The unsettling use of *weak* (rather than *weakness*) as a noun in the second

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[102] Apple's 2012 "Your Verse" marketing campaign, mentioned briefly in the opening paragraph, provides a succinct illustration of the ubiquity of these shared modes. The television commercial portrays individuals amidst diverse cultural milieus and natural landscapes incorporating the iPad into their daily lives as a voice track plays a short speech spoken by actor Robin Williams about "why we write poetry" ("because we are members of the human race, and the human race is filled with passion") from the film *Dead Poets Society* (1989). "What will your verse be," Williams's closing remark and the implied tag line of the commercial, recalls Proctor and Gamble Company's "premium for verses," likewise marketing a universally used product through the promise of creative achievement. The narrative, however, suggests that such creative achievement—designated by the commercial as "poetry"— remains distinct from the practices that bring it to visibility. The detached quality of the audio, the high-literary aspirations suggested by Williams's speech (which also quotes Whitman) and signaled by the commercial's undisguised reference to *Dead Poets Society*—all replayed visually through interspersed images of natural sublimity (a roiled, sprawling sky, a massive waterfall, snow-covered mountain peaks)—gesture toward an elevated, pure realm of human activity separate from the market forces that, in the view espoused by the commercial, simply supply tools to better access our essential humanity.

question, however, disturbs this reading, instead suggesting the loss of *good* within a community

of weak individuals (i.e., "the weak") when a tyrant takes power. The relationship between these

two questions is, then, not in their subject, but in the political conditions that trigger different

subjects' responses. The first question concerns the impassioned individual's reaction to tyranny,

and the second that of the community. If we are to infer any causal interaction between the two

queries, it moves in reverse of our expectations: The loss of good in the community causes the

"good heart" to flinch after his or her action.

This conflict between the individual and the community is further developed in the lines

that follow.

> Needs goodness lack the evil grit,
> That stares down censorship and ban,
> And dumbfounds saintlier ones with this—
> God's will avouched in each successful man?
> Or, put it, where dread stress inspires
> A virtue beyond man's standard rate,
> Seems virtue there a strain forbid—
> Transcendence such as shares transgression's fate? (5-12)

Again, the questions Melville poses work somewhat counterintuitively respecting his initial

staging. *Goodness* here shifts from the quality of *good* that characterizes the *heart* of the opening

quatrain, and stands apart as an unrealized, open term that either incorporates the *evil grit* needed

to break with the beliefs and laws of the community, or, conversely, excludes this evil and aligns

with the *dumbfounded saintlier* members of the community unwilling to commit such a criminal

act.[103] The second quatrain plays off the potential slipperiness of a related term, *virtue*, using it

both to denote a singular and noble act or quality, and as a prohibited category within certain

*stress*ed communities (notions that, as the poem later reveals, are not antithetical).

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[103] Melville explored other possibilities for this line, as well. See *Published Poems* 757-58.

Importantly, both of the quatrains link the questions about the relationship of the political, the individual, and the community to writing—specifically poetry. The first quatrain initially provides a vague allusion to written expression via the term *censorship*—an increasingly relevant aspect of U.S. publishing across the latter half of the nineteenth-century (particularly since the passage of the Comstock Law in 1873).[104] The second quatrain affirms this resonance through its correlative use of poetic terminology and metrical emphasis. Melville organizes the poem in a series of quatrains that play off the metrical scheme of three lines of iambic tetrameter followed by a line of iambic pentameter.[105] In the second quatrain, he punctuates the metrical term *stress* through a spondee (*DREAD STRESS*), and leaves the line surrounding the lyrical term *strain* as the quatrain's only intact sequence of iambs (*seems VIRtue THERE a STRAIN forBID*). The phrasing thus formally conjoins the poetic with that which *inspires* virtuous action, and to the particular music (the *strain*) of transgressive transcendence to which the good heart aspires.

Through this combination of formal tactics and writing-related terms, and through subsequent allusions and thematic investigations (which I will soon discuss), Melville invites the careful reader to recognize Timoleon's political act as, also, an aesthetic (or artistic) one. He further justifies this connection in the final quatrain of the opening section, stating that his decision to "stem" Timoleon's "life's cross-tide" comes from his understanding (his "reck") of the problem at the heart of Timoleon's story. While I offer a slightly different reading of the poem's biographical implications than previous critics, this quatrain foregrounds the text's obvious parallels with Melville's professional and personal life. Like Timoleon, he encountered

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[104] For more on Comstock and censorship, see Boyer, or Zboray and Zboray 29.

[105] Shurr calls this final line Melville's "version of the alexandrine" (153), although it typically uses a ten-syllable cadence without a central caesura.

early success (as a writer), only to find himself in self-imposed exile from the communities that had initially welcomed him—largely due to the radical, widely misunderstood nature of his authorial choices (particularly in *Pierre*). The opening section asks readers to understand Timoleon's story not quite as a rendering of Melville's life, but as a response to a fundamental "problem" underlying both Timoleon's and Melville's experiences, a problem at once bound to the political and the aesthetic.

At the nexus of the poem's questions about the political, individual, communal, and poetic stands the unlikely, and indeed disquieting figure of Timoleon, a Corinthian soldier and statesman who assisted in the assassination of his brother, Timophanes, in the mid 360s B.C. As the poem indirectly relates, Timophanes seized power in Corinth through a series of betrayals and murders, and installed himself as tyrant of the city, thereby compelling Timoleon to take part in his public assassination. Despite acting on behalf of Corinth, Timoleon's role in his brother's death led to his censure by the Corinthian populace and his mother, and eventually resulted in a lengthy, self-imposed exile from the city. Where Melville's account primarily focuses on the events leading up to Timophanes' assassination, his chief source for Timoleon's story, Plutarch's *Lives*, almost exclusively focuses on Timoleon's later appointment as a Corinthian general, twenty years after the murder of Timophanes.[106] Recalled from exile in order to lead Greek forces in Sicily, Timoleon successfully routed Carthagian troops from the island and wrested control of its towns from the loose confederation of tyrants then in power. Despite pleas to return to Corinth after his victories, Timoleon remained in Syracuse, where "he was virtually

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[106] Melville also seems to have supplemented Plutarch's account with the entry on Timoleon from Peter Bayle's *Dictionary Historical and Critical* (1710).

worshipped" (Marovitz 129), for the rest of his life.[107] In Melville's poem, however, Timoleon's

successes appear only as a brief mention in the final stanza. Jay Leyda has also suggested that the

poem's description of Timoleon's relationship with Timophanes also draws from an 1887

translation of Balzac's *La Rabouilleuse* (*The Black Sheep*), which dates it among Melville's last

compositions and thus marks it as one of his final meditations on politics and art.[108]

As William Shurr's seminal study of Melville's poetry notes, early critics invariably

discussed "Timoleon" "from the biographical point of view" (153), a trend that continues to

serve as the primary explanation for Melville's selection of such an unusual, but highly specific

figure. The emphasis of such biographical readings, however, has shifted. Where early studies

saw understood the poem's complex and tragic familial relationships in respect to Melville's

own family, venturing so far as to suggest that it "is hard not read the poem as a parable of

Melville's relationship to his brother [Gansevoort]" (Rogin 50), recent arguments connect

Timoleon's self-exile from Corinth to Melville's retreat from the public sphere and his

exhausting introspective engagement with the questions of faith and literary repute, likewise

perceiving Melville's final published volumes—or, in some cases, his late return to fiction in

Billy Budd—as Timoleon's eventual, muted triumph.[109] William Dillingham, for example,

proposes that the poem is probably "a study from his experience of the vagaries of fame" (78).

Similarly, Robert Milder's *Exiled Royalties: Melville and the Life We Imagine* posits, "The

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[107] Unlike Melville's version, Plutarch's discussion of Timoleon indicates that he briefly returned to Corinth to receive honors after his first set of victories over Carthaginian forces. Carthage later renewed its attack, and Timoleon again repulsed them. Only then did Timoleon decide to remain in Sicily for the remainder of his life.

[108] Melville's translation of Balzac's novel was titled *The Two Brothers*, and scholarship typically follows this earlier translation. For further discussion, see Rogin 49-50.

[109] See, for example, Dryden's *Monumental Melville: The Formation of a Literary Career*, which suggests that "Melville identifies most closely with the Greek hero during his tormenting exile where he imagines him articulating his "quarrel … with [the] gods" and finally questioning their existence" (176).

question that frames 'Timoleon' is whether glory, belatedly won, is the result of 'high Providence, or Chance,' a question prominently on Melville's mind as he pondered his long neglect, too proud or vulnerable to respond to the overtures of the New York literati yet scarcely indifferent to fame" (229).

Yet these biographically inflected critical narratives have obscured a rather fundamental point: Timoleon is a *very* strange choice. Timoleon is a strange choice for the subject of a long poem, and stranger still for the title of Melville's final collection of poetry, particularly given Melville's close, if sometimes tumultuous, relationships with his brothers and sisters—only one of whom (Catherine) was still alive at the time of *Timoleon*'s publication, and one of whom (Helen) died just a few years before it. Indeed, Melville's son Malcom's suicide (in 1867) and his second son Stanwix's then-recent death (in 1886) suggest that using Timoleon's role in assassinating his brother as an expression of familial resentment is unlikely, at best. The peculiarity of this choice is further accentuated by what most contemporary scholarship identifies as "the overriding theme" of the collection: "the character, meaning, and effect of art" (Sten 34).[110] Assuming that fratricide presents an event too explicit to simply signal repressed psychological factors (particularly given the poem's emphasis on the act), and that it would have had significant negative emotional resonance despite the attractive components of Timoleon's story, we are left with pressing questions regarding Melville's interest in the Greek statesman. Why did he choose to investigate personal concerns about virtue, politics, and an individual's relationship to the community through such a *conflicting*, obscure figure? Furthermore, considering the placement of the poem and its titular relevance to the collection, what does this

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[110] Shurr, for example, notes that "several poems touch on theoretical questions of esthetics and the activity of the artist—a fairly rare subject for Melville" (151). Also see discussions by Marovitz, Renker, Robillard, Tamarkin, and Wallace.

choice have to do with the question of *art*? What is at stake in the poem, and what is its

relationship to the collection that bears its name?

As I've suggested, Rancière's continuing examinations of aesthetics, which closely attend

to the intersection of politics, art, artists, and community, provide valuable tools for staging and

engaging with these questions. I'd like to look at Rancière's discussion of what he terms *primary*

aesthetics, specifically in respect to "Timoleon" and the collection it opens, as a means to re-

examine Melville's use of Timoleon and the significance of this choice in respect to the

collection as a whole. Rancière writes:

> There is thus an 'aesthetics' at the core of politics … This aesthetics should not be
> understood as the perverse commandeering of politics by a will to art, by a consideration
> of the people qua work of art. If the reader is fond of analogy, aesthetics can be
> understood in the Kantian sense—re-examined perhaps by Foucault—as the system of *a*
> *priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience. It is a delimitation of
> spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously
> determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves
> around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and
> the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time. (*Politics*
> *of Aesthetics* 13)

Momentarily putting aside the quasi-causative, if entangled, relationship between aesthetics and

politics that Rancière posits (in which *aesthetics* precedes and determines the "place and the

stakes" of politics), the passage convincingly organizes the concepts of aesthetics and politics

around the matter of the sensible and articulable—around the phenomena that present themselves

to us through our modes of parsing the world and our mechanisms for expressing this parsed

reality. Although not necessarily pronounced in this selection, in Rancière's account, the

boundaries of the sensible are not solely epistemological, but also based on a given society's

categorization and apportioning of—among other things—different forms of collective and

individual identity; the *ability* and *talent* to speak are not essential qualities, but results of how

the governing group allocates modes of expression, embodiment, and space. Thus the *ability* to

speak might concern the proper forum or medium for speaking, as well as the race, gender, sexual-orientation, religion, or nationality of the speaker. Put in the context of nineteenth-century literature, for example, the tendency of editors, anthologists, critics, and reviewers to focus on a "sense of beauty" (Griswold, qtd. in Bennett 19) or the transparent or idealized "expression of personal emotion" (Bennett 26) in poetry, specifically respecting the writings of female poets, reflects the way that the community's modes of apportioning sensible experience promote the visibility of certain textual elements. Such apportioning is, in Rancière's lexicon, *aesthetics*, in its broad sense.[111] Although not political in themselves, modes of apportioning, or *aesthetics*, can be "prejudicially linked from the outset to a certain regime of politics" (Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics* 13), a connection made evident by the ways that the textual elements visible to editors, critics, and reviewers also served as a means to restrict or direct women's poetic expression to certain spheres (e.g., domesticity, sentimentalism, or emotion). The use of primary aesthetics to generate and enforce hierarchies of power (such as the continuing disenfranchisement of women), whether they are directed at limiting who can speak or the arrangement of spaces and bodies, is, then, *politics*—as are various contestations over this limiting.

The modes of apportioning Rancière considers *primary aesthetics* are also at the heart of the "problem rolled in pang" that Melville recognizes in Timoleon's story. They are similarly at the heart of Melville's personal questions about art and, more specifically, his own poetry. In essence, the *Timoleon* collection represents the culmination of the inquiry into writing that

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[111] Appendix I of Ranciere's *The Politics of Aesthetics* denotes that *aesthetics*, "refers to the distribution of the sensible that determines a mode of articulation between forms of action, production, perception, and thought" (82).

Melville had begun more than thirty years earlier in *Pierre*.[112] As the shifting positions of the

poem's terms (e.g., *good*, *virtue*, *transcendence*, etc.) and its interrogative permutations indicate,

Melville is not simply staking out the terrain of virtuous, ethical action. His sympathies may rest

with Timoleon, evidenced by the poem's largely flattering portrayal of the Greek statesman, but

the opening questions extend beyond mere rhetorical staging. They pose a scenario in which the

legibility of Timoleon's action becomes foreclosed by the *aesthetics* of the community, by the

particular ordering and apportioning through which his involvement in his brother's

assassination emerges as a form of experience for the populace. The tasks of "Timoleon" and

Timoleon, Etc. are to disrupt the order that produces this emergence, and to provide a framework

for Timoleon's action—and other practices—to re-emerge as a form of experience for Melville's

readers.

The ordering and apportioning Melville highlights in "Timoleon" revolve around three

primary components: law, religion, and family. Thus, Timophanes reign is *legalised* [sic] *by*

lawyers, mutely accepted by the *saintlier* members of the community, and exalted by his mother

as, ultimately, the realization of her own political aims. Timoleon's mother, for example, calls

Timophanes "I / In sex translated" (65-6) and "what I would be were I a man" (68), considering

his rise to power as a means "To make the mother through the son / An envied dame of power, a

social queen" (63-4). Hearkening to Lady MacBeth, Timophanes's mother's ambitions also

reflects the form of vicarious political power available to the disenfranchised, and to those

otherwise excluded from direct involvement in the political realm. Although Melville's

influences appear more Shakespearean than contemporary, Timoleon's mother undertakes an

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[112] Although certain poems from *Timoleon, Etc.* date to earlier periods in Melville's career, his extensive
revisions to the bulk of the collection indicate that it (perhaps in conversation with *John Marr*) can be considered
representative of his conception of poetry and, more generally speaking, artistic expression at the close of his life.

indirect mode of political and social activity in a community resembling that of the nineteenth-century U.S., in which, as Paula Bennet suggests, "virtually all forms of social engagement were off-limits to women," at least insofar "as domestic ideology defined their sphere" (42). Timophanes death emerges as a form of experience for her not only in respect to the socio-political configurations that prompt her to embed her public selfhood in her son's actions, but also in light of the lived practices and modes of apportioning she predicates on this embedding. The *familial* bond between a mother and her first-born son, in this sense, comes to encompass a dense cluster of interactions between this mother and her community, interactions whose social and psychological dimensions are largely effaced by the superscription of instinctive sentiment as their defining characteristic.

Although Timoleon views his brother's ascent to power from a perspective outside that of his family and community, he intuitively recognizes the dangers that his "will to act" against Timophanes's tyranny poses to the primary forms of collectivity sponsored by his community's *aesthetics*. "In evil visions" (89) the night before confronting Timophanes, Timoleon "sees the lictors of the gods, / Giant ministers of righteousness, / Their *fasces* threatened by the Furies' rods" (90-2). In these visions, then, *righteousness* and the *gods* are assaulted by his action, a combined force of law and religion concisely expressed by the position of the *fasces*. The *fasces* was a bundle of wooden rods bound around a projecting axe head, borne ahead of a superior magistrate by minor state officers—*lictors*—to symbolize the magistrate's authority. Here, Melville replaces the figure of the magistrate with the *gods* themselves, thereby emphasizing the entanglement of religion and law threatened by Timoleon's impending coup. The Furies, violent and avenging spirits (or, in some renderings, deities) emanating from Tartarus, enact justice on those that have sworn false oaths or broken promises—precisely the crimes perpetrated by

Timophanes, whose "heart did not wince / At slaying men who kept their vows" (74-5). Their

chthonic origins also suggest the earthly (rather than legitimately divine) nature of the alliance

between the *gods* and the community's legal structure that Timoleon's actions will disrupt.

Coupled with the disturbing hybridity of the Furies (as part woman, bat, dog, and/or snake),

these origins signal their embodiment of compulsions and forces working outside or below those

accounted for by the community's forms of perception, expression, and control.[113] The

significance of this supersensible force is further implicated in Melville's temporal-cultural

stretch from Greek history to Roman mythology within Timoleon's vision. Not only does his

deployment of the Roman *fasces* and Furies privilege their conceptual impact over historical

continuity, but it performs a similar distortion within the poem's narrative, unsettling its own

historical foundation in Greek history.

Taken as a whole, the components organizing the public's perception of Timoleon (law,

religion, and family) constellate around and articulate a certain *aesthetics*, a distribution of the

visible and intelligible underlying language, practices, and beliefs within his community. As

Melville suggests, however, the *aesthetics* of this ancient community is analogous to—or

perhaps a thinly veiled cipher for—that of the late nineteenth-century U.S. In the fifth section of

the poem, the voice of the poet interrupts the poem's narrative to announce this, stating:

> The time was Plato's. Wandering lights
> Confirmed the atheist's standing star;
> As now, no sanction Virtue knew
> For deeds that on prescriptive morals jar. (121-24)

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[113] Vernon Shetley's nuanced reading of the poem suggests that "the Furies punished those who spilled the blood of family or clan members; they avenged violations of natural relations and loyalties" (86). He therefore argues that Timoleon's visions "figure concretely the conflict between political duty and natural ties" (86). In viewing "state and family at odds" within the poem, however, Shetley's interpretation does not account for the ways in which state and family are, in fact, *aligned* for Timoleon's mother. The filial bonds that Timoleon breaks are not poised in opposition to his bonds to his community or the state, but as related, entangled structures that he must also transgress in order to undertake his proposed course of action.

One of the most extensively revised quatrains of the poem, the lines also express the stakes of Melville's obscure subject matter: "Timoleon" may be set in 394 B.C., but it concerns Melville's present world—the *now*. Although "the order and even, at times, nature of particular readings [of Melville's changes] is partly problematic, because of the ways in which revisions he considered are spread out over four writing surfaces" (*Published Poems* 761), Melville's changes and excisions further clarify the intention of the quatrain. The omitted lines "The world was young, and Christ was still afar" and "No Revelation Virtue heard" refigure the opening concept of an atheistic antiquity as, specifically, a time before Christianity. As Melville's different versions indicate, Christianity offers a potential source for the "sanction" or, in the words of another omitted phrase, "heavenly warrant" of *Virtue*.[114] However, the quatrain's most significant clause, *As now*, reveals that the appearance of Christ and the spread of Christianity do not guarantee such sanction. As should be evident, the phrase *As now* also acts to profoundly amplify the implications of the poem, revealing it to be an inquiry into an active, rather than defunct, distribution of the sensible. That is, the configuration of politics, art, and community that Melville charts throughout "Timoleon" is not simply analogous to the makeup of the late nineteenth-century U.S., but instead details the *aesthetics* that Melville perceives as functioning within his own community. Melville links Greek antiquity and the late nineteenth-century U.S. through simile, yes, but he also identifies an equivalent structure at work in both communities. This sameness revolves around the treatment of *Virtue*, a quality of Timoleon's action that cannot be accounted for by the community, a form of action that evades their prevailing aesthetics—their forms of ordering and understanding the sensible. Importantly, the poem reveals that he understands the principal element of Melville's concerns is the *aesthetics* of both

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[114] See Melville, *Published Poems* 761.

communities. As "Timoleon" reveals, for Melville, as for Rancière, there is an aesthetics at the core of politics. "Timoleon" therefore expresses the political stakes of a collection ostensibly about art, architecture, and antiquity. What underlies the poem's political and social questions is a particular mode of apportioning—a mode of engaging with the world that art, on one hand, articulates, and, on the other, has the capacity to alter.

Melville also seems to share Rancière's notion that art's ability to establish "new relations between words and visible forms, speech and writing, a here and elsewhere, a then and now" (*Emancipated Spectator* 102) stems from its very exteriority to the distribution of thoughts and sensations prescribed by the community. Thus, although Timoleon tries "each prudential art" (98) to divert Timophanes from his tyrannical course, he must eventually make the unexpected, fracturing utterance, the "predetermined word" (111), that allows "Right in Corinth" to reassume "its place" (112). If Timoleon restores the substance and very possibility of *right* as both term and idea to the Corinthians through a radical act of speaking, his word—and his integrally linked political action—nonetheless still occupies a space exterior to what is legible to his community. The word, in its capacities as a historical speech act and as a double for Melville's poetry, signifies that which exceeds the *prudential*, that which generates its disruptive effects by its exteriority to foreordained forms of action and artistry. Even after its completion, this act remains unassimilated into the ethics of the community, retaining its distinctness from even from the political realm in which it intervenes. Timoleon is forced into exile by the citizens of Cornith, but largely due to how his action continues to baffle the aesthetic frameworks of the community. In continuing to evade legibility, it therefore retains its capacity to reshape the distribution of the sensible and remains a new sphere of activity separate from the extant regime. This becomes

most visible in the community's short circuit in recognizing Timoleon's action. Describing their

response, Melville writes:

> Reaction took misgiving's tone,
> Infecting conscience, till betrayed
> To doubt the irrevocable doom
> Herself had authorised [sic] when undismayed. (125-8)

In the cyclical logic of the passage, *conscience* preordains and *authorizes* a necessary course of

action in a time preceding Timophanes reign (*when undismayed*). However, although Timoleon

restores the aesthetics in place before Timophanes took power, his action still remains illegible to

the community, who are unable to view it in respect to such preexisting aesthetics. In a sense,

true restoration and repair prove impossible, and the action that becomes visible to the

community is an amalgam of imminent response (*reaction*) and their original modes of

perception. Timoleon's role in his brother's assassination stymies the very function of the

conscience, which constructs its sense of right and wrong based on its *misgivings* about a recent

event—an event composed of actions predicated on an earlier, but now outmoded sense of right

and wrong. Melville thus reveals the conscience as an evolving process, rather than a static

entity, and diagrams how this process can contradict its own foundations and presumed function.

This is not a critique of the fickleness or immorality of the public, nor is it simply a desire

for a consistent foundation for action and/or art. Rather, it expresses a specific break between

intention and effect, a rupture that resembles Rancière's concept of the "aesthetic cut," which

"separates outcomes from intentions and precludes any direct path towards an 'other side' of

words and images" (*Emancipated Spectator* 82). Due to this cut, images of art can "help sketch

new configurations of what can be seen, what can be said and what can be thought and,

consequently, a new landscape of the possible," but "they do so on condition that their meaning

or effect is not anticipated" (*Emancipated Spectator* 103). Timoleon, like the artist, produces

something beyond the threshold of what is legible to the community, but because of this exteriority, he is unable to anticipate how this act will reshape the configurations of what can be seen and thought. Most problematically for Melville, Timoleon's act has personally damaging political effects, but fails to impact the community on a conceptual level. That is, they register his act solely in terms of the new distribution of the sensible established by Timophanes's usurpation of power.

The poem literalizes the rupture between self and community, intention and outcome, at the close of section six.

> Estranged through one transcendent deed
> From common membership in mart,
> In severance he is like a head
> Pale after battle trunkless found apart. (141-4)

The *transcendent deed*, which the opening of the poem explicitly links to *transgression*, designates an action beyond the threshold of what is legible to the community, that exceeds the shared boundaries of the sensible. It is this deed that severs Timoleon's link to *common membership in mart*, a phrase which specifies authorized inclusion (*membership*) in the space of commodity and social exchange (the *mart*) where citizens enact community—in many senses, the spatial manifestation of a group's imagining of what constitutes community itself. The term *membership* also plays off an important double-entendre respecting the disturbing simile Melville employs in the final two lines. Timoleon's action excludes him from being a member of the community, just as it negates the potential for his existence as a *member* of a body. That is, he is no longer a constituent limb of a body—rather, he is a head. Significantly, he is a head that cannot communicate its intentions to the trunk. His transcendent act has rendered him a thinking, potentially integral component of the communal body, but it has also cut off his ability to communicate with this body. It has simultaneously negated his ability to act as a limb carrying

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out the repetitive motions of the larger social body *and* bestowed him with a contemplative and perceptive capacity that exceeds such *membership*, or limb-ness. In other words, Timoleon's action produces a conscious exterior perception of his community, but also prohibits him from communicating this perspective with the public body.

The sudden, jarring recognition of this *rupture* between his intentions and their effect, between himself and his community, profoundly unsettles Timoleon, within whom "Such deeps were bared as when the sea / Convulsed, vacates its shoreward bed, / And Nature's last reserves show nakedly" (130-32). His "playfellow's reproachful face" (140) haunts him throughout the remainder of his life, and he contemplates suicide. In certain respects, he undergoes and survives the recognition that dooms Pierre Glendinning at the close of *Pierre*, in which Pierre's experience of the "aesthetic cut" between art object and observer destroys the entire basis of his reality. Viewing a painting with his sister-wife Isabel, Pierre first realizes "though both were intensely excited by one object, yet their two minds and memories were thereby directed to entirely different contemplations" (352). More disturbingly, Pierre then recognizes that the seemingly unique quality *he* perceived in a family painting, a quality that serves as the basis of his decisions throughout the novel (including his marriage to Isabel, his half-sister), *is also visible* in a recently encountered foreign painting by an "Unknown Artist." In a brief span, he makes two devastating discoveries respecting the relationship between art and observer, both of which undermine presumptions that sustain his selfhood, specifically about the universal legibility and transcendent truth of art. He suddenly understands that members of the same community experience art in radically different ways, and art contains no essential component that marks it as such. Yet Pierre's realizations concern more than the relativism of interpretation. The cut between art and observer precludes the possibility of artistic intention and casts doubt on

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all intentions based on or in an artistic ideology. Pierre's selfhood, which revolves around his identification as a literary author and his adherence to a sentimentalized and romanticized perception of reality, thus collapses. He returns home from the gallery, nails his book—a "blasphemous rhapsody" (356)—to a counter and, after spitting on the manuscript to "get the start of the wide world's abuse of it" (357), runs into the street and murders his cousin. This act quickly leads to his imprisonment and suicide.

Timoleon experiences Pierre's self-destroying insights from a different perspective. Like Pierre, he undertakes a radical action based on his *aesthetic* convictions. Also like Pierre, he encounters a scenario that undermines the substantive basis of these convictions, thereby rendering the action as, at best, ambiguous (and, at worst, a sign of serious derangement). "Timoleon" and its original companion piece, "The Night-March," both refer to this substantive basis of action as a *mandate* seemingly voiced from an inaccessible space (the *skies* or the *twinkling distance lost*), and both overtly suggest its fictional nature.[115] Indeed, within the evacuated landscapes of *Timoleon*, armies march across "*boundless plains*" and men assassinate tyrants based only on *legends* and *seeming*. In *Pierre*, the scenario that undermines the protagonist's *aesthetic* convictions produces an abrupt, immediate climax, but in "Timoleon" this scenario acts as the *mise en scene* of the poem's primary action. That is, "Timoleon" (and the collection *Timoleon*) takes Pierre's revelation as its starting point, building its inquiry into art and political activity around the realization that destroys Pierre. The "aesthetic cut" that generates decisive narrative closure in *Pierre* thus becomes the sustained occasion of

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[115] "After the Pleasure Party," the second poem in the published version, was originally positioned after "The Weaver" in Melville's manuscript, thereby making "Timoleon" and "The Night-March" sequential. As the editorial appendix of *Published Poems* notes, "Melville marked its ['After the Pleasure Party'] move to a position after "Timoleon" on the contents list that probably went to the printer with the corrected galley proofs, where the shift was presumably also marked" (Northwestern-Newberry 766). See also 575.

"Timoleon," with Timoleon's political act also doubling as an artistic one, as I have shown. Where Timoleon's perspective differs from that of Pierre is in how he understands the implications of this cut. For Pierre, self is obliterated by the full understanding of the gap between art and observer. For Timoleon, the "aesthetic cut" between his action and its emergence in the community, however unsettling, serves as an incentive to speak out and question the gods, to enact a form of free, open speech.

In a sense, Timoleon thereby reenacts the logic of the poem, which understands the gap between Timoleon's actions and the perception of these actions within his community as an occasion to enact a mode of poetic speaking. Timoleon's response to a multi-faceted rupture—a breaking from community via political action, a fracturing recognition of the gap between intention and effect, and the subsequent *estrangement* produced by an outside perspective of the community's aesthetics—is to "rear" a "quarrel with the gods" (152). Like Melville himself, the titular hero turns to argumentation and questioning, and escapes Pierre's suicidal despair. Notably, he directs his speech at the "Arch principals," asking "To second causes why appeal?" (149) Ostensibly another instance of Melville's continuing assault on an absent or antagonistic creator, Timoleon's well-discussed *quarrel* with the gods, in context, provides a deeper insight into the poetic project of *Timoleon* when recognized as more than a mere iteration of his skepticism respecting the divine. Voiced alone to seemingly nonexistent interlocutors, Timoleon's speaking out is directed specifically at the *principal* causes underlying his selfhood and his community's modes of seeing, acting, and saying. His criticism of these *principals*—a term that also doubles for its homonym—stems from a peculiar form of self-contained reflection, which Melville describes through an unusual simile: "Like sightless orbs his thoughts are rolled" (147). Thus, Timoleon's *arraigning* of the gods emerges from thoughts that cannot see past their

own threshold, but are cast outward to issue their charges against heaven. These thoughts, embodied but unable to perceive their direction or purpose, have an obvious analogy to poetry, specifically the poetry of a writer who had regularly acknowledged the gap between artistic expression and its effects. One need look no further than the original printing of *Timoleon* to find proof of this analogy. Much to the confusion of critics, Caxton Press' original edition of *Timoleon* omits the quotation marks that frame Timoleon's speech to the gods in current editions. The omission itself was a product of both Melville's indecision regarding such punctuation, evident in the manuscript copies, and the often indistinct boundaries between the narrative voices of the poems and the voices of their subjects.[116] Timoleon's speech so closely resembles Melville's rolling thoughts (his poetry), then, that readers, and the writer himself, found them difficult to differentiate.

What Timoleon's speech reveals about Melville's late poetry is that it is directed at the *aesthetics* underpinning "second causes," which we might loosely understand as the public sphere and its constituents (the community as such). He refrains from direct political, social, or even artistic claims because of the nature of the "aesthetic cut," which separates intention from interpretation and political result. Yet Timoleon's role in his brother's assassination also suggests that *aesthetics*, as "the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience," have immediate, radical, and enduring political implications. That is, how Timoleon experiences Timophanes' rise to power—manifested by how he understands tyranny and virtue—produces his violent rebellion. The practice that both Timoleon and Melville ultimately undertake in response to these competing factors is a poetic speaking that registers its inability to produce a specific political result, but nonetheless recognizes the necessity and *possibility* of

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[116] See Melville, *Published Poems* 613.

addressing and disrupting the aesthetics at the core of their communities' politics. The

paradoxical relation of these factors is embodied not merely in the image of sightless orbs that,

like poetry, roll thoughts outward with no perception of or necessary connection to their impact,

but in the related scenarios of Timoleon's speaking and the publication of *Timoleon*. Where

Timoleon utters his quarrel to absent interlocutors, Melville published merely twenty-five copies

of *Timoleon, Etc.*, of which "there were still enough copies remaining in the possession of the

family [in 1921] for one to be used as a gift" (Shurr 151). In both cases, poetic speaking is

voiced without an evident purpose into a seeming void. Through this mode and site of speaking,

however, Melville acknowledges and engages with a conception of art that is *always* voiced into

oblivion without sight of its consequences. Through the same vehicles (mode and site), he details

a type of artistic-political action operative outside, if still alongside, the public sphere. This type

of action focuses on what Rancière understands as *aesthetics* and Melville terms *principals*,

speaking to and of these originary, generative structures from a position exterior to the *mart*—the

marketplace, the agora—in an effort to shift an interlocutor's frame of engagement with these

structures from a space entrenched within them to an alternative position.

How these features come to coalesce as a "fresh and unfamiliar poetic project"—how

they come to generate a mode of poetry that disturbs the generic (poetry) and aesthetic (literary

customs and expectations) foundations of its chosen medium—is perhaps most visible in the

bizarre decapitation image in the closing quatrain of section six that I discussed earlier. I'd like

to revisit Melville's employment of *trunkless* in the final two lines: "In severance he is like a

head / Pale after battle trunkless found apart" (143-4). Characteristic of his discordant stylistics,

Melville deposits the awkward syllogism *trunkless* athwart the expected syntactic and metrical

order of the final line, plunking it into the sentence in a manner akin to a severed head that has

tumbled onto a battlefield. The awkward position of *trunkless* and the pair of stresses at the outset of the line make scansion a difficult, potentially impossible, endeavor. The line could be read as a spondee followed by a four iambs (*PALE AFTer BATtle TRUNKless FOUND aPART*). However, the disjointed, counterintuitive placement of *trunkless* disrupts this scansion, drawing attention to itself as a distinct metrical unit (in this case, a trochee). The decisive closing iamb (*aPART*) partially restores a traditional metrical reading of the line, but it also works to juxtapose the expected rhythm of the line with the elements that disrupt it. Peter Coviello's investigation of "The Portent," from Melville's *Battle-Pieces*, identifies just such a "refusal to allow *any* pattern of metrical expectation to solidify behind and beneath the lines" (198) as a primary source of what he calls the "weird music" of Melville's poetry. The position of *trunkless* thus syntactically and metrically replays Timoleon's violent separation from his community, instantiating this separation as a noticeable, exaggerated break from customary verse—a rupture that the line nonetheless attempts to reintegrate (in its closing iamb) with the form from which it emerges, just as Timoleon initially struggles to find a way to realign himself with the social body. Not only does Melville provide readers with a model of the poet with Timoleon, an exiled figure that issues his quarrel from a space irrevocably detached from the community he (indirectly) addresses, but he renders this exterior position as a poetic method.

I hesitate to describe this method as *formal* because of the ways that Melville, by employing both traditional and non-traditional resources, regularly stages the failure and malfunction of formal expectations within and against recognizable poetic structures. More accurately, his poetic method provides a different sensorium than a truly *formal* poetry, a sensorium in which expectations and interpretive stances built on form collapse, falling back on themselves. Renker suggests that "Melville's battle with conventional form was an ever present

component of his writing process" ("Melville's Poetic Singe" 15), and I would merely extend her

claim to *form* itself.

Melville's poetry seems to incorporate elements that stymie even its own "formal"

tendencies. The poems in *Timoleon, Etc.* involve a shuttling between convention and disruption;

they integrate both a positing of traditional poetics, indeed of the value of traditional poetics, and

an effort to unsettle and deterritorialize this poetics. I want to stress that it is specifically the

movement between these two positions that is both the focal point and political function of the

Timoleon collection. By this "political function," I mean that Melville constructs a different and

new relationship between words and beings—specifically between poetry and people—and

thereby attempts to generate the possibility of a different shared world, a different community.

This relationship is one characterized by, on one hand, a reparatively oriented recognition of the

promise of and possibilities offered by traditional concepts and practices of literature, and, on the

other, an informed and critical perspective of these concepts and practices. That Timoleon

chooses *not* to return to Corinth, that he chooses to remain on the *adopted shore* of Sicily, has

invariably, and surprisingly, been read from the Corinthian perspective, from the perspective of

Timoleon as exile. This vision of a nostalgic, wistful Timoleon seems to forget the message of

Melville's most famous protagonist, Ishmael, who, though exiled with his mother Hagar, also

gives birth to twelve new tribes, to communities apart from that which exiled him. Timoleon is,

then, perhaps not just a Gatsby, longingly gazing upon the distant green light of Daisy's

community, but is also an Ishmael awaiting readers to join his new world.

The traversal between traditional poetics and its disruption is made apparent by what is

most startling and, to my mind, most moving about Melville's use of the decapitation image and

the little-used neologism *trunkless*: They directly allude to Percy Bysshe Shelley's sonnet

"Ozymandias." I quote it at length for its particular and definite resonance with "Timoleon" and

Timoleon.[117]

> I met a Traveler from an antique land,
> Who said, "Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
> Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
> Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
> And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
> Tell that its sculptor well those passions read,
> Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
> The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed:
> And on the pedestal these words appear:
> "My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings.
> Look on my works ye Mighty, and despair!"
> No thing beside remains. Round the decay
> Of that Colossal Wreck, boundless and bare,
> The lone and level sands stretch far away.

Where Melville uses *trunkless* to describe a severed head, Shelley employs it for two *vast legs* of

a statue. Enough of the "*shattered visage*" nearby remains, however, to indicate that the statue's

head also lacks the body that supported it—that it, too, is *trunkless*. Similarly, while Shelley's

"*half sunk*" head is not a simile about an individual's separation from the social body, it

nonetheless extends both political and artistic claims. On one hand, it is a cautionary image about

the inevitable collapse of civilization and political power (once again, tyranny). Put in terms of

one of Melville's favorite aphorisms, "All is vanity." On the other, it suggests an enduring

essence to art itself. The sculptor's presumably acute perception of a sneering tyrant's passions

remains legible—*stamped* on the buried head—long after the civilization has vanished and the

"*King of Kings*" has been reduced to letters inscribed in stone. The crumbling statue of

Ozymandias (Ramses II), its accompanying inscription, and the surrounding "*lone and level*"

sands, then, stage the impermanence of political, architectural, and social structures against the

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[117] Melville not only owned *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (1857), but very likely (although not definitively) references Shelley later in *Timoleon*, in the poem "Shelley's Vision."

durability or semi-permanence of art. In Shelley's poem, we "look on" such structures only through the art and writing that survives them.

Although "Ozymandias" is perhaps more ambiguous than this interpretation allows, its endorsement of the enduring nature of art is in obvious conflict with the themes and concerns of "Timoleon." Timoleon, like Pierre before him, eventually recognizes that this supposedly persistent and essential quality of art, articulated obliquely in Melville's poem via the term *virtue*, is subject to both individual and communal changes—that "*good*" can in "*weak*" expire. Late in the poem, the reader discovers that Timoleon's chief anxiety while in exile is that his own conscience might first "*doubt*" and then "*recant*," leaving him without justification—even an internal one—for participating in his brother's murder. The tension between the presumption of art's representational capacity and "timelessness," and Melville's devastating recognition of the "aesthetic cut" (the chasm between artistic intention and effect) generates the peculiar and remarkable force of the poem and, generally speaking, the *Timoleon* collection. It is also a tension that Melville attempts to provisionally resolve in "Timoleon," and in these lines in particular.

In essence, Melville's allusion to "Ozymandias" positions poetry, specifically a sonnet that questions the relationship between art and politics, as the scene of Timoleon's separation from the social body. The political space of Timoleon's estrangement from community is therefore also the space that poetry examines and occupies—an idea confirmed by "Timoleon" itself, which Melville composes around the same concept (i.e., that Timoleon's action constitutes an occasion for poetry). In other words, the aesthetics underpinning Timoleon's *transcendent* political act also underlie the depiction of the statue (an artwork) in Shelley's sonnet, permitting their substitution for one another. Timoleon's deed, in the poem's reckoning, stems from the

zone that poetry interrogates, a zone concerned with the interchange between words and practices, between people and the forms of legibility and perception that come to influence or dictate their actions. Timoleon's adherence to *virtue*, the supposedly persistent quality that sponsors his radical political dissent, replays the relationship between art and politics that Shelley proposes in "Ozymandias," a poem in which the creation of the artist far outlasts the tyrant and his "*works*." As we have seen, however, it is precisely this relationship that "Timoleon" interrogates. That is, the poem questions, rather than accepts, the durability of art and any stable "*basis*" of human action. As Timoleon asks the gods, "Are earnest natures staggering here / But fatherless shadows from no substance cast?" (163-4) Rather than positing such "*substance*" as the foundation of Timoleon's actions, then, the poem repositions substance as part of an interrogative movement. Timoleon undertakes his initial act because he believes that *virtue* endures, that *virtue* stems from some substantive, persistent quality. This belief, also at the core of the anonymous traveler's statements in "Ozymandias," is nonetheless the subject of Melville's poem's opening questions and the questions Timoleon poses to the gods. What sustains virtuous action? What sustains art?

If Timoleon first acts on his initial belief in the enduring *substance* of virtuous action, he comes to different answers to these questions by the close of the poem. More specifically, the course of his life leads him to pose questions about the basis of virtuous action to the *Arch Principals* through a specialized form of address. Although the gods he addresses answer his inquiries with silence, withholding even the "little sign" of "low thunder in tranquil skies," this arraigning of principals provides the poem's provisional resolution to Timoleon's questions. Significantly, the resolution serves both aesthetic and political purposes in that it revises the relationship between people and practices, between things and meanings. As is suggested by the

radical dislocation of the term *trunkless* as the formal analog of Timoleon's political condition, the poem proposes that poetry becomes dislodged from its function within the "common mart" as an ongoing reproduction and reiteration of the community's aesthetics. I am speaking specifically of the logic that delineates scenes of presence and absence—that organizes the space of the community in terms of enduring substance and truth, on one hand, and vacuous, ephemeral, or otherwise flawed socio-political formations on the other. That is, the poem attempts to dislodge art from its function as either antithesis of a community's temporary missteps or justification of the community's supposedly persistent logic, instead situating it as a space for questioning and interrogating this logic. Rather than viewing poetry, as "Ozymandias" depicts it, as a mystifying monument to an aesthetics that combines the figures of the impermanence of the community with the durability/semi-permanence of the tenets supposedly underlying that community (and its art), "Timoleon" dismantles and reconfigures this relationship. It instead stages poetry as the locale where the *Arch Principals* on which a community rests are explored, developed, and altered. Art's role as "timeless" substance is absorbed into this interrogative model, serving, in a sense, as the primary catalyst of aesthetic and political questioning. In other words, the enduring essence of art espoused within "Ozymandias" no longer acts as art's simultaneous justification and function—and poetry therefore no longer substantiates the community's modes of apportioning space and bodies (through a constant reiteration of the persistent essence of the principles of that community). Rather, by staging the disruption and dislocation of this mode of poetry and its respective aesthetics, "Timoleon" reveals it as a powerful, evolving device for generating questions capable of unsettling existing correspondences between bodies and meanings—for reinterpreting, and thereby transforming, the common world. Poetry's claims to timelessness and truth become

mechanisms for questioning a community's principles, not the instantiation of those principles

themselves.

"Schiller's Ambition" and the Curious Case of "Art"

Timoleon's characteristic tension between conventional poetics and the effort to unsettle

and redefine this poetics is readily visible in the frequent conflict between the titles of Melville's

poems and their subject matter. In the first section of the collection, in particular, Melville

regularly uses titles that dislodge art, faith, and faith in art from the venerated spaces it occupies

in the accompanying text. A poem titled "The Enthusiast," for example, asks a series of

questions nearly identical to those posed in "Timoleon" (and, in fact, using a number of the same

terms) only to end with a stanza praising "fealty to light":[118]

> Nor cringe if come the night:
>   Walk through the cloud to meet the pall,
>   Though light forsake thee, never fall
> From fealty to light. (21-24)

Unlike "Timoleon," which suspends resolution to its questions about the "*basis*" of action and

faith, "The Enthusiast" wholeheartedly affirms the tenets that Timoloen interrogates. Yet the title

of the poem makes it impossible to take its closing affirmation as an unconditional claim. Instead

the title suggests that the poem represents a Browning-esque monologue from a speaker that is

not the poet, or that it otherwise ventriloquizes a viewpoint that the poet does not necessarily

endorse.[119] Enthusiasm implies a momentary, unsophisticated, and even thoughtless passion, a

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[118] Similarities between "The Enthusiast" and "Timoleon" abound. The former opens with "Shall hearts that beat no base retreat / In youth's magnanimous years— / Ignoble hold it … / When interest tames to fears" (1-4) while the latter asks "Shall the good heart whose patriot fire / leaps to a deed of startling note" (6-7). Similarly, both refer to the "mart" and the question of whether the primary figure(s) should "recant."

[119] Melville was well-acquainted with Robert Browning's poetry. See Parker, "Historical Note."

passion that partakes of the fervor of what the poem ambiguously calls "youth's magnanimous years" (2). Dillingham notes a similar ambiguity in the poem, arguing that the "speaker sounds somewhat like the Pierre of Melville's novel (1852)" (*Melville and His Circle* 88), and that Melville disparagingly refers to Pierre Glendinning as an "enthusiast" in *Pierre*.[120] The irony generated by the juxtaposition of title and text is similarly visible in the poem's epigraph, "Though He slay me yet I will trust Him." A truncated rendering of the first part of Job 13:15, the epigraph positions the faithful "enthusiast" in respect to the god that would kill him in spite of his zeal.[121] In a like manner to the ways that *The Confidence Man* distorts the notion of confidence, the poem uses the juxtaposition of title and epigraph to unsettle the concept of *trust*, linking the faithful enthusiasm for "light" and "Truth" to an unwavering belief in a divine force that destroys the devoted disciple. By replaying the self-destructive *trust* ironized by the epigraph, the "fealty" unabashedly embraced at the close of the poem collapses the distinction between religious devotee and egoist, between futile, even harmful, faith in the divine and an equally detrimental self-conviction. Viewed in respect to core tenets of nineteenth-century U.S. literature, such as Emerson's self-reliance or romanticism's devotion to individualism, the final stanza comes to signal not an affirmation of the transcendental or romantic ego, nor an assertion of an artistic credo, but a problematic link between these artistic values and the staid traditions they seemingly critiqued.

The potentially misguided passion of "The Enthusiast" also appears in "The New Zealot to the Sun," which initially commends the sun for "compel[ing] the flight / Of Chaos' startled

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[120] Despite this, Dillingham nonetheless asserts, "The voice of this work, however, is not that of Pierre … but that of the older Melville confirming his determination to combat the dullness and mundaneness of age with his imagination even if it means sacrificing personal relationships" (*Melville and His Circle* 88).

[121] Perhaps not incidentally, Borges "Deutches Requiem" uses the same epigraph for similarly ironic effect.

clan" (26-27) by producing reverence, worship, and religion. Its final verse, however, reveals the Zealot as an adherent to the power of "Science" (31), which the speaker believes able to search "every secret out" and "elucidate" the "ray" of the sun itself. The speaker thus advocates the supplanting of religion by science because of its ability to "quell the shades you [the sun] fail to rout" (34). Again, however, the connotations of the title's "New Zealot" disturb any type of unreserved reading of the poem. Instead, they align the speaker with the very religion that he or she would aim to supersede. Worse, perhaps, they pose immature, credulous ("New") enthusiasm against a force born in "time's first dawn" (26). Similarly, in criticizing the sun, the speaker of the poem contradicts the light-affirming standpoint of "The Enthusiast" (and vice versa). Not only do the titles problematize our readings of each poem, then, but the conflicting stances presented throughout the collection create additional inversions and reversals.

I'd like to suggest, however, that the juxtapositions of title and text, and of certain poems, are not simply meant to subvert the viewpoints espoused by the body of each poem. Melville's tone is far too convincing to indicate mere disagreement or opposition. Like the ceaseless searching of "Timoleon," the tension between the enthusiastic, indeed "literary" position and the ironic voice that undermines this position produces a space in which the community's aesthetics are both powerfully expressed and powerfully questioned. The result is not simply a "contrast" that serves as a "binder" for "the reading of each poem and the collection as a whole" (127), as Marovitz argues, but an interrogative space produced by locating the committed affirmation of poetic principles alongside the failure and transformation of expectations predicated on these principles. This space, as I have suggested above, relies on legitimization and provisional sanction of the community's aesthetic values as a means to amplify the impact of their malfunctions and failures.

Melville's strategy in this regard represents an evolution of his use of Ahab in *Moby-Dick*, as Robert Milder depicts it in his analysis of the novel's narrative form. Milder suggests that Ahab's magnetic appeal, and his confusing status within the narrative, stem from Melville's intent to have the reader yield "to 'the abandonment' of the moment" (80) when Ishmael makes Ahab's hunt for the whale his own. Later, when Ahab casts his final harpoon at Moby Dick and the whale drags him to his death beneath the waves, the reader's intense association with the monomaniacal captain allows them to experience a catharsis from what Ahab embodies. In Milder's view,

> What dies with Ahab is more than a morbid, defiant strain with the individual reader; it is a mode of consciousness and an established cultural order. The Ahab who is compounded of Prometheus, Job, Christ, Lear, Satan, Faust, Manfred, Cain, and Teufelsdröckh, among others, is the legitimate heir of these mythic and literary figures who sails toward his encounter with Moby Dick bearing the entire legacy of Western thought … (85-86)

There can be no doubt that *Timoleon* also engages with this legacy. Not only does the first section draw heavily from European history, arts, and literature, but the following section, "Fruit of Travel Long Ago," traces the roots of European culture through Italian and Greek sites to the birth of Western religion (the "dumb I AM") in the Egyptian pyramids.[122] If *Moby-Dick* effects a cathartic release from such an "established cultural order" through this strategy, however, the poems of *Timoleon* adhere more closely to the cultural and intellectual legacies that they unsettle. Rather than jettisoning these legacies, *Timoleon* attempts to harness them as mechanisms for revising the political stakes of poetry. Specifically, it attempts to render a mode of reasoning in which the subject posits the legitimacy of the community's principles—

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[122] Marovitz writes, "The pyramids were so awesome for Melville that he believed the idea of Yahweh was first conceived within the largest of them. But for 'L'Envoi,' this final section of *Timoleon* ends at the beginning, as it were, at the very origin and foundation of Judeo-Christian worship, reverence, and fear" (136). Dryden notes, "The pyramid, standing "like flame transformed to marble," for Melville, is the source of the idea of Jehovah as well as the first work of art" (*Monumental Melville* 189).

particularly its *artistic* principles—but must evaluate these principles against and within spaces where they fracture, break down, or modulate. The point is not to abandon the position that someone like Shelley or the Enthusiast occupies, as the reader of *Moby-Dick* finally relinquishes Ahab's quest, but to generate a means to engage with this position as dynamic and mobile, and, therefore, outside the scope afforded by a reified perspective, such as conventional humanism. In the context of a poem like "The Enthusiast," this means that the unwavering "fealty to light" must be experienced as a legitimate option in order to generate the force of the reversal achieved by the title and epigraph. This reversal does not necessarily invalidate the body of the poem, but shifts its function from a reflection of absolute truth to a representation of the Enthusiast's aesthetic values. Politically speaking, such a perceptual shift provides a means to make ethical and social decisions *in respect to* these aesthetics, rather than from/on these aesthetics.

Despite acknowledging the disruptive qualities of the collection, what Marovitz identifies as the "subtle, depersonalized, shrewdly ironic voice that underlies *Timoleon*" (127), critics often cite seemingly less ambiguous poems, such as "Art," "In a Garret," and "Disinterment of the Hermes," as the key to understanding Melville's views on poetry and art. Elisa Tamarkin, for example, maintains that the four-line poem "In a Garret" suggests "art is not some great monument, but rather the dissolving vision that we have at some remove, in our garrets ... . [Art] asks us to grapple with ideas that melt like wax the moment we try to grasp them" (176). Sanford Marovitz writes, "In fact 'Art,' a poem of only eleven lines, may be regarded as the thematic keystone of the collection by identifying the source of form and life in art as the forceful combining of disparate elements and qualities in the creative act" (126). In a similar vein, Renker's reading of "Disinterment of the Hermes" asserts, "The poem's historical context of the literal disinterment of the Hermes serves as a figurative allegory of reading. … The distant, lost,

hidden world of such artworks – biding, waiting to be disinterred – is the world of *Timoleon*"

(139). Each of these interpretations highlights a single poem as the means to unlock the meaning

of Melville's poetic project. This is, of course, not an unusual strategy in literary criticism—I

highlight these analyses precisely for their exemplary nature. The problem is that, in order to

substantiate their claims, each of these otherwise nuanced readings must suspend the ironic

voice—the persistent tension between convention and iconoclasm—recognizably underlying the

collection. Where these interpretations go amiss, I would like to suggest, is not necessarily in

their examination of each individual poem, but in the extension of the poem's apparent assertions

to the meaning of the overall collection or to Melville's stance on art.

     "In a Garret" presents the most obvious obstacles to such a synecdochal approach. The

published version reads:

> Gems and jewels let them heap—
>   Wax sumptuous as the Sophi:
> For me, to grapple from Art's deep
>   One dripping trophy! (1-4)

As Tamarkin remarks, the poem "is likely based on Friedrich Schiller's ballad, 'The Diver,' in

which a young page responds to his king's challenge to retrieve a golden goblet from the 'dark

waves' of the sea (once successfully, then tragically)" (177). While the poem readily supports

this suggestion, it is important to note that Tamarkin's inference stems not from the published

text, but from the group of possible titles scored through on Melville's manuscript: "Ambition,"

"Schiller's Ambition," and "The Spirit of Schiller" (*Published Poems* 789).[123] The original titles

and the likely source material to which they refer, however, suggest that the poem does not

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[123] Tamarkin is undoubtedly drawing from the notes to *Published Poems* here, which indicate that Melville "sidelined in pencil three stanzas of his Bulwer-Lytton translation of Schiller's 'The Diver' … which was also his source for the underwater portion of White Jacket's account of his fall from the yardarm in chapter 92 of *White-Jacket* (1850)" (789).

represent Melville's viewpoint on art, but rather *a* viewpoint about art—and a potentially

problematic one, at that. They delineate the poem as a rendering of Schiller's concept of art, or,

evocatively, of a perspective on personal and artistic value enmeshed with a desire for a certain

type of success ("*Ambition*," with all of its attendant concerns). Similarly, the tragic fate of "The

Diver," parenthetically addressed by Tamarkin, further implies that the speaker's enthusiastic

exclamation offers, at the very least, an incomplete portrayal of "*Art's deep*." If the speaker of

"In a Garret" is the brave page of Schiller's ballad, he shares only the first part of his journey,

excluding the tale of his drowning—a tale, of course, he never tells. That the poem presents a

problematized vision of art is also apparent, if less explicit, in the published version. The title "In

a Garret," which indicates an elevated, distant, and limited enclosure (and one *still* associated

with "artists"), implies that the speaker of the poem occupies a rarefied, and therefore potentially

suspect, standpoint. As I have elsewhere highlighted, Judith Hiltner identifies a "pattern of

imagery suggesting the distortion or limitation of elevated perspectives" (77) in Melville's

magazine writing, a pattern I would argue is also operative here.[124] Whether the mastheads of

Moby-Dick or *White-Jacket*, the tower rooms of *Pierre* (Plinlimmon's and Pierre's), the lofty

spaces of "The Two Temples," "The Piazza," "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of

Maids," and "The Bell-Tower," or the mysterious "old garret" of "The Apple-Tree Table," the

elevated positions of Melville's fiction never offer a complete perspective.

Shurr's seminal study also registers the "curious tension is set up between the poem and

its title" (243). Although he leaves the argument undeveloped, he suggestively asserts, "The

poem is one of Melville's many statements against commercial man, but it also fits into another

context of his polemic against Thoreau and Transcendentalism" (243-4). In other words, the

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[124] Indeed, the ambiguous and often discomfiting story "The Apple-Tree Table," one of Melville's late short stories, centers on a table found in a garret.

poem does not fully endorse the aloof artist's counter-position to capitalistic culture. The manuscript revisions and published title thus link "In a Garret" to the more overtly problematized positions of "The Enthusiast" and "The New Zealot to the Sun." The *partial* nature of the view of art depicted in "In a Garret" is similarly evident in the poem's position in the collection. Marovitz argues, for example, "As if in ardent response to the beckoning lamia, the poetic voice behind 'In a Garret' counters with a dismissal of such seductive temptation and immediately follows it with the oft-anthologized "Monody"" (134). Although Marovitz takes a comparable angle on "In a Garret" to Tamarkin, aligning it with the "intense desire" (133) of the poet (denoting both Melville and the figure of the poet Marovitz believes that the collection endorses), he recognizes that it acts in dialectic fashion with both the preceding and proceeding poems, "Lamia's Song" and "Monody," respectively.[125] It does not, however, represent Melville's "ardent response" or a pat "dismissal" of the sensualistic call from intellectualism, "From your lonely Alp / With the wintry scalp" (3-4), sung by the temptress Lamia, nor does it anticipate the subdued tone of "Monody." Indeed, "Monody" pleads for "a little ease" from "song" (6), linking its woeful entreaty to "Lamia's Song" rather than the grappling process apparent in "In a Garret." As I've suggested, none of these poems represents an unqualified perspective, and none of them issues Melville's definitive statement on his own writing.

Such a statement instead appears to come from the poem "Art," which serves as the primary foundation of most readings of poems like "In a Garret," "The Weaver," and "Disinterment of the Hermes." Perhaps the single most discussed poem in Melville's corpus, "Art" offers what critics have tended to perceive as a "relatively straight-forward" (Dryden *Monumental Melville* 170), if still (and paradoxically) ambiguous, declaration concerning the

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[125] Milder also highlights the importance of the arrangement (230).

creation of poetry and artwork.[126] Dillingham, for example, calls it "Melville's hymn to the

imagination" (90), a sentiment reiterated by Dryden, Marovitz, and a multitude of other

commentators.[127] However, a number of key elements from the extensively revised manuscripts

and the published poem seem to complicate such an interpretation. As the editors of the

Northwestern-Newberry note, "In a Garret" was "developed and expanded from two lines

canceled and covered with a revision patch at the top of Melville's manuscript of 'Art'" (789),

and the lines that "became the poem 'Art' may well have been conceived as a gathering of

'epigrams' about art, with a title indicating it as their common topic" (796). I cite this not as a

means of attempting to privilege, resuscitate, or even locate Melville's original intentions, but in

order to suggest a similarity between "Art" and the problematized poems I have already

discussed—particularly "In a Garret," which emerged from a related group of lines.[128] That said,

Melville evidently saw the initial text that became "Art" as more involved and significant than an

epigraph format would permit, and indeed worthy of their final title. However he originally

perceived the poem's perspective, it came to represent his perceptions and experiences of the

category of "Art." The poem nonetheless suggests that even this seemingly clear distinction

raises more questions than it answers, leaving the text as anything but "straight-forward."

The poem "Art" reads as follows:

In placid hours well pleased we dream
Of many a brave unbodied scheme.
But form to lend, pulsed life create,
What unlike things must meet and mate:
A flame to melt—a wind to freeze;

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[126] Dryden suggests that "Even in the relatively straight-forward "Art," the figure for the poet is not a completely unambiguous one" (*Monumental Melville* 170). By 1972, Shurr already noted that the poem had "become a classic" (242).

[127] See, for example, Dryden, *Monumental Melville* 169; Marovitz 126-27; or Milder 228. Shurr similarly calls the poem "an expansion and commentary on [his] theory of art" (241-2).

[128] See also Robert C. Ryan "Melville Revises 'Art'" (308).

> Sad patience—joyous energies;
> Humility—yet pride and scorn;
> Instinct and study; love and hate;
> Audacity—reverence. These must mate,
> And fuse with Jacob's mystic heart,
> To wrestle with the angel—Art. (1-11)

In the poem's logic, the creation of "pulsed life" and attribution of "form" are produced by the meeting and mating of a multitude of unlike, often oppositional, forces. This form-lending, life-creating operation, however, is not necessarily "Art." It is, at least as the poem expresses it, a precursor to contending with "Art," which may or may not be the culmination of the life-creating operation. That is, the poem closes with a moment of contention, with a moment of wrestling between the would-be creator and the concept of "Art"—not necessarily with the production of art itself (although it is suggested as such by the parallel use of infinitive verbs in the third line and final line). Does the title "Art" therefore refer to itself as its own instantiation? In other words, is this poem "Art"? Does it seek to define Melville's notion of art? Or does it, as the final line suggests, generate a space of discussion and uncertainty regarding the titular term?

The latter option appears counterintuitive, particularly given the evident pathos of the poem; lines like "Sad patience—joyous energies" or "These must mate, / And fuse with Jacob's mystic heart" suggest a profound authorial investment in and understanding of the processes described by the text. Indeed, "Art" is regularly considered in respect to its biographical implications. Milder, for example, includes it with a group of poems "particularly concerned with the renunciations and rewards of truth's votaries … as if Melville, surveying his long career, were trying to persuade himself he had not been a Fool of Truth" (228). Yet the poem seems purposefully resistant to a reading that considers it either a definitive claim about art or a purely personal "hymn to the imagination." Via this resistance, it instead organizes art as a site of a paradoxical simultaneity—on one hand, an autonomous form of "pulsed life," and an operation

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never fully consummated. Melville's manuscript change of "give" to "lend" in the third line of the poem ("But form to lend, pulsed life create") is particularly telling in this regard. The provisional, transitory nature of the term "lend" implies a suspended process, an incomplete circuit in which the bestowed attribute exists in a state of tension with the origin to which it will eventually return.

Melville renews this tension in the final lines of the poem. Like "form to lend, pulsed life create," the closing sentence sets up a conflict between resolution and a suspended, provisional process. This conflict is implicit in the final em-dash, certainly among the most extraordinary uses of punctuation in U.S. poetry (and evocative of Emily Dickinson's equally profound manipulation of the dash).[129] In the typical readings of this em-dash, "Art" either categorizes the preceding term ("angel") or the entire process described by the sentence (mating, fusing, wrestling), or acts as a synoptic descriptor reiterating the poem's primary object. What commentators regularly overlook is that this em-dash also replays the structure of the "unlike things that must meet and mate" cataloged by the poem, most of which are also divided by an em-dash. Given this structure, "Art" both characterizes the angel/process and stands in opposition to it. Melville also evokes this contentious blending in "to wrestle," a process in which bodies meld into a single form despite the fraught grappling between them; the verb's frequent association with sex also plays off the poem's numerous allusions to childbirth.[130] In most respects, this would seem to simply reiterate the traditional interpretations of the poem as, to repeat Marovitz's argument, an explanation of the "forceful combining of disparate elements and qualities" involved in the creative act. However, the series of ruptures, from *lend* and

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[129] For a detailed discussion of Dickinson's dashes, see Crumbley.

[130] See, for example, Person's discussion of the tale (237-8).

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wrestling, to the ambiguous figure of Jacob and the final em-dash, indicate a subsequent

remove—implying that such combining that is both consummated and held in abeyance, and

thereby stymying the largely New Critical interpretive model Marovitz offers.

Examined through this further remove, *art* functions as a concept-entity-force ("*angel—*

Art") with which the aspiring creator must contend in order to make something formed and alive.

Yet the contest with the "*angel—Art*" complex, as the syntax suggests, is ongoing rather than

resolved. Thus, the "pulsed life" of the third line comes to exist *within*, rather than *as a result of*,

this continuing struggle between the "*angel—Art*" complex and the mating-fusion process. While

this might appear to add a needless layer of complexity to an otherwise "straight-forward" poem,

Renker has effectively shown that "Melville created a poetics of difficulty that burned through

the didactic, sentimental, and formal conventions of his day" ("Melville's Poetic Singe" 13).

Given the subtlety and sophistication of the other poems in *Timoleon*, it seems unlikely that

Melville would suddenly diverge from his "poetics of difficulty" with "Art," a poem that

addresses *the* central concern of his late writing, and which conspicuously resists the type of

transparency suggested by its title. Indeed, even those who consider "Art" as a direct comment

on poetry and/or the imagination have noted the strangeness and ambiguity of its closing

sentence, what Shurr calls the "compressed achievement of the last two lines" (242).[131]

What, then, might it mean for a creation to come to exist within a continuing struggle

between the mating-fusing process of the creator and the "*angel—Art*" complex? Or for "Art" to

operate as both the product of a creative act (as in the poem's title), and as that which contests

this act (as in the poem's final line)? These dual-figures of art, I'd like to suggest, demonstrate

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[131] Shurr perceptively suggests that "it is Melville's theory, as well as Coleridge's, that the elements must not be allowed to fuse into a static union—hence the word 'wrestle' in the final line" (243). What Shurr and other critics have neglected, however, is that one of the "elements" thus suspended is *art* itself.

two significant innovations in Melville's theorization of "artistic" expression. First, they indicate

that "art" is contested in and through the sites that come to articulate, identify, or represent it.

This simultaneously accounts for the influence of tradition and convention on the production and

evaluation of contemporary work, and offers a model for the ways that both new and antiquated

artworks continue to revise the sphere designated as art (and are, thus, subsequently revised).

Timoleon, which engages with art and architecture from a wide range of historical periods, and

which refracts these works through a poetics that is at once disaffecting and radically

contemporary, *and* recognizably formalized and allusive, consistently examples the complex

interchange between artistic traditions and the perspectives that would unsettle and revise them.

The poet-traveler's obvious affinities for, as one poem puts it, the "symmetry congealed"

("Greek Masonry" 3) of the sites he visits attests not to an embrace of the traditions associated

with these sites, but to their profound influence on what is contested within and through them.

Second, as this discussion makes evident, the dual-figures of art layered within the poem

explore the reciprocity between *altering* and *according with* a community's aesthetic

composition. This relationship is exampled within "Art" through the terms *lend* and *wrestle*, both

of which suggest a provisional and unstable forming, as well as a persistent separation, akin to

Timoleon's "severance" from "common membership in mart." Each pair of "unlike things"

cataloged within the poem also engage with this reciprocal exchange. That is, binding Melville's

seemingly disparate list is the balance between stasis and change, between tradition/convention

and the forces that would disrupt it. Thus, "humility," "reverence," "study," and "sad patience"

align with the existing, stabilized aesthetic composition of the community—an *accord with* and

respect for the operative forms of legibility. The oppositional terms ("joyous energies," "pride

and scorn," "instinct," and "audacity") all suggest a radical interference with this aesthetic

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composition—a willing, individualistic eagerness to break from and rupture such forms. The remaining pairs ("A flame to melt—a wind to freeze" and "love and hate") echo and enhance these distinctions, but introduce considerable ambiguity respecting the speaker's affinities. What does the speaker love or hate? Is the freezing wind a forming, stabilizing force, or that which evokes a cold resentment to the sedating flame? However suggestive, these ambiguous figures again reiterate the fraught balance between the oppositions that the poem advises, categorizing *art* is a specialized way of mediating between an individual's or community's existing aesthetic composition and the forces and impulses that would disrupt it. In order to achieve the meeting and mating advocated by the text, the speaker's sympathies must shift across each binary structure, a process that recalls the Ishmael who is "neither believer nor infidel, but … a man who regards them both with equal eye" (*Moby Dick* 374). As I've argued, Melville locates the final word of the poem, "*Art*," within a similar structure, thereby replaying the concept of *art* through the same reciprocal exchange expressed in the other tradition-disruption, accord-alteration pairs. The "*angel—Art*" pair, however, also plays off the ambiguity of this catalog, rendering "*Art*" as simultaneously the conceptual apparatus contended with by the creator and the "pulsed life" resulting from this contest.

If "Timoleon" approaches the questions of art and poetry in respect to their relationship to the political, "Art" wrestles with the contradictory and incongruous elements embedded within its titular term, a contest whose outcome has political implications. As its final lines imply, the poem's rendering of "Art" is a dual-figure of embrace and combat that subtly revises the conception of creative works—the widespread endorsement of the synthesizing power of the imagination—that continued to dominate artistic practice and interpretation throughout the first half of the twentieth-century (this despite the supposed fragmentation of the early twentieth-

century psyche). Sensually but antagonistically paired with the assimilative romantic imagination (implied by the well-discussed Wordsworthian opening couplet of "Art") is the refusal of or permanent resistance to such fusion—the idea that a creative act can grapple against the very category ("art") that serves as its mechanism of becoming visible to the community.[132] The poem's resistance to its own qualification as "art," a resistance nonetheless also absorbed by this protean category, attempts to locate—perhaps even produce—a space of emergence within and through the classification "art" for creative endeavors not fully legible as *art*, endeavors that seek to reconfigure the very grounds of their visibility to and meaning for the community. In certain respects, this reimagines the process that divides Timoleon from the citizens of Corinth as a source of possibility rather than despair, as precisely the mechanism that allows creative practices to reshape the shared world, and introduce new objects, subjects, and interactions to the common sphere. To a degree, Melville thereby anticipates the focus on experimentation and newness soon to surface in literary and artistic circles, but Melville's model offers a more nuanced version of an artist's relationship to history and tradition than the figure of rupture prominent among these groups. Politically speaking, the poem and the collection bring new forms of speech to audibility, even as they invest the already visible and sensible—the sites of "culture" and "art" that the poet visits—with a radical contemporaneity and a direct relevance to these emerging forms. Such new modes of speaking, as "Art" suggests, are specifically those inhabiting and contending the space opened between nostalgia and novelty, between abiding reverence for a community's aesthetic composition and the audacious, scornful instinct to disrupt it.

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[132] Shurr writes, "The first two lines seem to echo Wordsworth, as if they would lead the reader into a theory of the origin of poetry from 'emotion recollected in tranquility'" (242).

Through "The Great Pyramid"

The concerns of "Art" also occupy a central position in the final two poems of *Timoleon*. The first of these, "The Great Pyramid," which closes the section titled "Fruit of Travel Long Ago," leaves its readers with a pair of profound, unsettling images. In the penultimate stanza, the individual who "braves / And penetrates" (27-8) the "caves / And labyrinths rumored" (26-7) of the great pyramid (of Cheops, or Khufu) emerges "afar on deserts dead / And, dying, raves" (29-30). The final stanza begins in similar fashion, in a scene of darkness and confinement, the "dateless quarries dim" (31) where "[c]raftsmen … / Stones formless into form did trim" (31-2). Where the preceding stanza ends in madness and death, however, the final stanza culminates in the birth of the great pyramid and, through this, the invention of the Judeo-Christian god. This dual act of creation, not necessarily anticipated by the craftsmen, is made explicit when Melville reveals that the craftsmen "usurped on Nature's self with Art / and bade this dumb I AM to start, / Imposing Him" (33-5). As Shurr eloquently writes, "… so powerful was it [the creation of the pyramids], so far did they reach (or so far did they dive) that they *imposed* an idea of supreme power on subsequent civilizations by their massive construction" (179). Both verbs referring to the craftsmen's god-making act (*imposing* and *bade*) suggest intention without definitively endorsing it, and the reader is left wondering if Yahweh—the "I am that I am," also rendered as "I AM"—arises as byproduct or end-product of the process of creating form.[133]

Evocatively, Melville does not explain the relationship between the closing stanzas. Is it that those who brave the pyramid's depths are driven to madness because they, like *Moby-Dick*'s Pip, witness "God's foot upon the treadle of the loom" (414)? Have they arrived "by horrible

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[133] See Shurr 179 and *Exodus* 3:14. The King James Bible, one of Melville's primary textual sources, features the following from Exodus 3:14: "I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel: I AM hath sent me unto you."

gropings" in the pyramid's central room only to find its sarcophagus empty, as figuratively happens to Pierre? Or have they been driven mad by the very revelation of the final stanza—that the "divine" is a result of artistic practice, of the shaping of materiality in respect to a community's aesthetic composition (a.k.a., the material production of "form")? Seemingly another instance of Melville's supposed "quarrel with [the] gods," this closing stanza instead divulges a different concern at the heart of this conflict: Art. That is, while the final stanza provides a startling, essentially Nietzschean, suggestion about the nature of the divine, as Shurr notes, it makes an equally stunning claim about the connection between artistic practice and religious belief, between the production of Art and the birth of what is regularly identified as a community's ethical and moral foundations (religion).[134] The pyramids, in Melville's reckoning, signify a transition of craft (the forming work of the *craftsmen*) to *Art*, and the usurpation of the natural (*Nature's self*) by this new source of power. Attendant upon the emergence of art is the production of the primary element of Western monotheism, the divine that is its own ontological justification (the I AM THAT I AM). What takes place, then, at the site where *Art* emerges as distinct from craft, when the *practice* of making suddenly becomes visible as such and supersedes the function of what is made, is the imposition of an inaccessible (dumb) and self-justifying ontology over subsequent communities. As the stanza specifies, this is an ontology borne from a community's conception of *form* rather than from *Nature's self*. Elisa Tamarkin insightfully registers this unusual, tenuous fusion between the poetic, divine, and ontological when she recognizes "the "I AM" of the great pyramids as an iamb" (184), a connection also evoked by the capitalized term *Art*, itself a homophone of the largely outmoded, but still

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[134] Shurr suggests that the fourth stanza introduces the "remarkable implication" that "the subject of this poem is truly the origin of the notion of God—as if the God of Christian Theology who is later to manifest himself in Jesus already embodies the characteristics which will there be displayed" (178).

"poetic," second-person singular tense of *to be*.

In deeming the god of Christian theology a companion result of the emergence of "Art," Melville lays bare the stakes of *Timoleon*'s focus on the term. *Art* is the not only the practice that produces a material embodiment of a community's aesthetic composition, but it is also—problematically—the site through which a community's seemingly self-evident principles of action come into being and establish their persistent, intrusive visibility. Art not only made God, but also generates the space where communal conceptions can come into being as governing principles—hence Melville's interest in actively interrogating its composition, and in recalibrating its political registers. According to the "The Great Pyramid" (and "Timoleon"), the very idea of "self-evident" truths is coincident with the appearance of *Art*, itself a certain mode of material making that causes specific practices of making to be visible to the community. The pyramid is *Art* precisely because of way it marks itself as distinct from *Nature's self*, as an object formed by craftsman rather than by natural processes. The madness of the traveler who has braved the depths of the pyramid stems, then, from a combined recognition of absence and plentitude; the sarcophagus at the heart of the pyramid, like the basis of the divine, is empty, but knowledge of this absence is akin to Pip's vision of God, of the "hoarded heaps" of "the miser-merman, Wisdom" (*Moby Dick* 414), in that it leads to an overwhelming conception of the "courses" and "strata" composing contemporary existence—of the pyramid, and of art, as a densely layered nexus of forces. The traveler "raves" because she emerges on "deserts dead," a barren landscape stripped of life and meaning, the scope of its vast lifelessness rendered blindingly visible by the trek through the inmost caves of the pyramid.

The final poem of *Timoleon*, "The Return of the Sire de Nesle," also focuses on a traveler who has encountered the madness-inducing discoveries of plenitude and absence, but, as we will

see, dramatically alters the tenor of these recognitions. It also marks a distinct close to a wide array of the collection's structural and thematic elements. For example, its subtitle date ("*A.D. 16—*") serves as the counterpoint to the subtitle date of "Timoleon" ("*(394 B.C.—)*"), highlighting that the collection follows a temporal, as well as spatial, progression. The poem also nearly achieves the homecoming refused at the close of "Timoleon," as the Sire de Nesle arrives within sight of his towers, wearily ready for the comfort of his home. That the three-stanza poem does not actually consummate the Sire's "return" reiterates the various figures of abeyance and suspension articulated by poems like "Art" and "The Weaver"—figures that Melville suggests are integral to artistic practice. Similarly, although "The Return of the Sire de Nesle" arrests its titular character's homecoming before his arrival, its sentiment nonetheless suggests the prospect of a more hopeful outcome for other pieces from the collection preoccupied with absent lords and leaders, specifically "The Margrave's Birthnight," "The Night-March," and "The Garden of Metrodorus." Most importantly, Melville also frames the Sire's impending return in respect to poetry, thereby closing *Timoleon* with a (somewhat) more optimistic alternative to the bleak prospects for creative practices alluded to in "The Great Pyramid."

As yet definitively identified by commentators, the Sire de Nesle is, as Edgar Dryden puts it, "an obscure and ambiguous historical figure" (194), much like Timoleon. Although Melville's rationale for employing such a specific, enigmatic figure remains unclear, the poem— spoken by the Sire—effectively details his relevance to the collection. The Sire's remarks suggest that he has undertaken similar travels to the poet and perhaps even experienced many of the sights and insights of the preceding sections. His use of the term *pilgrimage* also consciously alludes to Melville's epic poem, *Clarel; A Poem and Pilgrimage to the Holy Land*, itself another "fruit" of Melville's travels. Like Clarel and the poet of *Timoleon*, the Sire is, above all, a

pilgrim, a term that implies travel to Jerusalem, and, quite possibly to the pyramids at Giza, roughly 500 miles away (by land). The Sire's own "rovings end" and his "yearning infinite recoils" (3) because of a "thirst … slaked in larger dearth" (2); this *thirst* and *dearth* consciously evoke the "deserts dead" of the preceding poems ("In the Desert" and "The Great Pyramid"), just as the Sire's strange phrasing suggest that he has found a type of closure—not death or madness—in deprivation.[135] The second stanza, however, provides an unusual contrast, noting that "Araxes swells beyond his span, / And knowledge poured by pilgrimage / Overflows the banks of man" (6-8). Like those who brave the pyramid, the Sire encounters both emptiness at the heart of his desire ("yearning") and a stifling surplus of knowledge. The Araxes river, now known as the Aras river, is also inland from Jerusalem (running through/along Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Iran), thereby reiterating the likelihood that the Sire has first-hand knowledge of the type of vast desert depicted in the previous poem. Kaf, a mythic mountain that the Sire also references, further implies that his knowledge is spiritual as well as physical. His extensive journeys, perhaps hearkening to Tennyson's "Ulysses," do not satisfy his wanderlust, nor do they answer the needs that provoked his pilgrimage, but they overfill him with a type of wisdom that spills outward, flooding his perception of the landscape. His response to the twinned forces of despair (too little and too much), however, is not raving madness or anger, but a decision to "return" and a desire for nostalgic attachment.

I categorize the sire's response as a desire for nostalgia rather than nostalgia itself because of the peculiar phrasing of the final stanza:

> But thou, my stay, thy lasting love
> One lonely good, let this but be!
> Weary to view the wide world's swarm,
> But blest to fold but thee. (9-12)

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[135] See Shurr 179.

Commentators typically read the lines as a qualified retreat to what Shurr calls "the smaller more controllable universe of domestic life" (179).[136] This, in part, follows the suggestion of Arthur Stedman, a "frequent visitor in the Melville household in later years" (Shurr 179), that Melville had addressed "his last little poem, the touching 'Return of Sire de Nesle'" (Stedman xxvi) to his wife, Maria. The first two lines of the stanza, however, complicate an interpretation that sees the poem as a qualified embrace of domesticity, or even of the literary, as has also been suggested. Instead they withhold this embrace, in much the same manner that the poem pauses before the Sire's actual homecoming. The Sire's unusual phrasing indicates that he returns to someone or something who holds lasting love (potentially, but not definitively, for him), not to whom he loves. Thus, he desires that his "stay" serves as a sustaining, if sole, good. He does not, as some critics mistakenly claim, desire to return to *his* lasting love. He returns because of the spiritual exhaustion produced by *dearth* and surplus knowledge. Similarly, he does not experience nostalgia, νόστος (*nostos*) –αλγία (*algia*), the specific pain or ache (algia) of returning home (nostos). He wishes for it (if despairingly). Only in the final line, via the term *blest*, does the Sire indicate any of his own feelings about his homecoming, and the poem leaves it unclear as to whether the final pair of lines is contingent upon the preceding two.

The distinctions here are critical, particularly in respect to the stanza's relation to and evocation of poetry, as is Melville's powerful choice of *stay*. Marked by reflexivity and a purposefully ambiguous use of the second person pronoun, the final stanza signals its parallel concern with Melville's own writing through its final verb, "*to fold*." The act of folding is also

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[136] Marovitz sees the Sire's comments as reflective of Ishmael's comments on domesticity, and deems "The Return of the Sire de Nesle" as concerning "the seeker who finds truth in his own home, where 'lasting love' has awaited him" (130). He nonetheless notes the irony of this love respecting the Marguerite de Bourgogne, a potential identity for the "lasting love" (130). Dryden's perceptive reading finds a similar irony in the "history of the towers to which [the Sire] returns" (*Monumental Melville* 193), which "seems to question the possibility of his finding comfortable domesticity" (*Monumental Melville* 193), although not in the unusual phrasing of the final stanza.

the last action described within the poem and the book, obviously anticipating the folding of the final page and back cover. It thereby revises the implications of the formal second person pronouns threaded throughout the stanza, blending the abandoned, loving figure with the acts of writing/reading poetry. Similarly, the pronoun *this* (from "*let this but be*") shifts to encompass the poem itself, as though something about the poet-speaker's utterance has not yet come into being. As the extant drafts indicate, Melville incorporated similar reflexivity and pronoun use into "The Great Pyramid." For example, in addition to changing multiple uses of the definitive article "*the*" to "*your*" in the third verse, he altered the first word of the poem from "*Dumb*" to "*Your*." Both poems, then, engage with the type of suspended fusion of ontology and art found in "Art," in which the product of a creative act simultaneously serves as *art* and as that which must wrestle with the term/category. If the final stanza of "The Return of the Sire de Nesle" provides a Whitman-esque blending of speakers and addressees (the poet to poem, the poet to reader, the poem to reader), as it seems to imply, it refers to an exchange not yet consummated—a moment of meeting and mating that takes place only by accepting the sanctity of the love proffered by the patient "*stay*" apostrophized in the stanza.

This *stay* indicates not simply a support or buttress, but also that which gives pause. Melville, well-versed in nautical terminology, would have also understood a *stay* as a rope used to support a mast, typically fixed to another part of the ship. Each of these implications collapse in his usage here, and the term *stay* transforms into that which supports and arrests while enabling motion. The attributes have obvious applications to Melville's writing, specifically his poetry, which arrested his attention and served as his primary creative engine and outlet for more than thirty years. Yet his suspended endorsement of this work, as the apostrophized entity whose love he desires as a lonely good, also illustrates his anxious, tense relationship to writing

throughout his later years. Not only had he largely renounced prose, apart from *Billy Budd* and a few unfinished manuscripts (most of which had started as poems), but he self-published his poetry from *Clarel* onward, with waning interest in mainstream popularity. Similarly, *Clarel*, which Elizabeth Melville deemed a "dreadful incubus of a book" strained household relations—already deeply damaged from their son Malcolm's suicide. Thus, while poetry provided Melville's primary expressive outlet and *stay*, his inability to establish an ontological, artistic, or financial justification for his work, and his overall suspicion of *faith* of any kind, prevented him from subscribing to the sanctity of artistic/literary production—the very project to which he had devoted the bulk of his life.

He instead closes his writing career with a tempered and ultimately disruptive statement of hope. More profoundly, Melville uses his final moments in print to reorganize the relationship between poem, poet, and reader. In the final stanza, the poem speaks, calling for the reader's lasting love to be a lonely good, folding over and becoming folded by the reader in the embrace peculiar to reading. Too, Melville calls to poetry, asking for its love for him to exist, to make his creative act somehow holy, or "*blest.*" And like Ishmael, Melville calls to the reader for their necessary involvement in producing the text's relevance and meaning. In the poem, the reader's bestowal of love serves as the sole hope of the pilgrim who has witnessed the absence at the heart of the paired forces of religion and art, and experienced the overwhelming knowledge of a purposeless existence. Lest we imagine the last burst of the effusive romanticism of *Moby-Dick* and *Mardi*, or perhaps a darker version of Whitman, Melville undercuts the poem's hopeful tone through the title's allusion to Alexander Dumas's *The Tower of Nesle; or, The Chamber of Death* (1832). The novel tells the tale of Marguerite de Bourgogne, the French queen who, as Dryden notes, "had her many lovers led from her bed to a chamber of death in the Tower of Nesle, where

they were killed by hired assassins and their bodies thrown into the Seine" (193). Effusive romanticism indeed!

This undercutting strategically reiterates Melville's use of Timoleon as the centerpiece of the collection's opening poem. At the heart of the Sire's optimism is a deeply problematic, and, in this case, reprehensible figure. Just as the Sire cannot and will not deem the "lasting love" of the apostrophized individual an actual good, and just as the poem refuses to consummate his homecoming or grant him true nostalgia, the reader cannot unequivocally or completely yield to the affective stance invoked by the Sire. The title's allusion prevents readers from fulfilling the Sire's *desire* to desire his home, in a sense pausing their attention before the towers, and leaving his "yearning infinite" in the same disordered state as the *Sire de* Nesle's name implies. The poem thereby offers an alternative to the forces unleashed in the pyramid, and threatening from the Sire's towers—forces specifically embedded in the composite of ontology, art, and forming practices depicted in "The Great Pyramid." It is an uneasy, provisional, and unsettling alternative, and the completion of its circuit and nostalgic promise yields only its own perversion and destruction—whether in the killing of those who grant love perpetrated by Marguerite de Bourgogne, or in the imposition of the "dumb I AM," the unspeaking ontology that comes to lord over human relations through the site of "art."

Yet this uneasy relationship is the very shape of *Timoleon*'s politics and its aesthetics. It is the mode by which the collection, to borrow from again from Rancière, carves up "space and time, the visible and the invisible, speech and noise" (*Politics of Literature* 4), and comes to reconfigure the shared world. If politics is, as Rancière contends, "the construction of a specific sphere of experience in which certain objects are posited as shared and certain subjects regarded as capable of designating these objects and of arguing about them" (*Politics of Literature* 3),

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Melville's text rearranges readers' relationship to the past, to the composition of their principles of action, and to the goals of their affective relations. The ideal sphere that organizes and legitimizes action—whether art or a sacralized past—comes into sight as a space composed of agency and desire rather than the product of timeless principles underlying human existence. Rendering it as such, however, does not invalidate it, but integrates it with the shared world from which it claims exemption.

CODA

AESTHETICS AND "FAKE NEWS"

On the night of November 15, 2016, I sat in Professor Steve Lamos's class on Pedagogy in Writing. With characteristic concern, Steve put our pedagogical work on hold, and gave us an opportunity to write down some of our thoughts about the previous week's presidential election. I was still trying to come to terms with the result. My response focused on the anger, frustration, and hopelessness I felt, but I also struggled to reconcile these emotions with an unusual feeling of accomplishment. The election had suddenly and disconcertingly crystallized the importance of my research.

I had just completed an early draft of a chapter on Herman Melville's *Timoleon, Etc.*, a text that concerns, among other things, the usurpation of democratic power by a self-absorbed tyrant. While the significance of the titular poem had been evident during the presidential campaign, it had seemed more of a cautionary tale than a potential reality. More to the point, perhaps, I had yet to fully understand the ramifications of the poem's engagement with aesthetics in relation to current political situation. While I couldn't yet put these implications into words, however, I had a strong sense that many people in the nation around me had begun to understand things in a way that radically destabilized and undermined what I considered fundamentally important modes of speech. Initially, I thought that this shift in understanding primarily pertained to an uneasy coupling of popular culture and political rhetoric, a theory stemming from the public apathy toward Donald Trump's comments on the now-notorious *Access Hollywood* tape. Trump's unrelenting assault on the press would help me gain clearer insights.

In the president's ceaseless accusations of "fake news," I eventually recognized a shift in shared understandings analogous to that which I had attempted to chart within my dissertation. Where my investigation focused on a shift in the political and social function of the literary, however, the changes I soon witnessed centered on journalism—a form of expression that had once been far more intertwined with literature than at present. What nonetheless became clear is that similar factors (e.g., deeper integration of capital and medium, radical shifts in the scope of available information and the speed and extent information could be disseminated, etc.) had precipitated both shifts, and that, as Melville seemed to recognize, the conflicts over modes of speaking simultaneously concerned the basis of democratic politics. The implications of Melville's linking of politics and aesthetics at last became legible.

In Melville's "Timoleon," the people of Corinth fail to recognize Timoleon's act as virtuous, as he envisions it. Ultimately, their failure stems from the precise ways that Timoleon's action intersects with converging elements: the community's preexisting notions of family, law, and tradition, and Timophanes usurpation of power. (If the particular forces at play in today's U.S. vary, they nonetheless bear striking similarities to those that Melville identifies.) In effect, this unusual and unexpected confluence of forces render Timoleon's act of speaking the "predetermined word" illegible as virtue, and the individual that sacrifices himself for the good of the democracy suddenly finds that he has been excluded. Obviously this has a significant personal impact on Timoleon, as Melville's hasty fall from literary fame had once had on him. Yet, it took until Trump's declarations of "fake news" for me to fully understand why Melville felt compelled to address his self-imposed exile from fiction in the context of Timoleon's political act.

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Ultimately, as I have come to realize, the poem concerns the exclusion of modes of speaking, and the specific voices that employ these modes, from the *demos*. As "Timoleon" makes clear, however, these modes of speaking, like the individuals that use them, are essential to the sustainability and survival of the democracy, as such; Timoleon not only saves Corinth from his tyrannical brother, but later leads Corinthians to victory on distant shores—despite his continuing exile. Put another way, democracy, as a form of political practice, is predicated on both the legitimacy and successful function of certain modes of speaking—not all of which are necessarily discernable in its manifest theoretical foundations. The political logic of the democracy becomes untenable when certain forms and modes of expression (creative or otherwise) are rendered inert, a relationship that Trump seems to instinctively recognize.

Timoleon's voice, simultaneously that of Melville as artist and author, is analogous to the voices Trump seeks to render illegible or representationally impotent via his accusations of "fake news." Meville felt the need to address his own fate as a writer through Timoleon's political act because the community's modes of seeing and speaking, the very basis of their politics, had long been the focus of his writing. Politics, as Melville seems to understand it in "Timoleon," is always intrinsically at play in aesthetics. It is thus possible to radically revise the political sphere via the aesthetic field. Put in a different way, the stability of a democracy is particularly susceptible to assaults on its modes of expression, particularly when such assaults effectively sever links between meanings, and between meanings and actions. While this seems like the lesson of George Orwell's newspeak, Melville more expressly reveals aesthetics as a backdoor to the inner logic of democracy, rather than as a propagandist tool for consolidating and enforcing totalitarian power.

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I would like to say that Melville's and Watkins Harper's writings offer hope for our current moment. I feel, however, that this might overstep the realities of their world and ours. Their literary output, and Harper's activism, seemed to have little impact on the nation's course to civil war, or on the U.S. community's understanding of the conflict and its aftermath. Similarly, Melville's *Timoleon, Etc.*, which was wholly irrelevant to the mainstream U.S. public of its day, seems to presage a proliferation of aesthetic responses to the imbrication of market and art, none of which were able to halt the rise of authoritarianism—and some of which (e.g., Italian futurism) seemed to have hastened its arrival. More pointedly, these responses seemed to have relatively minimal effect on their communities' capacity to resist the inculcation of modes of being and seeing that sponsored the global spread of totalitarianism (although such a statement is obviously matter for future research). That said, Watkins Harper's writing, speaking, and activism, whether through her involvement in the Underground Railroad, or in her many travels and meetings across the south, obviously impacted many lives and communities.[137] Similarly, small and sometimes influential groups of readers sprang up around Melville's work even before his initial critical revival in the late 1910s.[138] This initial revival would also help lay the groundwork for significant developments in the institutionalization of American literature, and to studies like F. O. Mattheissen's seminal *American Renaissance*, which (for better or worse) continues to exert its influence in U.S. literary and historical study.

It therefore seems more suitable to suggest that *Dread Stress* provides valuable, and potentially actionable insights into our current moment. For example, the preceding chapters help alert us to the ways that the increasing (if not always intended) commodification of internet

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[137] See, for example, Still's portrayal of Watkins Harper (755-780), which was also influential.

[138] See Stein 862.

journalism, via the click and page visit, has altered (and possibly undermined) journalism's capacity to speak "truth" to power. It further allows us to recognize this shift not solely as a function of capital, but also of aesthetics. That is, the intersection of certain modes of perception and practice potentially foreclose the disruptive capacity of the journalistic. While there is, perhaps, "no direct road from intellectual awareness to political action" (*Emancipated Spectator* 75), as Rancière suggests, it seems nonetheless imperative to identify the specific issues at stake in the shifting composition of our shared world. *Dread Stress* also invites us to alter our own emphasis from the mass-oriented machinations rampant across social and news media to more intimate and provisional communities, like those Melville seemed interested in cultivating though his poetry.

This in mind, however, my dissertation also pauses to read slowly and deliberately, to think through its textual subjects with the care and insight they seem to request. If this proves a useful tactic for deciphering our contemporary moment, it is also functions as its own end, revising our connections to and perceptions of the shared world, and providing space and incentive to reimagine our community and ourselves.

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