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Mechanical Reproduction in the Age of Immediacy

By

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Abstract

Mechanical Reproduction in the Age of Immediacy

by

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"Mechanical Reproduction in the Age of Immediacy" examines the influence of technical media on the aesthetic categories that antebellum American authors inherited from British Romanticism. I argue that Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, and Nathaniel Hawthorne turned to the optical devices of copyists and showmen as models for literary form, with the result that, in their writing, the reflective mind comes to resemble a machine. The viewing machines of nineteenth century popular culture — the diorama, the camera obscura, the daguerreotype — figuratively recast the imaginative eye of Romanticism as a construction to be scrutinized, disassembled, and tested. I argue that insistent invocation of technical media in the writing of America's second-generation Romantics reveals a changing conception of literary form as less a record of experience than an objectification of the mind's faculties at work.

My first chapter, an introduction, traces the central place of copies and repetition in the Romantic aesthetic theory that formed the basis for antebellum American writing, and in particular the poetics of Wordsworth and Coleridge, for whom imagination always departs from simple duplication. After tracing their theories in the work of Ralph Waldo Emerson, I make the case that the theory of photography offers a particularly useful model of study for the American authors who followed Emerson (or resisted him).

My second chapter, "The Poet and the Pendulum," tracks Edgar Allan Poe's figurative recourse to the camera obscura as a model for his fictional settings and the metronome as a model for poetic meter, conceits that come together in his tales "The Pit and the Pendulum" and "The Masque of the Red Death." Poe's habit of sealing characters in dark rooms resembles the optical experiments performed by Newton and Goethe in the camera obscura, a chance to test the senses in isolation. While these tales aestheticize scientific instruments, I argue, the poetic theory expressed in "The Rationale of Verse" and "The Philosophy of Composition" suggests that literary experience, often regarded in Romantic criticism as an hallucination or a dream, can in fact be measured and quantified.

My third chapter examines Herman Melville's use of visual concepts such as foreshortening and outline as cognitive metaphors in his novel *Pierre* and his late book of poems *Timoleon*. For Melville, these terms of art approximate the workings of the mind as it forms a manageable

conceptual picture from the confused matter of experience. I compare Melville's figurative outlines with the artistic theory and practice of William Blake, George Cumberland, and John Flaxman, whose popular illustrations of Homer and Dante feature prominently in *Pierre*.

My fourth chapter argues that Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun* links his career-long meditation on the nature of guilt with the aesthetic question of how transitory impressions become fixed as images, a technical problem that surfaces frequently in the early theory of photography. To this end, *The Marble Faun* contrasts different degrees of vividness and permanence in the arts, comparing sketches with finished paintings, clay models with marble sculptures. In parallel, Hawthorne questions at what point a fancied crime becomes a fixed spiritual fact.

CHAPTER ONE
HYSTERICAL ROMANTICISM

Introduction

Mechanical Reproduction in the Age of Immediacy examines the influence of technical media on the aesthetic categories that antebellum American authors inherited from British Romanticism. I argue that Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, and Nathaniel Hawthorne turned to the optical devices of copyists and showmen as models for literary form, with the result that, in their writing, the reflective mind comes to resemble a machine. These authors replace the contemplative pause between perception and expression with a series of deterministic effects that resemble both the rote process of professional copyists and the mechanism of photography. The viewing machines of nineteenth century popular culture — the diorama, the camera obscura, the daguerreotype — imposed a sense of rationalized order on the Romantic understanding of vision as a creative process. The strain of American fiction these developments influenced recasts the imaginative eye that half-perceives and half-creates the visible world as a construction to be scrutinized, disassembled, and tested. As a result, the conceptual shift from imitation to expression, characteristic of Romanticism, inspires paranoia and forensic attention in these authors rather than visionary conviction. And, further, the received notions of beauty, poetry, and imagination (concepts bound up in Walter Benjamin's term of "aura") lose their capacity to humanize the impersonal mediations through which images and texts found their audience. Literary perspectives and effects, in their artificial character, become less a record of experience than an objectification of the mind's faculties at work.

The insistent invocation of mechanical media and rationalized technique in the work of America's second-generation Romantics signals a changing conceptual hierarchy between originals and copies that also manifests itself in a heightened fear of automatism. Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville wrote within a culture increasingly organized around mass circulation and technical media, a shift encompassing both the transformation of a decentralized reprinting trade into a national system of publishing and the emergence of the Daguerreotype as the basis of an industry consisting of both urban studios and itinerant craftsman.[1] Studies that deal with reproducibility in the context of literature cluster around two objects of study: the print marketplace and the image. The first of these critical trajectories is located in the history of the book, the second in a range of studies spanning the disciplines of literary criticism and art history.

Walter Benjamin has argued that as modern mass culture emerged during the first half of the nineteenth century technically produced copies of artworks began to disrupt the authenticity of their originals, with the result that associated concepts such as "creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery" lose their explanatory power.[2] Reproduced artworks lose their place, both in

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[1] For the industrialization of American publishing see William Charvat, *Literary Publishing in America, 1790-1850* (Philadelphia,: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1959). For the parallel history of photography see Beaumont Newhall, *The Daguerreotype in America*, 3d rev. ed. (New York: Dover Publications, 1976), 33.

[2] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations* (New York: Shocken, 1968), 218.

the sense that "technical reproduction can put the copy into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself" and in the related sense that artworks displaced in this way shed their contextual values: "the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition" (221). For Benjamin, this phenomenon suspends artworks between aesthetics and politics. Yet in practice it also suspends them between different conceptions of aesthetics; while reproduction removes art objects from the material and conceptual enclosures that previously affirmed their aesthetic value, this decontextualization also creates the possible autonomy that would become central to modernist aesthetics. The fragmentary condition of art objects in a culture characterized by mechanical reproduction gets recuperated in modernist theories of medium-specificity and impersonality, in which texts functionally internalize a troubled tradition by means of self-reflexive technique.

The effects that Benjamin attributes to the influence of technical media surface in the representational strategies of antebellum American fiction before photography had become fully industrialized. But the continuity between visual and verbal media renders the continuity between techniques of reproduction and strategies of representation more difficult to trace.[3] While Benjamin sidelines printed literature as "a special, though particularly important, case," this dissertation will examine the destabilizing influence of mechanical reproduction on both imitation and expression. In American fiction, this project will argue, reproducibility becomes the conceptual hinge between problems of evidence and the status of aesthetics. Whereas the representational codes of visual media may be naturalized as qualities of resemblance or presence, the code of language is less easily effaced. Print foregrounds the artifice as language yet easily masks the particulars of circulation. The cognitive content of literary works seems uniquely detachable from any material instantiation, even as textual meanings lean upon particular methods of circulation and scenes of reading. Further, printed literature occupies an intermediate position even within the history of mechanical reproduction, in that print was always reproducible and yet intersects with economic and cultural practices that alter its social function over time.

Benjamin's writing on visual media begins with a Marxist framework in which the entire field of representation figures as superstructure, but he nonetheless attends to the way that new technologies transform the accessibility and significance of images and objects. At one level, he

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[3] I do not mean to imply a clean distinction between verbal and visual representation. The visibility of writing and the symbolism of images leave reading and seeing hopelessly entangled. The ability to read what one sees may even underlie the fundamental visual distinction of figures from grounds. W.J.T. Mitchell has argued for a dialectical and shifting boundary between word and image in *Iconology : Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986). More recently, Mitchell has argued that the figures of pure visuality and the innocent eye both suppress the degree to which putatively visual media engage the senses in combination, according to cultural and symbolic codes. Poetry, he asserts, "remains the most subtle, agile master-medium of the *sensus communis*, no matter how many spectacular multimedia inventions are devised to assault our collective sensibilities." See W. J. T. Mitchell, "There Are No Visual Media," *The Journal of Visual Culture* 4, no. 2 (2005). Along similar lines, John Irwin identifies a preoccupation with the picture-language of hieroglyphics in the work of antebellum American authors such as Poe and Melville, inspired by Champollion's then-recent decipherment of the Rosetta Stone. See *American Hieroglyphics : The Symbol of the Egyptian Hieroglyphics in the American Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).

pursues the thesis that the reception of art follows patterns formed in the workplace, so that detached contemplation belongs to the middle class just as the distraction of cinema belongs to the same urban crowd that populates the of the humming factories and bustling sales-floors. This sense of medium-as-milieu holds his work apart from its occasional appearance of techno-determinism.

In his "Little History of Photography," Benjamin focuses on the practice of photography in its first decade, before its industrialization, and on the unique images produced by Daguerre's process, images reproducible only after being copied as drawings or engravings.[4] The "aura" surrounding the subjects of early photographs "was by no means the mere product of a primitive camera. Rather, in this early period subject and technique were as exactly congruent as they became incongruent in the period of decline that immediately followed" (283). Benjamin refers to a period when newspapers, luxury items in their own right, had not yet adopted photography, with the consequence that "contact between actuality and photo had not yet been established" (279). Benjamin laments the transformation of portrait photography as its practitioners decked out their images with painted backdrops, studio props, costumes, and the intrusive effects of retouching. In his account, these sentimentalized images marked the reshaping of photography's craft into an industry, a transformation that required as its antidote the disenchanted style of Eugene Atget and the surrealist photographers who belatedly followed his example.

In British Romantic writing, the distinctions between copy and imitation, mechanism and imagination, reinforce and even rationalize the authenticity of cultural texts. The processes of technical reproduction that became increasingly central to the organization of antebellum American culture placed pressure upon an aesthetic tradition already struggling with the status of copies and mechanisms. The effect of mechanical reproduction on literary technique was to materialize anxieties that the reading practices of a transatlantic Romanticism had previously held in check through the application of humanizing concepts such as beauty and especially poetry.[5] In America, the age of mechanical reproduction produces something like an hysterical Romanticism, in which the detachment of images and objects from the regulatory field of tradition prepares the way for texts that actively interrogate the status of literary form through various formal excesses, whether by establishing idiosyncratic modes of authorization (Poe), by reveling in unreliability (Melville), or by filtering the experience of modernity through an insistently fictional mise-en-scene (Hawthorne). This last strategy, as realized in Hawthorne's fictions, positions readers to come to terms with the unsettling dynamics of mass culture as displaced onto morbid incarnations of its alternatives, whether traditional, fantastical, or utopian.

The Romantic aesthetic theory that formed the basis for antebellum American writing gave a central place to the status of copies and repetition. For Wordsworth and Coleridge, imagination always departs from simple duplication. Coleridge distinguishes between imitations and copies on the grounds that an imitation involves some transformation of its objects. So, even though Coleridge classes poetry as an imitative art, he also classes imitation as an inherently

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[4] Walter Benjamin, "Little History of Photography," in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press 2008).

[5] Friedrich Kittler has argued that poetry plays a central in the way that Romanticism suppresses the technical character of the letter and the word by framing language as the bearer of imagined sensory experience. See Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, trans. Michael Metteer and Chris Cullens (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

expressive act, not defined in terms of art's resemblance to the outer world. An imitation "as opposed to a mere copy," Coleridge writes in *Biographia Literaria*, is distinguished by "the apparent naturalness of the representation, as raised and qualified by an imperceptible infusion of the author's own knowledge and talent" (335). He repeats this formulation in more abstract terms: "the composition of a poem is among the imitative arts; and that imitation, as opposed to copying, consists either in the interfusion of the same throughout the radically different, or of the different throughout a base radically the same" (355). Coleridge cannot be blind to the irony that he has differentiated sameness from difference by confusing sameness with difference. Coleridge's fine-grained distinction between imitations and mere copies depends upon the conscious exercise of imagination in the gap between perception and expression; the absence of this intermediate act (as in the creation of a photograph) reduces thought to a mechanical effect, the epiphenomenon of raw sensation.

My emphasis on the British sources for American writing is essential to understanding how new optical devices influenced an aesthetic tradition already anxious about the status of copies, in which the mereness of copies reflected the drift from imitation to expression, but the prominence of British texts in this dissertation also reflects their general availability to American readers. Broadly speaking, American readers in the nineteenth century would have been more familiar with Byron, Scott, and Dickens than Poe, Hawthorne, and especially Melville. Alexis de Tocqueville noticed as much: "American authors may truly be said to live more in England than in their own country; since they constantly study the English writers, and take them every day for their models."[6] Yet studies of transatlantic literary culture are surprisingly scarce despite the extensive circulation of British books and British ideas in nineteenth century America. Two notable exceptions are the studies of transatlantic influence by Leon Chai and Robert Weisbuch, who in different ways attempt to assert a cultural exchange more pervasive and systematic than any particular pairing of authors might suggest.[7] Further, studies by Elisa Tamarkin and James Chandler have explored how both American and English readers, despite the great antipathy between nations during this period, experienced their national identities through an ongoing comparison of national manners, institutions, and rituals.[8] Finally, transatlantic literary culture has also come into focus in scholarship on literary piracy and the fierce nineteenth-century debate over international copyright.[9] The absence of international copyright made British authors all the more ubiquitous in the American market; unauthorized editions of British books could easily undersell American books for which the authors inconveniently had to be paid.

Further, we know that Poe, Melville, and Hawthorne all participated in the transatlantic literary culture in various ways. Poe exposes his reading habits in his copious reviews of both British and American authors, documents in which he asserts his membership in an international literary culture even as he derides the provincialism of New England's literary cliques and

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[6] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America: Vol. 2*, trans. Henry Reeve (Cambridge: Sever and Francis, 1863), 77.

[7] See Leon Chai, *The Romantic Foundations of the American Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987). And see Robert Weisbuch, *Atlantic Double-Cross : American Literature and British Influence in the Age of Emerson* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

[8] Elisa Tamarkin, *Anglophilia : Deference, Devotion, and Antebellum America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). James Chandler, *England in 1819 : The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

[9] See Adrian Johns and Meredith McGill.

bemoans the metaphysical preoccupations of the Lake School. Melville's reading during the period when he composed *Moby-Dick* and *Pierre* reveals his interest in both British literature and continental philosophy; during and 1849 trip to England he returned with copies of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* and other volumes. Despite the pose of literary nationalism he assumed in "Hawthorne and his Mosses," Melville spends the opening chapter of *Pierre* describing the pedigree of American families in terms that erode any sense of exceptionalism for the young democratic nation. Hawthorne composed *The Marble Faun* in England, following his years as the American consul in Liverpool, during the same period that Melville spent touring the Mediterranean, gathering the material for his travel poetry in *Timoleon* and the epic-length *Clarel*. Hawthorne clarifies that he did not intend "a portraiture of Italian manners and character," but instead treated his Italian setting as "a sort of poetic or fairy precinct, where actualities would not be so terribly insisted upon, as they are, and must needs be, in America" (3). In one way or another, each of these authors was part of a literary culture that extended across the Atlantic.

Joel Snyder has demonstrated that the category of the mechanical changed in its meaning during the nineteenth century, and in its earlier sense denoted a process performed without imagination rather than a process performed by an actual machine.[10] Our understanding of photography as a mechanical medium would not, in this earlier sense of the term, distinguish photographic images from the work of manual copyists who executed the designs of more seasoned artists without seeking to interject their own sensibility. Even in the virtual absence of photographs or engravings, *The Marble Faun* deals with the difference between mechanical and imaginative work.

In his study of the metaphors that drive poetics, M.H. Abrams approaches the boundary between rhetorical analysis and the theory of media. His figures of the mirror and the lamp are themselves caught in the same history that produced the camera obscura, stereoscope, the photograph, the kaleidoscope, the diorama, and so on. The figures through which authors understand literary effect are not utterly dependent on the latest in optical gadgets, of course, but these are not irrelevant either. Abrams argues that the category of expression displaces those of instruction and imitation in the poetry of the Romantic period. The fading significance of imitation registers in the way that many theories of both literature and the plastic arts seek to delimit the imitative arts into narrower and narrower bounds. In his *Philosophical Enquiry* (1757), Edmund Burke denies that the words of poetry are imitative, relying instead on a theory of association. Words, he writes, "seem to me to affect us in a manner very different from that in which we are affected by natural objects, or by painting or architecture," yet they still elicit the aesthetic effects of beauty and sublimity.[11] Burke argues in short that words have their effect without the necessity of raising any image to the mind. For John Ruskin, in the first volume of *Modern Painters,* the category of form plays a counter-intuitive role in separating drawing and sculpture from the imitative art of painting; according to Ruskin, the objects of painting take on an illusory presence in the eye while drawing and sculpture, in their self-evident artifice, convey the mere forms of things without any pretense of capturing their real substance.

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[10] See Joel Snyder, "Res Ipsa Loquitur," in *Things That Talk : Object Lessons from Art and Science*, ed. Lorraine Daston (Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books, 2004).

[11] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 149.

Emerson and Optics

In contrast to Transcendentalists such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, or Henry David Thoreau, who typically foreground intuition rather than raising questions of mediation, the authors I discuss remain skeptical about the connection between visible signs and the truths they portend. Yet even in Emerson's *Nature* (1836), composed before the invention of photography, the relationship between thought and vision has already become more abrupt, more deterministic, than in the poetics of Wordsworth and Coleridge. His visual metaphors show the aesthetic thought that would soon absorb and explain the new medium of photography, but these same figures were undoubtedly changed by the medium's appearance. Emerson describes nature in terms that recall Plato in the same moment that they anticipate Daguerre: "It is a perpetual effect. It is a great shadow pointing always to the sun behind us."[12]

Emerson describes a version of aesthetic education that addresses not so much the original split between the rational man and the sensual, but instead the more microscopic division into trades and specialties brought about by America's industrialization during his lifetime.[13] Emerson figures outer nature as mediation in order to frame the experience of nature as the expression of spirit. The world becomes a text so that it may become transparent to the intuition as symbolism, immediate in its spiritual effects if not in its objective truth. As Carolyn Porter has demonstrated in her analysis of the participant-observer as a distinctive figure in American writing, Emerson's method does not overcome the threat of reification so much as translate it from a sociological problem into an aesthetic problem:

> Emerson set out in *Nature* to construct a vantage point from which to see the world as mediated – the product of man's own making within a process of incessant change. Such a vantage point would allow him to regard the mediated appearances congealed around him as unnecessary, and so would enable him to remain afloat in the sea of change. But having freed himself from the prison of the immediately given by seeing it as mediated, Emerson is in effect aloof but no longer afloat, detached as he is from the active reality he has discovered. (94)

After Emerson has imagined nature as the changeable expression of the self, Porter argues, "alienation resurfaces as a split between the I who sees nature and the I who inhabits it" (107). The fact that the visible world is merely visible does not diminish Emerson's fascination with the spectacle of nature, which he describes at one point as "the great apparition" (6). He repeatedly refers to nature as a kind of divine painting: "what difference does it make, whether Orion is up there in heaven, or some god paints the image in the firmament of the soul?" (59). And blindness is the only contingency that *Nature* treats with any real sense of terror: "In the presence of nature, a wild delight runs through the man, in spite of real sorrows. There I feel that nothing can

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[12] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature* (Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1836), 76.

[13] See Carolyn Porter, *Seeing and Being : The Plight of the Participant-Observer in Emerson, James, Adams, and Faulkner* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press 1981), 92-3. Porter compares Emerson to Schiller, but instead of anticipating an account of their differences this comparison subjects Emerson to Georg Lukacs' remarks on Schiller in *History and Class Consciousness*.

befall me in life, – no disgrace, no calamity, (leaving me my eyes,) which nature cannot repair" (13).[14]

Emerson defines beauty in visual terms as "a pleasure arising from outline, color, motion, and grouping" (19). Apart from motion, each of these categories seems equally suited to the natural world and the pictorial arts. "The eye is the best of artists. By the mutual action of its structure and of the laws of light, perspective is produced, which integrates every mass of objects, of what character soever, into a well colored and shaded globe, so that where the particular objects are mean and unaffecting, the landscape which they compose, is round and symmetrical. And as the eye is the best composer, so light is the first of painters. There is no object so foul that intense light will not make beautiful" (20). Emerson wrote these words before the invention of photography become a public fact in 1839, yet his metaphors seem to anticipate the convergence of optical laws and aesthetic codes in the discourse of early photography, a field that took figures such as Henry Fox Talbot's "pencil of nature" as at least partially non-metaphorical. Emerson prefers the direct experience of the senses, light striking the eye, to the studied products of the visual arts, but with the consequence that he must emphasize the mechanical and pictorial properties of the eye itself.

He intends to show that virtuous action is a higher type of beauty than the pleasing appearance of natural objects, but then translates this relationship into the visual paradigm of figure and ground: "are not these heroes entitled to add the beauty of the scene to the beauty of the deed?" (26). Emerson presents each example of moral beauty in the form of a descriptive tableau, an imaginary history painting. Just as he imagines the appearances of nature as a reflection of its observer, Emerson describes historical scenes as a garment for their central figures: "When the bark of Columbus nears the shore of America; – before it, the beach lined with savages, fleeing out of all their huts of cane; the sea behind; and the purple mountain of the Indian Archipelago around, can we separate the man from the living picture? Does not the New World clothe his form with her palm-groves and savannahs as fit drapery?" (26). *Nature* privileges moral and intellectual beauty over the simple pleasures of visual form, but expresses this position by rethinking abstractions such as virtue as the qualities of an imagined picture. The virtuous man goes beyond the mere appearances of nature by way of residing at their center: "Only let his thoughts be of equal scope, and the frame will suit the picture. A virtuous man, is in unison with her works, and makes the central figure of the visible sphere" (27). As his sentence drifts from the metaphor of frame and picture to the analogous metaphor of ground and figure, Emerson's iconoclasm short-circuits.

"Nature is made to conspire with spirit to emancipate us. Certain mechanical changes, a small alteration in our local position apprizes us of a dualism. We are strangely affected by seeing the shore from a moving ship, from a balloon, or through the tints of an unusual sky. The least change in our point of view, gives the whole world a pictorial air" (63). Notably, the

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[14] This represents a small difference from the nearest passage in Wordsworth, from the fourth book of *The Excursion,* where the poet addresses how the forms of nature might continue to address the mind without the benefit of the eye: "Ah! if the time must come, in which my feet / No more shall stray where meditation leads / By flowing stream, through wood, or craggy wild, / Loved haunts like these – the unimprison'd mind / May yet have scope to range among her own, / Her thoughts, her images, her high desires. / If the dear faculty of sight should fail, / Still it may be allow'd me to remember / What visionary powers of eye and soul / Were mine in youth."

reference here to "mechanical changes" does not imply the involvement of a machine, but instead marks off practical processes from theoretical ones.

"A man who seldom rides, needs only to get into a coach and traverse his own town, to turn the street into a puppet show" (63). One wonders if this suggestion of Emerson's inspired Hawthorne to perform that very transformation in his sketch "The Main-Street," where a showman gives the history of Salem "somewhat in the nature of a puppet-show" (1023). "What new thoughts are suggested by seeing a face of country quite familiar, in the rapid movement of the rail-road car!" (63). Emerson lists means of transportation before he arrives at more conventional visual media, but his emphasis is always on the visible.[15] Emerson's point, that changed perspective dislocates the spectator from the spectacle, has a particular affinity for situations that actually put the observer in motion. Besides which, it is easy forget that vehicles then as now must have provided a source of novel visual experience, more pervasive than the various props that picturesque observers carried to their favorite views.

The motion of the spectator creates the impression that the visible world is itself in fluctuation, detached and free-floating. Only after he has listed the ship, the balloon, the coach, and the railroad, Emerson turns to optical devices more narrowly defined: "In a camera obscura, the butcher's cart, and the figure of one of our own family amuse us. So a portrait of a well-known face gratifies us" (64). "In these cases, by mechanical means, is suggested the difference between the observer and the spectacle, – between man and nature" (64). For Emerson, these "mechanical means" point toward the higher truth of the soul's distinctness from the appearances of nature, with the effect that Emerson's brand of idealism elevates its practitioner into a kind of cosmic flaneur. According to Emerson, the inward eye of poetry completes the mechanical effects created by the technology of transportation.

Emerson's idealism subordinates the visible world to spiritual insights: "Nature is thoroughly mediate. It is made to serve" (50). Yet the mediacy of nature makes the facts of the natural world transparent to the intuition rather than causing the attention to dwell in their particulars. "The world is emblematic," Emerson writes, suggesting that it is meant to be read through (41). In this way, the natural world becomes the subject of symbolic and allegorical reading; the discoveries of empirical investigation serve as the model for the spiritual insights that will spring from the material facts of the natural world.

As Emerson reads the spiritual meanings of the visible world, he is careful to insist that these readings are not merely the spectator's passing fancy: "It is easily seen that there is nothing lucky or capricious in these analogies, but that they are constant, and pervade nature. These are not the dreams of a few poets, here and there, but man is an analogist, and studies relations in all objects" (35). This view of analogy as the basic human activity extends the creative eye of Wordsworth and Coleridge from a statement about human imagination into a statement about nature itself. This is a far less qualified claim, one that holds objects in thrall to the creative eye not only in thought, but in fact. Emerson's theory of language frequently parallels Wordsworth's associationism, particularly in the conviction that poetic language ultimately derives from the

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[15] While Emerson here imagines the railroad as an optical device, a prototype for the mobility of the fancy itself, his protégé Thoreau pays closer attention to its effects on the rhythm of life along the rails: "Have not men improved somewhat in punctuality since the railroad was invented? Do they not talk and think faster in the depot than they did in the stage-office?" See Henry David Thoreau, *The Variorum Walden* (New York: Washington Square Press, Inc., 1966), 88.

observation of nature, but for Emerson momentary intuition takes the place of sustained habit. Emerson argues that all of language has evolved from natural symbols: "It is this which gives the piquancy to the conversation of a strong-natured farmer or back-woodsman, which all men relish" (37). In this account, rural speech accentuates a picturesque quality that is already inherent in words. Wordsworth too maintains that in rustic life the passion "speak a plainer and more emphatic language," but for the reason that under the conditions of rural life "the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature."[16] Wordsworth states that these rural figures "hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived," yet he emphasizes the influence of habitual experience over the character of words themselves (LB, 597). According to Wordsworth, this is a language "arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings" (LB, 597). Emerson describes poetic imagery as "the blending of experience with the present action of the mind," yet without the same deliberate attention to the way that associations take shape (39). Emerson posits an emblematic world in place of an associative mind, with the consequence that he is less burdened, at least in theory, with the stubborn fact of external things. Every analogy between language, nature, and spirit is at once more spontaneous and more automatic than the gradual binding of words, objects, and passions that Wordsworth imagines as both the subject and the substance of poetry.

Herman Melville's *Pierre* has been read as a parody of Emersonian self-reliance, and the novel's young hero marks his rebellion with a speech that conspicuously resembles the well-known opening paragraph of Emerson's *Nature*. In place of monumental forms such as Emerson's "sepulchers of the fathers," Pierre lists all the small tokens that surround him: "letters, locks of hair, bits of ribbon, flowers, and the thousand-and-one minutenesses which love and memory think they sanctify" (197). The paternal sepulcher, a ready figure for the authority of the past, makes an easy target for iconoclasm compared to the symbolic clutter that surrounds Pierre. Further, Emerson's maneuver of collapsing art into nature for the purpose of his argument returns in *Pierre* as a tendency to collapse the natural world back into art as a series of imagined sculptures and picturesque views that reflect ideological baggage in the same moment that they reflect back the observer's expressive self.

Emerson's tendency to imagine the visible world as a mediation of spiritual truths turns even the original products of human craftsmanship, such as the European influences that saturated that provincial culture of America, into provisional renderings of an ideal thought: "The American who has been confined, in his own country, to the sight of buildings designed after foreign models, is surprised on entering York Minster or St. Peter's at Rome, by the feeling that these structures are imitations also, – faint copies of an invisible archetype" (84). This difficulty in dealing with the material of art over and above its ideas will plague Nathaniel Hawthorne in *The Marble Faun*.

The painterly metaphor for nature shades into a figure for expression rather than simple representation: "Nature always wears the colors of the spirit" (14). Poe was no admirer of Emerson, or "the so called poetry of the so called transcendentalists," but could he have recalled this sentiment as he planned for the colored rooms of "The Masque of the Red Death"?[17]

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[16] Wordsworth makes these remarks in his preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. See William Wordsworth, *The Major Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 597. This text will be cited parenthetically as LB.
[17] For the quotation from Poe see "The Philosophy of Composition" in Edgar Allan Poe, *Poetry and Tales* (New York: The Library of America, 1984), 24. The resemblance between Poe's

Emerson writes, "To the attentive eye, each moment of the year has its own beauty, and in the same field, it beholds, every hour, a picture which was never seen before, and which shall never be seen again" (23). This passage may underlie Herman Melville's later parody of picturesque conventions in "The Piazza," as the narrator describes the scenes around his home as "galleries hung, month after month anew, with pictures ever fading into pictures ever fresh" (384).

In *Nature*, the movement from vehicle to tenor, from nature to spirit, takes place with such intuitive ease that Emerson has little occasion to dwell on the mediate facts of language or nature before they dissolve into expression. Emerson does not attend to mediation as a barrier until his optimism recedes in "Experience," an essay that dramatizes the difficulty in transforming the object-matter of Emerson's emblematical world from things into meanings. Where Bishop Berkeley denies the existence of matter to remove the epistemological grounds for spiritual doubt, a hygienic philosophy, Emerson entertains the comparatively equivocal position of founding his optimism on a world that retains some measure of its actuality even as it serves as an emblem of spiritual truths, responsive to its observer's inner life. *Nature* very nearly sacrifices actuality for dynamism, yet "Experience" dwells on images and objects that seem to withhold significance.

But in the meantime Poe, Melville, and Hawthorne have a greater tendency to dwell on the medium of expression and render it opaque in its material properties and effects. Poe asserts that "the *excess* of the suggested meaning" turns transcendentalist poetry into prose "of the very flattest kind," while for Poe an undercurrent of suggestion is valuable for its effect rather than its truth (24). Poe's emphasis is almost invariably technical, while Emerson writes about the poet as a visionary rather than a writer of poetry. Meanwhile, Melville and Hawthorne share the habit of arranging multiple observers around the same symbol, a habit that asserts the emblematic value of objects while holding them firmly in view. The effect in each case is a fascination with the medium apart from the message, even for its resistance to interpretation. Emerson is a theorist of media almost despite himself, while my case-studies share an active interest in the mechanisms of perception and technique that would produce Poe's body of literary criticism, Melville's poems and lectures on European art, and Hawthorne's survey of the fine arts in *The Marble Faun* (as well as the theory of prose Romance developed in his prefaces).

The Theory of Photography

The theory of photography offers a model for analyzing the disruptive effects of mass culture on the aesthetic character of literary texts. The problematic aesthetic status of photography, a medium which many critics have urged has no distinctive aesthetic categories of its own, mirrors the frequently under-determined status of "form," a term that attracts statements of value more readily than analysis or definition. According to recent critiques by Marjorie

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color-coded décor and Emerson's metaphor of color may be faint here, but the similarity becomes more tangible in "Experience" (1844), an essay published after the composition of Poe's tale: "Life is a train of moods like a string of beads, and, as we pass through them, they prose to be many-colored lenses which paint the world their own hue, and each shows only what lies in its focus. From the mountain you see the mountain" (55). This statement about the limitations of individual temperament is uncharacteristically dour for Emerson, which may explain his momentary overlap with an author whose work habitually focuses on the observer-effects of the individual mind through unreliable narration and circumscribed settings.

Levinson and Samuel Otter, the loose movement of New Formalism presents a rhetoric of commitments rather than a coherent system of ideas that might clarify what literary form is and does.[18] My contention is that the fascination with optical devices in the writing of antebellum American authors provides a model for their reconceptualization of literary artifice.

Revisionist historians such as Jonathan Crary and Geoffrey Batchen have approached visual culture through discourse analysis; by focusing on the ideas and texts that have shaped our understanding of optical devices and even vision itself, they have presented literary technique as constitutive of visual media.[19] Meanwhile, critics such as Alan Trachtenberg, Susan Williams, Timothy Sweet, and Christopher Sten have examined the relationship between American literature and the visual arts. Marcy Dinius stresses that antebellum Americans encountered the Daguerreotype in print before encountering the images themselves, so that this technology was a product of the written word before it emerged as a part of visual culture.[20] In response to this growing field of study, I argue that literary allusions to visual media offer not only a reflection on emerging cultural dynamics, as these critics have shown, but also a deliberate theorization of literary effect as both a type of mechanism and a type of consciousness.

Photography more often appears alongside realism than Romanticism, as in Nancy Armstrong's influential study *Fiction in the Age of Photography: The Legacy of British Realism* as well as Stuart Burrows' recent book *A Familiar Strangeness: American Fiction and the Language of Photography.*[21] For example, Nancy Armstrong has argued that photography and fiction participated in a reciprocal definition of the real in visual terms. Both of these arguments have their limitations (Armstrong overestimates the cultural ubiquity of photographs, Burrows underestimates the residual pull of originals even when they have lost their stability of reference) but they both link photographic practice to realist style in a way that has tended to eclipse the affinity between early photography and Romantic lyricism along with its aesthetic apparatus. The earliest partial successes at fixing the image in a camera obscura, by Nicephore Niepce, followed the experimental poetry of *Lyrical Ballads* by about a decade, although the public announcement of the Daguerreotype would wait until 1839. The work of critics such as Geoffrey Batchen and Tom Gunning, focused on the emergence of photography and film out of earlier viewing practices, opens this pre-history further. The perennial critiques of photographic realism from Susan Sontag onward may look different in light of an earlier photographic Romanticism.

In her book-length diatribe against the naïve conception of photographic objectivity, Susan Sontag that the appearance of the real in photographs supresses ethical engagement with

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[18] Samuel Otter, "An Aesthetics in All Things," *Representations* 104, no. 1 (Fall 2008). Marjorie Levinson, "What Is New Formalism?," *PMLA* 122, no. 2 (March 2007).

[19] See Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer : On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992); Geoffrey Batchen, *Burning with Desire : The Conception of Photography* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1997).

[20] Marcy J. Dinius, *The Camera and the Press : American Visual and Print Culture in the Age of the Daguerreotype*, 1st ed., Material Texts (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

[21] See Nancy Armstrong, *Fiction in the Age of Photography : The Legacy of British Realism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999). Stuart Burrows, *A Familiar Strangeness : American Fiction and the Language of Photography, 1839-1945* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008).

the represented world.[22] The literary dramatization of the participant-observer comes to a head in Sontag's insistence that taking a photograph "is essentially an act of non-intervention" (11). "The limit of photographic knowledge of the world is that, while it can goad conscience, it can, finally, never be ethical or political knowledge. The knowledge gained through still photographs will always be some kind of sentimentalism, whether cynical or humanist" (23).[23] The stillness is the problem, in that it will permit any representation of how things function in time. In a sense, *On Photography* follows the arguments of Gotthold Lessing's *Laocoon*, in that the temporal sequence of narration corrects for the distortions of the still image. Sontag insists on sustained duration in a tidy paragraph-closing aphorism: "Only that which narrates can make us understand" (23).

Yet the fictions of Poe, Melville, and Hawthorne tend to show the limits of this understanding. Sontag's description of photographic knowledge plays out as a passable description of the way that everyday objects behave in Herman Melville's *Pierre*: "The camera makes reality atomic, manageable, and opaque. It is a view of the world which denies interconnectedness, continuity, but which confers on each moment the character of a mystery. Any photograph has multiple meanings; indeed, to see something in the form of a photograph is to encounter a potential object of fascination" (23). That is, every photograph is an ambiguity. The painted portrait of Pierre's father even at one point suggests that "a smile is the chosen vehicle for all ambiguities," words that may anachronistically haunt any number of family photo-albums (84). Of course, *Pierre* is a novel that dramatizes the erasure of political struggle by the picturesque treatment of the contested landscape.[24] But it is also a novel that takes the association and interconnection so seriously that the hero cannot trace any of his circumstances, actions, or feelings to a single isolated cause. While Melville fills his novel with mysteries and ambiguities, Poe hyperbolizes rational and intelligible order until it somehow turns back into a kind of mystification. These fictions help to frame understanding as a process inevitably torn between

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[22] See Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Picador, 1973). Sontag arrives at a version of the comparison between photography and lyrics poetry: "Poetry's commitment to concreteness and to the autonomy of the poem's language parallels photography's commitment to pure seeing. Both imply discontinuity, disarticulated forms and compensatory unity: wrenching things from their context (to see them in a fresh way), bringing things together elliptically, according to the imperious but often arbitrary demands of subjectivity" (96). Sontag's descriptions reveal a conception of both poetic language and visual aesthetics soundly rooted in modernism, whereas Romantic theories of poetry and photography usually seek to contain the kind of rupture she describes.

[23] Roland Barthes complicates these claims by locating such responsible knowledge on the order of the photographic "studium," a term by which he indicates the field of general interest based in "a classical body of information," such that intention remains an active category and "emotion requires the rational intermediary of an ethical and political culture" (26). The stadium finds its dichotomous other in the "punctum," a term by which Barthes describes some element within the photograph, some unassimilable detail, some variety of surprise, which (true to the etymology) punctures the studium (27). See *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981).

[24] In particular see the following two studies: Samuel Otter, *Melville's Anatomies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). Nancy Fredricks, *Melville's Art of Democracy* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995).

the desire to form narrative interconnections and the imagistic tendency toward manageable parcels of experience.

According to many critics American fiction does not manage the leap between observational detail and abstract reflection with the same evenness as its British models. This comparison has a relatively long history, dating back to the nineteenth century. For example, Alexis de Tocqueville argues in *Democracy in America* there that the lack of any stable social intermediary between the individual and the state in American democracy is the defining fact of virtually every cultural phenomenon, whether the inflated style of orators, the frequency of neologism, or the regular appearance of spiritual fanatics. "In democratic communities, " he writes, "each citizen is habitually engaged in the contemplation of a very puny object, namely himself. If he ever raises his looks higher, he then perceives nothing but the immense form of society at large, or the still more imposing aspect of mankind."[25] Some version of this idea, detached from the structuralism of *Democracy in America,* has also served to distinguish American literature in the criticism of John Lynen, who attends to the leap between time and timelessness; Richard Brodhead, who sees symbolism opposed to dramatization in the novels of Hawthorne and Melville; and Carolyn Porter, who analyzes the figure of the participant-observer. For Garrett Stewart, a Victorianist with a taste for Poe, attention to the specifics of narrative media rather than narrative in the abstract means attending to the moments in which technique is potentially at odds with the drive toward narrative closure.[26]

More recently criticism has found ways to balance between the earlier ideas of photographic objectivity or modernist medium specificity and the positions held by scholars who present photography as a product of cultural fetishization, a discursive construct to be read for its symptomatic value. In a particularly compelling version of this argument, art historian Rosalind Krauss has argued, in "Notes on Photography and the Simulacral," that the distinctive discourse of photography is not an aesthetic but critical:

> As I have said, at a certain point photography, in its precarious position as the false copy – the image that is resemblant only by mechanical circumstances and not by internal, essential connection to the model – served to deconstruct the whole system of model and copy, original and fake, first- and second-degree replication. For certain artists and critics, photography opened the closed unities of the older aesthetic discourse to the severest possible scrutiny, turning them inside out. Given its power to do this – to put into question the concept of the uniqueness of the art object, the originality of its author, the coherence of the oeuvre within which it is made, and the individuality of so-called self-expression – given this power, it is clear that, with all due respect to Bourdieu, there *is* a discourse proper to photography; only, we would have to add, it is not an aesthetic

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[25] de Tocqueville*, Democracy in America: Vol. 2,* 93.

[26] See Garrett Stewart, *Novel Violence : A Narratography of Victorian Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). For an earlier explanation of Stewart's methodology in the context of the contemporary cinema see *Framed Time : Toward a Postfilmic Cinema*, Cinema and Modernity (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). There will be more about Stewart and Richard Brodhead in my final chapter.

discourse. It is a project of deconstruction in which art is distanced and separated from itself. [27]

This is a way of reading photography that acknowledges the particularity of the medium not as its own art but as a disturbance in the arts. The irony is that photography recovers its distinctiveness by way of its subordination to the written word, not as a direct portrayal of things as they really are but instead as an imperfect reflection of things as they are described. Conceived in this way, photography unsettles the aesthetic and social codes governing images in such a way that their form can no longer be a given. The invocation of form, when it is not a means of distancing literature from history, necessarily separates literature from itself, drawing attention to the textual strategies that underlie the pose of aesthetic unity. In that sense, formalism potentially shares its distinctive discursive aim with photography.

Douglas Crimp makes the case that the inclusion of photographs in museums alongside modernist art marks the end of modernism as a coherent aesthetic system: "when photography is allowed entrance to the museum as an art among others, the museum's epistemological coherence collapses."[28] Once photography is admitted to the museum, Crimp argues, it disrupts the defining modernist fiction of art's autonomy from the everyday world. Crimp's study of the museum doubles as a way of showing the unraveling of modernist theory at an institutional level. Crimp's analysis makes an interesting counter-point to the uneasy contemplation of artistic autonomy in *The Marble Faun*, a text that turns Rome into a virtual museum and very nearly excludes photography and engraving from its descriptions of copyists at work. While critics such as Crimp and Krauss have attended to the unraveling of modernism's operative fictions at an institutional level, authors such as Poe, Melville, and Hawthorne witnessed an early stage in their construction. The critique of photography at the tail end of modernism resonates with the concerns that surrounded both literary and visual images during the first generation of American mass-culture.

While Krauss describes photography as a medium whose proper discourse is critical rather than aesthetic, Roland Barthes captures something similar when he responds to the medium as causing "a revulsive movement" that he calls "photographic *ecstasy*" (119). An antecedent of Krauss, Barthes searches for the essence of photography in the face of the critical

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[27] Rosalind Krauss, "A Note on Photography and the Simulacral," in *The Critical Image: Essays on Contemporary Photography*, ed. Carol Squiers (Seatle: Bay Press, 1990), 24. Originally published in *October*. In this article, Krauss frames her argument against Pierre Bourdieu's insistence that photography has less to do with art than the indirect expression of social differences, where even art photography defines itself against the more innocent practice of tourists and eager parents. See *Photography: A Middle-Brow Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990). Krauss observes, "[Bourdieu's] feeling that art photography's difference is a sociological *effect* rather than an aesthetic reality stems from his conviction that photography has no aesthetic norms proper to itself" (21).

[28] Douglas Crimp and Louise Lawler, *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), 14. In a similar vein, Rosalind Krauss argues that the inclusion of photography in the tradition of high art by critics and curators has resulted in the erasure of the medium's institutional history. See Rosalind Krauss, "Photography's Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View," *Art Journal* 42, no. 4 (Winter, 1982).

positions of Bourdieu and Sontag.[29] Indirectly, Barthes develops one of Benjamin's insights about early photography, where in comparison to the subjects of painting the figures in photographs display "something that goes beyond testimony to the photographer's art," an impulse to know more about the names and lives of the people photographed (276). "No matter how artful the photographer, no matter how carefully posed his subject," writes Benjamin, "the beholder feels an irresistible compulsion to search such a picture for the tiny spark of contingency, the here and now, with which reality has, so to speak, seared through the image-character of the photograph" (276). The same unsettling excess that Benjamin describes as a "spark of contingency" and Roland Barthes as a "punctum" figures in Rosalind Krauss' account as a rupture in the codes of art.

Writing on the mixed genre of the photographic essay, W.J.T. Mitchell accepts neither the naïve position that photography presents reality free from cultural codes nor the post-structuralist position that photographs are inevitably saturated by language, whether through the captions that circulate with them or the cultural scripts attached to their subject-matter.[30] Instead, he chooses to focus on the mutual resistance that keeps these two media distinct even when they coexist in the same text: "the exchanges which seem to make photography just another language, an adjunct or supplement to language, make no sense without an understanding of the resistance they overcome" (285). This formulation of the relationship between language and photography seems like the inevitable outcome of a study that departs from the theory the word and image share a dialectic relationship instead of occupying opposite sides of a crisp distinction.

Rather than fixating on abstract substantives such as "the verbal" and "the visual," categories that seem to lead inevitably toward interpretations in which literary vitality contends with the nefarious spatialization of pictures, this dissertation will focus on the shared conceptual motifs that allow literature and the visual arts to exert mutual influence at the level of technique as well as subject-matter. Poe's interest in devices such as the metronome and the camera obscura corresponds to his fascination with the mechanical properties of the voice and the eye; his critical drive to quantify aesthetic experience makes sense as a skeptical reaction to the Romantic definition of poetry as an auratic category distinct from verse. Herman Melville invents literary variants on the visual concepts of outline and foreshortening; these concepts distinguish between the illusory reality of painting and the overt mediation of prints and drawings, but as cognitive metaphors they also mark the boundary between the overwhelming totality of experience and the retraced image retained by human understanding. Nathaniel Hawthorne excludes photography and print-making from his catalogue of the fine arts in *The Marble Faun*, yet the book's aesthetic and moral meditations revolve around the idea of fixing transitory images.

Part of what I am arguing for is a version of medium specificity that acknowledges the insights of the "linguistic turn," a moment prematurely eulogized in the naming, without

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[29] Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Rosalind Krauss cites Barthes as an earlier critic of Bourdieu's method, but one who does not entertain "the alternative of aesthetic categories" (20n).

[30] W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory : Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 281-5. Mitchell takes Victor Burgin's work as the paradigmatic expression of the theory that construes photography as the adjunct of language. See Victor Burgin, *The End of Art Theory : Criticism and Post-Modernity* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1986).

conceding that photographs (or lithographs, dioramas, stereoscopes, phantasmagorias, and so on) are pure substrates of a stabilizing discourse. This has meant looking at the way that a new medium sends ripples through its constitutive discourses, manifesting itself as a distinctive shift in the pace and pattern of received ideas. The test of this method demands close attention to practices of selection and periodization that have become more distinct as the original outline of the project has filled in. Does the medium retain its discursive signature as the surrounding pattern of ideas shifts around it?

Form in New Materialism

Object-oriented critics have made form a term of interest, but with a tendency to emphasize only one of its meanings, either the superficial form that defines the appearance (but not the essence) of objects or the deep form that remains, in their view, unknowable. Graham Harman writes, "If this severing of a thing from its surroundings above and below can be called 'formalism,' this is not because the rock is just a form in our minds, but because it is a real form *outside* our minds. It is what the medieval philosophers called a *substantial form:* the reality of an individual object over and above its matter, and under and beneath its apprehension by the mind" (199).[31] At the opposite pole, Timothy Morton confines the concept of form to surface impressions: "*form* (*morphe,* hence anthropomorphism) is how things appear."[32] While this understanding of form seems purely cosmetic, Morton complicates the usual scope given to appearances with the unusual position that causality (because it describes the relations and not the identity of objects) is aesthetic. Morton looks to Percy Shelley for an ancestor to his aesthetic theories. These critics raise questions that resonate with Romantic attempts to describe the object world and the status of literary form, and their attempt to describe the world from an inhuman point-of-view echo the experiments of Poe and Melville, yet their ethical and epistemological commitment to the absolute otherness of objects threatens to flatten out the vacillation in Romantic thought that made the pathetic fallacy alternately a psychological effect and a providential fact.

It does not seem like a coincidence when Harman singles out *Moby-Dick* for his description of what an object-oriented method of literary criticism might look like. He describes a criticism that imagines or even constructs alternate versions of texts to discover what is essential and what is contingent in the reading experience: "Instead of just writing about *Moby-Dick*, why not try shortening it to various degrees in order to discover the point at which it ceases to sound like *Moby-Dick*? Why not imagine it lengthened even further, or told by a third-person narrator rather than by Ishmael, or involving a cruise in the opposite direction around the globe?" (202). He does not recommend transforming *Moby-Dick* into a pop-up book or transplanting its plot into a desert full of gigantic moles, but contemporary literature has attempted both of these feats.[33] It is striking that Harman already thinks of *Moby-Dick* as lengthened instead of merely long, but it also sounds right. Many abridgements and adaptations have already condensed the

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[31] Graham Harman, "The Well-Wrought Hammer: Object-Oriented Literary Criticism," *New Literary History* 43, no. 2 (2012).

[32] Timothy Morton, "An Object-Oriented Defense of Poesy," ibid.: 207.

[33] For the (excellent) pop-up book see Sam Ita and Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick : A Pop-up Book*, 1 vols. (New York, NY: Sterling Pub., 2007). China Miéville, *Railsea*, 1st ed. (New York: Del Rey/Ballantine Books, 2012).

plot, removing the many chapters on the routines of whaling. And then Melville himself has given signs that the text should be regarded as excessive and redundant. Harrison Hayford has noted in particular the duplicated scenes of the opening, which he takes as the remainders of an earlier version.[34] Further, it is not always obvious whether the individual chapters belong to Ishmael or a third-person narrator. In some sense, Herman Melville has anticipated Harman's suggestion that the novel should exist in multiple parallel versions. *Moby-Dick* makes the ideal example for Harman because the novel already presents many of its chapters as surplus even as Melville makes it clear that Ahab's tragic plot is a design narrower than the novel itself, in need of comical leavening and some degree of mutiny, successful or not. *Moby-Dick* sounds like *Moby-Dick* in large part because it continually prompts us to ask how much is enough.

  Pierre has given the same impression of a text inflated and possibly even defaced by its author. Hershel Parker has shortened the novel to exclude any passage referring to Pierre as a young author. Meanwhile, Edgar Dryden has analyzed the ways that *Pierre* tropes aesthetic unity and closure as a kind of petrification to be resisted. Melville and Hawthorne both compose their novels with a sense of both abundance and fragmentation that undoes the notion of any settled unity of plot or structure, while Poe tends in the opposite direction toward fictions so single-minded that they assume a double perspective as a result of alienation rather than internal diversity. Melville and Hawthorne surround their symbols with interpreters while Poe achieves a similar effect as his characters drift from method into madness or vice versa.

Conclusion

  The sequence of chapters moves from Poe's micro-formal experiments with time, through questions of social reproduction in Melville toward Hawthorne's broad meditations on art-historical timelessness. The second chapter, following this introduction, addresses the theme of reproducibility in terms of voice and physiology in the writing of Edgar Allan Poe, while the following two chapters, on Melville and Hawthorne, deal more directly with the effects of technical media upon the traditional arts, particularly the disruption of traditional aesthetics by photography.

  Unlike the Romantic poets he alternately imitates and mocks, Poe repeatedly suggests that the experience of literature can be measured and quantified. As I argue in my second chapter, "The Poet and the Pendulum," Poe's obsessive manipulation of narrative time and poetic meter replaces the "fine frenzy" of inspiration with a rational method, but only by turning literary composition into a formulaic exercise in deduction. The self-enclosed rationality of his style becomes both a refuge for consciousness and a machine it must overcome, often through madness. Poe's habit of sealing characters in dark rooms resembles the optical experiments performed by Newton and Goethe in the camera obscura, a chance to test the senses in isolation. Where Poe consistently imagines a literature engineered for precise effects, constructed like a puzzle or a trap, both Melville and Hawthorne turn their attention from the mechanical contraptions of popular culture to the artistic monuments of the past, to discover what modern eyes can still detect in classical forms.

  My third chapter juxtaposes Melville's encounter with popular culture in his most unpopular novel, *Pierre,* with his tour of classical art in the poetry of *Timoleon,* particularly his

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[34] Harrison Hayford, "Unnecessary Duplicates: A Key to the Writing of Moby-Dick," in *New Perspectives on Melville*, ed. Faith Pullen (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1978).

poems on Greek architecture, which abound in reflections on form, line, and perspective. The chapter explores how Melville formulates his theory of fictional point-of-view through the language of optical perspective, particularly the terms of "foreshortening" and "outline." I compare Melville's figurative conception of outline with the artistic theory and practice of William Blake, George Cumberland, and John Flaxman, whose illustrations of Homer and Dante feature prominently in *Pierre.* Widely circulated as engravings by Tommaso Piroli and others, Flaxman's clean-lined drawings fascinate Melville because they emphasize implied narrative rather than optical verisimilitude. In Melville's work, terms of art such as outline and foreshortening suggest the workings of the mind as it flattens unconscious possibilities into a manageable picture of the world.

In his final completed novel, *The Marble Faun,* Hawthorne links his career-long meditation on the nature of guilt with the aesthetic question of how passing impressions become fixed as images, a technical problem that surfaced frequently in the pre-history of photography. In this regard, Hawthorne's final romance revisits early tales such as "The Vision of the Fountain" (1835) and "The Artist of the Beautiful" (1837), the former a picturesque study of shifting light, the latter a meditation on the task of "putting spirit into machinery," both written before Daguerre's discovery. *The Marble Faun* explores the solidity of spiritual facts through different degrees of vividness and permanence in created images, contrasting sketches with finished paintings, clay models with marble sculptures. Hawthorne pointedly avoids photography in his survey of the arts, but its pressure is felt throughout his narrative. His preoccupation with copies and copyists undermines the connection of any given image, or any crime, with one particular hand.

The House of the Seven Gables has become the central text in the intersection of photography and literature in the antebellum period, featured one way or another in virtually every book to make a comparative study between the two media in this period.[35] It helps that Hawthorne makes one of his central characters a daguerreotypist and pays careful attention to the management of light and perspective in his pictorial descriptions. I have chosen not to write about this novel. Instead I have focused on its stranger counterpart, Herman Melville's *Pierre,* and works in Hawthorne's career that address photography at the level of shared conceptual motifs rather than direct commentary, his early tales and his final completed romance, *The Marble Faun.* These texts have figured less prominently in the study of Hawthorne's optical interests and better fit my object of analysis, which is not the literary representation of visual media so much as the shared metaphors and concepts that inform both. *The Marble Faun* is Hawthorne's most direct commentary on representation, and in that sense it reveals a great deal about the conceptual pressure of photography on his conception of both immaterial fancy and the inscriptive acts that make mental or optical images permanent.

Alan Trachtenberg has argued that Hawthorne fixates on the Daguerreotype as a medium that, much like his own literary style, hovers between modernity and the forms of tradition.[36] Because the Daguerreotype shares features "of science and magic, of modernity and tradition," Trachtenberg argues, it embodies the ambiguous position that Hawthorne associates with his chosen genre of romance, which itself wavers between actuality and fancy (460). Citing a discourse of photography that distinguishes "between merely mechanical and self-consciously

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[35] See Susan Williams, Marcy Dinius, Stuart Burrows.
[36] Alan Trachtenberg, "Seeing and Believing: Hawthorne's Reflections on the Daguerreotype in the House of Seven Gables," *American Literary History* 9, no. 3 (1997).

artistic uses of the new medium," Trachtenberg argues that Hawthorne foregrounds photography to express an equivocal position, aesthetically and politically, between modern means and the preserved image of a displaced tradition of republican ideals. Further, Trachtenberg claims, the portraitist Holgrave uses his camera in service of his hazy social position as the inheritor of the conservative order he initially seeks to supplant: "The modern instrument has served his purpose of a deconstructive politics, of exposure and exorcism" (477). But after the new medium supplies "a new version of the old challenge of seeing to believing," the camera is presumably abandoned at the novel's conclusion (479).

More recently, Stuart Burrows has juxtaposed *The House of the Seven Gables* with the tradition of realism.[37] Burrows frames his analysis around the epistemic shift between a hierarchy of copy and original and a subsequent order based on serial reproductions without reference to any distinct original. His readings place stress on the dissolution of identity into sameness. Burrows argues that *The House of the Seven Gables* follows a photographic aesthetic while *Pierre* by contrast is painterly, for the reason that Melville attends to resemblance while Hawthorne instead focuses on the iteration of social types. But Burrows downplays the confusion between photography and the graphic arts during the first decades of the medium. The reading of photography as primarily an archive of social types rather than a collection of singular images promotes the idea that *The House of the Seven Gables* as a realist text despite Hawthorne's insistence on the more fanciful genre of romance. I would argue that this reading fixates on the novel's anxious view of modernization at the cost of minimizing its lingering fascination with the imaginative possibilities of the residual social world of tradition, which persists as a mold for fancy when it has lost its place as an active structure of power.

The treatment of photography in *The House of the Seven Gables* in many ways closes the book on this young medium at the moment when its capacity for strategic truths has started giving way to the kind of serial sameness that takes center stage for Burrows. The novel sits on the tipping point that Benjamin describes in his "Little History of Photography" between the medium's early transmission of aura and its rapid industrialization. Hawthorne has arranged the novel's marriage plot as a substitute for Holgrave's profession as a portrait photographer, in that his attempts at discerning character and capturing light both come together in his union to the aptly-named Phoebe, a figure who functions in the novel's dim house of fiction as sunlight personified. The tension between optics and sentiment in this ending returns in *The Marble Faun* as a demand for sculptures and pictures to give up their meanings more easily. Rather than write directly on *The House of the Seven Gables*, I mean to answer some questions raised by its position in Hawthorne's career. In particular, *The House of the Seven Gables* powerfully links photography to the elaborate pictorial effects that mark Hawthorne's style from his early tales onward, which raises the question of what is photographic in this style. How does the cultural presence of photography pervade Hawthorne's visual figures even when photographs are pointedly absent from the fictional world, as in *The Marble Faun*?

Each of the chapters deals in some way with relationships between figure and ground, displayed as both a strange determinism between character and setting or a near collapse of plot into the received conventions of genre. *The Marble Faun* novelizes the usual subject-matter of travel guides, staging most scenes at well-known tourist sites or in front of famous works of art. And indeed Hawthorne composed the book from notebooks that he kept during his travels in

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[37] Burrows, *A Familiar Strangeness : American Fiction and the Language of Photography, 1839-1945*.

Italy, a tourist's diary. Yet are these descriptions placed in service of the plot or do the movements of the plot illuminate the experience of these places and artworks in a way that the experience of viewing them or describing them does not? Do the backdrops serve the novel or does the foreground action merely annotate the objects that flow through the background? The fact that most of the principal characters are working artists of one kind or another only increases the sense of aesthetic claustrophobia, as they set about creating more of the very objects that surround and sometimes seem to overwhelm them.

The visual relationship between figure and ground (or between outline and figure) stands in for the aspectual, non-visual difference between form and its objects. Form is ecstatic, never quite equal to the thing it is the form of. The form of a poem is not exactly a poem. The form of a sentence is not exactly a sentence. The creative eye of Romanticism confuses the status of form all the more. Poetry concretizes both the objects of perception and the act of perception itself in equal measure. Fiction potentially scripts and dramatizes this sort of exchange, both the way that objects are extruded into features of consciousness and the way that consciousness then collapses back into an external fetish. In this sense, the terms of analysis here line up with Bill Brown's sense for literary form as at some level a record of the unsteady relationship between subjects and objects. What Brown suggests is not dissimilar from what novelist Richard Hughes has described as "some overspill of self into penumbral regions – the perceiver's *footing* in the perceived," by which he means an extension of individual identity through material belongings and familiar sights.[38] Brown describes the premature modernism of *Moby-Dick* in terms of the novel's treatment of objects: "Staging an elaborate will-to-knowledge while elaborating the perpetual failure of knowledge to achieve power, Melville prefigures the modernist epistemological shift *away* from objects as a source of secure meaning that is nonetheless an aesthetic shift *toward* objects as the source of phenomenological fascination."[39] In *Pierre,* a novel less concerned with things than with texts and clues, what Brown calls phenomenological fascination adheres in the terms of mystery and ambiguity. The central problem in *Pierre* is that the hero takes up ambiguous objects as if they were a secure source of meaning rather than conduits of his fantasies and his anxieties.

The concern with evidence and detection in the writings of these three authors shows that the transition from imitation to expressive form has encountered complications. Even when Poe's fictions do not focus on crime and detection, his elaborate settings in tales such as "The Pit and the Pendulum" and "The Masque of the Red Death" demand the same kind of forensic attention, whether because the scenery is actually mechanical or because the mechanisms of fiction are so overt. The hero of *Pierre* weighs the evidence that he has met his lost half-sister.

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[38] Hughes further suggests that the idea of the abstracted observer alone with nature is a recipe for pathology: "It is we-they and meum-alienum divisions which draw the sane man's ultimate boundary." See Richard Hughes, *The Fox in the Attic*, New York Review Books Classics (New York: New York Review Books, 2000), 90.

[39] Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things : The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). Brown limits comparisons between literature and other media in the interest of "returning to some fundamental questions of literary form, questions about the rhetorical grammars on which these novelists depend" (15). "I recognize, nonetheless, that with one eye on the extraliterary referent, and one on the text, I mean to effect something like a stereoscopic effect, wherein our knowledge about how human subjects interact with material objects assumes a different dimension" (16).

The Marble Faun turns on a murder, but the novel is not a mystery. Particularly in Hawthorne and Melville, "mystery" is not a property of stories so much as a property that adheres in the objects of perception and ultimately in the eye. Instead the crime provides a test-case for Hawthorne's ideas about the differences between action and pure fancy, categories blurred together in the creation of a work of art. For each of these authors, the investigation of outer objects shades into an anatomy of the paranoid mind. The mechanism of the camera indirectly suggests that the creative eye operates with the same regularity, that its perception does not infuse the visible world with spiritual or psychological truths so much as reveal the set patterns and rules that govern the mind. The media theory embedded in the writing of Poe, Melville, and Hawthorne is the story of etherealized objects returning as reified thoughts, and the workings of seeing machines give this interchange its shape.

CHAPTER TWO
THE POET AND THE PENDULUM

Introduction

Whether he is writing fiction, poetry, or criticism, Poe returns with obsessive frequency to questions of time, quantity, and measurement. These preoccupations emerge in the meticulously wrought cadences of poems such as "The Bells" or "The Raven" and in the empirical uncertainties that so often plague Poe's characters, detectives and lunatics alike. His fictional protagonists routinely find themselves sealed in dark spaces ("Premature Burial," *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*), tormented by unusual time-pieces ("The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Devil in the Belfry"), or both ("The Pit and the Pendulum," "The Masque of the Red Death"). These preoccupations take different forms as they cross the between genres; by insisting upon the universality of time in his poetics and undermining the uniform experience of time in his fiction, Poe positions himself to test the extent to which literary texts can project sensory impressions and, in poetry, the qualities of the spoken voice. While Poe's fiction dwells on the slippage between the senses and the outer world, his theory of poetry bypasses the problem of imitation by treating poetic effect as an operation on language and sensibility that elides the world at large.

Poe's interest in time has not gone undocumented, nor has the corresponding tendency toward self-enclosure in the structure and point-of-view of his tales and poems.[1] According to Cindy Weinstein, time in Poe's fiction "runs according to a logic that continually invokes the conventional passage of time and simultaneously undercuts the reader's ability to follow its passage."[2] She places *Pym* alongside John Harrison's invention of the chronometer, a device that ought to ensure that maritime time is never out of joint: "the chronometer momentarily appears in *Pym* only to vanish, and with it the degree zero, the Greenwich Meridian against which time can be told and against which the narrative can support its sense of now, its hold on the past, and its grip on the future."[3] Weinstein links Poe's concern with chronometry to the geographic codification of racial hierarchy, a power-structure that does not always coincide neatly with Poe's display of authorial mastery over the fictional world: "Poe's aesthetics of temporality, in other words, replicates and reinforces the arbitrary assertion of power, but at the same time problematizes it" (102). Weinstein's interpretation links the criticism that deals with the abstract mechanics of Poe's fiction, centering around time, and criticism that explores his fiction in terms of race. While pieces such as "The Pit and the

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[1] John F. Lynen, *The Design of the Present; Essays on Time and Form in American Literature* (New Haven,: Yale University Press, 1969); David Ketterer, *The Rationale of Deception in Poe*, Southern Literary Studies (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979). Clayton Marsh, "Stealing Time: Poe's Confidence Men and the "Rush of the Age"," *American Literature* 77, no. 2 (June 2005).

[2] Cindy Weinstein, "When Is Now? Poe's Aesthetics of Temporality," *Poe Studies/ Dark Romanticism: History, Theory, Interpretation* 41, no. 1 (2008): 85.

[3] "When Is Now? Poe's Aesthetics of Temporality," *Poe Studies/ Dark Romanticism: History, Theory, Interpretation* 41, no. 1 (2008): 88.

Pendulum" and "The Raven" do not lend themselves as readily to political thematics, their explorations of effect join a wider Romantic discourse of species and human science that operates through the medium of poetic sensibility.

For example, Maureen McLane has argued that Wordworth's experiments with poetic language aspired toward "the construction of a universal human from the ethnographic and social margins," a project that ignited Coleridge's skepticism precisely because he could not imagine the limited minds of rustics as the source of a universal human diction.[4] McLane further argues that this linguistic debate between the two poets pivots on the status of mediation:

> What Wordsworth seems less able to acknowledge than Coleridge is the actual mediation which is the condition of literary production by the early nineteenth century. Whereas Coleridge calmly proposes a clerisy as the mediating agent of cultural "diffusion," Wordsworth looks for figures such as rustics who have easy "intercourse" both with the best objects of nature and with each other. Wordsworth looks for a horizontal commerce, Coleridge for a vertical one. Their theories of language, culture, mind, and poetry diverge inasmuch as they differently assess the function of mediation in society. Whereas Coleridge would seize the modes of mediation (thus his journalism, his lectures, his sermons), Wordsworth would (theoretically) abandon them in favor of a poetics of immanent presence.[5]

On the one hand, Poe seems at no real risk of figuring in a debate about the "real language of men," so lugubriously and self-consciously artificial is his language, but then his nearly mechanical attention to questions of rhythm and sound constitutes an attempt to give a physiological fixity to poetic effects, to generate repeatable bodily routines in which his desired poetic effects will be realized. The music of poetry, removed from any reference to instructive truths, becomes for him the grounds for a vision of the human just barely separated from mechanical and animal voices.

Poe's fiction, caught between clock time and subjective freeze-frame, dramatizes the contradictory experience of time that critics such as Sharon Cameron have identified with the genre of lyric poetry. Cameron has described "lyric time" as a state of suspension between time and timelessness.[6] This condition bears a closer affinity to the disorienting subjective pace of Poe's fiction than the heavy, controlling cadences of his verse. Cameron writes, "the lyric fears acknowledging that its meanings exist as a middle point between other surrounding meanings, for it fears that mediacy involves death as well as meaning" (203). Clock-conscious Poe aestheticizes both mediacy and death time after time, in piece after piece, including fiction as well as poetry. Cameron's conception of poetic language notably differs from Wordsworth's

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[4] Maureen N. McLane, *Romanticism and the Human Sciences : Poetry, Population, and the Discourse of the Species*, Cambridge Studies in Romanticism 41 (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 44.

[5] *Romanticism and the Human Sciences : Poetry, Population, and the Discourse of the Species*, Cambridge Studies in Romanticism 41 (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 83.

[6] Sharon Cameron, *Lyric Time : Dickinson and the Limits of Genre* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979).

position that the language of poetry derives from everyday speech: "As pure unmediated speech it lies furthest of all the mimetic arts from the way we really talk. Lyric speech might be described as the way we would talk in dreams if we could convert the phantasmagoria there into words" (207). There is a "radical inequality," according to Cameron, "between lyric speech and the voice or voices it represents" (207). This approaches the metaphor of ventriloquism that Coleridge wields against the Wordsworthian rustic, but treats that degree of alienation as constitutive of all poetic practice.

"The Pit and the Pendulum"

Poe's experiments with unreliable narration and hermetic plot structures demonstrate the triumph of internal structure over external verification. As Meredith McGill has argued, Poe's introverted aesthetic shows his adaptation to uncertain conditions of reception:

> Poe creates self-authorizing fictions by staging the often dubious transfer of authority from a settled, hierarchical social order to the more elusive but common territory of genre. While a negative consequence of this maneuver is the readerly identification of Poe with his self-enclosed, deluded narrators, fictions that refer the reader primarily to themselves for their authority are well braced against the prospect of their decontextualization and recontextualization.[7]

McGill argues that Poe's self-referential style adapted his tales for circulation in varied contexts rather than marking their status as high-cultural objects that prefigured the aesthetic values of modernism.[8] In theory, the textual authority derived from the internal markers of genre ought to turn fiction into something like a controlled experiment, isolated as much as possible from outer determinations. But Poe also tends to undermine the divisions between genres, whether by crossing earnest criticism with self-satire in "The Philosophy of Composition" or by declaring in the preface to *Eureka* that what appears to be a treatise on cosmogony is in fact a prose poem. His texts evoke multiple genres and suggest multiple attitudes without anchoring themselves in a social niche that will clarify their unstable tone. The perceived lunacy of the authorial voice is an effect as well as a side-effect, the tonal signature of a literary style with an especially slippery hierarchy between generic codes and local effects. "The Pit and the Pendulum" dramatizes this formal riddle in its complicated relationship between narrative voice and setting.

In effect, Poe has taken up the scientific project of testing the senses in a camera obscura, treating his tales as a laboratory for poetics. For Poe, the camera obscura reveals the self-enclosure of private sensation and geometric order. Poe's favored motif of live burial derives its abstract interest from the experience of chronometric drift, a subjective perception of time that

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[7] Meredith L. McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834-1853* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 163.

[8] *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834-1853* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 164. For further criticism on Poe's relationship to the marketplace see John Eugene Elmer, *Reading at the Social Limit: Affect, Mass Culture, and Edgar Allan Poe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995). Terence Whalen, *Edgar Allan Poe and the Masses : The Political Economy of Literature in Antebellum America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999).

has sheered away from the outside flow of events to an unverifiable extent. Interment becomes a figure for the isolation of the mind from the world, a state of detachment from which Poe's characters can only hope to awake. At the same time, Poe favors settings such as crime scenes and dungeons that foreground the momentary rhythm of stimulus and response, cause and effect, at the expense of social or cultural context or meaning.

In "The Pit and the Pendulum," the physical enclosure of the setting lends itself to a narrative focused on momentary experience in the near-complete absence of a stabilizing context. The tale never mentions the circumstances of the narrator's capture or even the charge brought against him. He never pleads his innocence. At the conclusion, there is no behind-the-scenes glimpse at the mechanisms of the dungeon, nor any clarification of how long the narrator's captivity has actually lasted. Even in retrospect, with the benefit of "the lucid reason of a later epoch," the narrator rarely ventures beyond the immediate report of his senses; his experience in the hands of the Inquisition remains detached from his previous life or the broader narratives of history.[9] General Lasalle's abrupt arrival at the tale's conclusion marks the intrusion of history upon the enclosed fictional world, but this is history in its thinnest pasteboard generality, a proper noun and a vague suggestion that progress has swept away brutality.

Poe's dark chamber accentuates the subjective and hallucinatory properties of the senses, yet he refers back to an earlier scientific discourse that treated the camera obscura as both an instrument and metaphor of empirical certainty. "During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries" according to Jonathan Crary, "the camera obscura was without question the most widely used model for explaining human vision, and for representing the relation of a perceiver and the position of a knowing subject to an external world" (27). Crary contrasts the decontextualized images of modernity to the camera obscura's "guarantees of authority, identity, and universality" (24). "By the beginning of the nineteenth century," Crary writes, "the camera obscura is no longer synonymous with the production of truth and with an observer positioned to see truthfully" (32). Crary argues that the camera obscura changes in its cultural meaning from "the site of truth" to "a model for procedures and forces that conceal, invert, and mystify truth" (29). According to Crary, this transformation of the camera obscura as a philosophical metaphor did not correspond to any particular mechanical improvement but instead a new kind of observer (30-1). Poe dramatizes this transition by placing a compulsive empiricist in an apparatus designed to withhold any stable knowledge or sense of position relative to the external world.

The opening scene of "The Pit and the Pendulum" foregrounds sensory impressions over practical details of time, place, and plot. From its first sentence, the tale throws the senses into disarray: "I was sick – sick unto death with that long agony; and when they at length unbound me, and I was permitted to sit, I felt that my senses were leaving me" (Tales, 491). Who "they" are must be gleaned from a passing reference to "inquisitorial voices." The trial scene contains frequent but indefinite marks of time: "at length," "only for a brief period," "for a while," "for a few moments of delirious horror." The narrator's hearing fails followed by his vision, but not before Poe blends the impression of the senses with the written matter of his tale:

> I saw the lips of the black-robed judges. They appeared to me white – whiter than
> the sheet upon which I trace these words – and thin even to grotesqueness; thin
> with the immoveable resolution - of stern contempt of human torture. I saw that
> the decrees of what to me was Fate, were still issuing from those lips. I saw them

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[9] Poe, *Poetry and Tales*, 492. This volume will be cited parenthetically as "Tales."

writhe with a deadly locution. I saw them fashion the syllables of my name; and I
shuddered because no sound succeeded (491).

The metaphor of paper-white lips prepares for the transition from hearing into lip-reading, and
lips that "writhe" as a kind of lettering. The narrator's emotional shock very nearly translates into
actual electrocution, "as if I had touched the wire of a galvanic battery" (Tales, 491).
　　　The story behaves as a developmental narrative, in which the narrator regains his senses
and his reason in response to the Inquisition's psychologically fraught traps. Roughly speaking,
the narrator becomes sensible as he maneuvers around the earthy pit and rational as he confronts
the mechanical pendulum, recovering first the embodied sense of touch and then the
comparatively abstract sense of vision. The sequence of tortures loosely duplicates the stages of
the narrator's return to consciousness from his state of shock:

> Very suddenly there came back to my soul motion and sound – the tumultuous
> motion of the heart, and, in my ears, the sound of its beating. Then a pause in
> which all is blank. Then again sound, and motion, and touch – a tingling sensation
> pervading my frame. Then the mere consciousness of existence, without thought –
> a condition which lasted long. Then, very suddenly, *thought*, and shuddering
> terror, and earnest endeavor to comprehend my true state. Then a strong desire to
> lapse into insensibility. Then a rushing revival of soul and a successful effort to
> move. And now a full memory of the trial, of the judges, of the sable draperies, of
> the sentence, of the sickness, of the swoon. Then entire forgetfulness of all that
> followed; of all that a later day and much earnestness of endeavor have enabled
> me vaguely to recall. (Tales, 493).

The vague "shadows of memories" recovered from the narrator's swoon lack any sense of
measurable space or time (493). The indistinct figures of his jailors carry him "down – down –
still down – till a hideous dizziness oppressed me at the mere idea of the interminableness of the
descent" (Tales, 493). The narrator recoils at the "unnatural stillness" of his heart and then at "a
sense of sudden motionlessness throughout all things; as if those who bore me (a ghastly train!)
had outrun, in their descent, the limits of the limitless, and paused from the wearisomeness of
their toil" (Tales, 493). These impressions hint at death forcefully enough to demand a rebuttal:
"The sentence had passed; and it appeared to me that a very long interval of time had since
elapsed. Yet not for a moment did I suppose myself actually dead" (494). The narrator presumes
that the experience of death is "altogether inconsistent with real existence," but then stumbles
after sensation in a state of near hysteria. The lack of scale in this dreamlike state may well
prompt the narrator's compulsive measurement when he regains his senses; aimless empiricism
affirms the continued presence of the material world even when it does not yield useful insight.
　　　Once the narrator becomes capable of thought, barely a paragraph passes without some
attempt at measurement or geometric reasoning. The narrator first measures his cell by touch,
pacing the perimeter in the dark, and then later estimates its dimensions by eye. This numerical
fixation on paces and yards and angles gives the unusual setting a mundane material reality, but
even the narrator acknowledges his will-to-quantify as a kind of compulsion or excess: "I had
little object – certainly no hope – in these researches; but a vague curiosity prompted me to
continue them" (Tales, 495).

> In its size I had been greatly mistaken. The whole circuit of its walls did not exceed twenty-five yards. For some minutes this fact occasioned me a world of vain trouble; vain indeed – for what could be of less importance, under the terrible circumstances which environed me, than the mere dimensions of my dungeon? But my soul took a wild interest in trifles, and I busied myself in endeavors to account for the error I had committed in my measurement. (Tales, 497)

The narrator concludes that he must have reversed directions, circling the chamber twice around, but a few critics find this explanation dubious. Jeanne M. Malloy suggests that the cell's moveable walls have closed in during one of the narrator's swoons.[10] Or perhaps the same jailers who leave food and water when the narrator falls unconscious have also moved the scrap of serge that marks his starting position. In a meticulous analysis of the tale's geometry, Alexander Hammond proves that it would be impossible to walk "ten or twelve paces" at "two paces to the yard" into a square chamber twenty-five yards in perimeter without passing through the center of the room, where the pit waits.[11] He proposes the solution of an octagonal chamber that folds into a square, with half the original perimeter, when two pairs of adjoining walls are flattened together. According to this theory, the narrator's senses have not been deceived, but he has rationalized changing conditions as errors of measurement. Hammond also discovers that the square chamber may be too small for the pendulum to reach its full swing, but he concedes that the explanation may not be a matter of pure spatial reasoning after all: "perhaps Poe refuses to allow readers to rest content with any neat, rationalistic solutions to interpretive problems, even the kind that the chamber's geometry invites from this reader" (14).

Instead of modeling a stable relationship between the mind and the world, Poe's dark room embodies philosophical doubts. After comparing the mind to a "a closet wholly shut from light, with only some little opening left," John Locke speculates that "would the pictures coming into such a dark room but stay there and lie so orderly as to be found upon occasion it would very much resemble the understanding of a man" (Crary, 42). Objects and even walls in "The Pit and the Pendulum" have a tendency to leave their places in a way that disrupts the object-permanence of Locke's metaphor. "Upon awakening, and stretching forth an arm, I found beside me a loaf and a pitcher with water. I was too much exhausted to reflect upon this circumstance, but ate and drank with avidity" (495). Even the pictures on the wall and ceiling seem to move and change. Locke's metaphor carries a residual affinity with Renaissance memory palaces but Poe has made his chamber into a model of amnesia. The narrator explains that the recovery of his memories has involved a sustained effort; particular impressions and even particular mental faculties come and go in this tale. The precarious condition of the narrator's memory becomes all the more slippery given the way that his surroundings change.

The pendulum measures the passage of time at a steady mechanical pace, in contrast to the swooning narrator's fragmentary experience of time. Yet steady metronomic time cannot resolve the narrator's uncertainties: "There was another interval of utter insensibility; it was brief; for, upon again lapsing into life, there had been no perceptible descent in the pendulum. But it might have been long – for I knew there were demons who took note of my swoon, and

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[10] Jeanne M. Malloy, "Apocalyptic Imagery and the Fragmentation of the Psyche: 'The Pit and the Pendulum'," *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, no. 46 (June 1991).

[11] Alexander Hammond, "Subverting Interpretation: Poe's Geometry in 'the Pit and the Pendulum'," *Edgar Allan Poe Review* 9, no. 2 (2008).

who could have arrested the vibration at pleasure" (500). The demons, in this case, are the members of the Inquisition who manipulate the mechanical chamber from behind the scenes. But Poe's metaphor recalls the first section of Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*, where the philosopher tries to decide on the extent of his doubts: "But what shall I now say that I am, when I am supposing that there is some supremely powerful and, if it is permissible to say so, malicious deceiver, who is deliberately trying to trick me in every way he can?" (18). Poe's Inquisitors mimic the conditions of radical skepticism, undoing the empirical constants of time and distance, along with the secure deductions that follow from them. These monks punish their heretic with a miniature world where empiricism does not work.

The narrator's empirical investigation of his prison offers an imperfect means of understanding his captors, a way of turning the room around him into a record of their plans and motivations. Instead the narrator produces a series of speculative plots that only render his torment more acute with anticipation. The prison becomes visible by a "sulphurous lustre" that itself resembles the light of the tormented fancy. And the walls appear overwritten with the figures of superstition, as if in mockery of the fancies that already populated the dark chamber:

> The entire surface of this metallic enclosure was rudely daubed in all the hideous and repulsive devices to which the charnel superstition of the monks has given rise. The figures of fiends in aspects of menace, with skeleton forms, and other more really fearful images, overspread and disfigured the walls. I observed that the outlines of these monstrosities were sufficiently distinct, but that the colors seemed faded and blurred, as if from the effects of a damp atmosphere. (Tales, 498)

The pictures on the walls prepare for the misrecognition of the pendulum as a mere painted figure. On the ceiling panels, the narrator finds his attention "riveted" by "the painted figure of Time as he is commonly represented, save that, in lieu of a scythe, he held what, at a casual glance, I supposed to be the pictured image of a huge pendulum, such as we see on antique clocks" (Tales, 498). "While I gazed directly upward at it, (for its position was immediately over my own,) I fancied that I saw it in motion. In an instant afterward the fancy was confirmed. Its sweep was brief, and of course slow" (Tales, 499).

Cultural causality returns in the form of superstition, but as an extension of the unreliable senses. Even in the absence of supernatural events, superstition colors the narrator's perception. "Of the dungeons there had been strange things narrated – fables I had always deemed them – but yet strange, and too ghastly to repeat, save in a whisper" (Tales, 494). After he nearly stumbles into the pit, the narrator states that "the death just avoided, was of that very character which I had regarded as fabulous and frivolous in the tales respecting the Inquisition" (Tales, 496).The decorative murals on the walls match the narrator's stylistic flourishes. The figures of monkish superstition belong to the same supernatural set of imagery that converts the candles in the opening scene to "white slender angels" or the narrator's swoon to "a mad rushing descent as of the soul into Hades" (Tales, 491, 492). The narrator describes the pit as "typical of Hell" and concludes after his narrow escape that "it was no part of the demon plan to hurl me into the abyss" (Tales, 499). This is the same vein of apocalyptic fantasy that renders the conclusion of the tale, as the rescuing army storms the dungeon and the metal walls retract, as "a loud blast as of many trumpets" and "a harsh grating as of a thousand thunders" (Tales, 505).

> I have observed that, although the outlines of the figures upon the walls were
> sufficiently distinct, yet the colors seemed blurred and indefinite. These colors
> had now assumed, and were momentarily assuming, a startling and most intense
> brilliancy, that gave to the spectral and fiendish portraitures an aspect that might
> have thrilled even firmer nerves than my own. Demon eyes, of a wild and ghastly
> vivacity, glared upon me in a thousand directions, where none had been visible
> before, and gleamed with the lurid lustre of a fire that I could not force my
> imagination to regard as unreal. (Tales, 504)

This moment disproves the narrator's earlier conjecture that a damp climate has dulled the coloring of the walls. The designs serve the practical purpose of both dramatizing and defamiliarizing the heated metal of the walls. But the vividness of the colors also generates a mechanical rationale for the intensification of fancy.

The tale's episodic structure contrasts with its obsessive dramatic economy. The plot follows the whims of the Inquisitors as they subject the narrator to one strange torture after another. The sequence of events, because it is essentially arbitrary, accentuates the authorial power that Poe displaces onto the Inquisitors. The abrupt changes to the setting while the narrator lies unconscious expose the discontinuous style of plotting. There are few incidental details that do not later return as some kind of plot point. The narrator's thwarted attempts at measurement prefigure the moveable walls of the chamber; the pitcher of water turns out to be drugged; the spicey dish of meat (its own kind of torment) turns into bait for the rats; even the murals on the walls, the closest thing to a purely ornamental detail, help to dramatize the heating of the metal surface.

How far ahead have the Inquisitors plotted? The narrator's torture may amount to a single iteration in an experiment repeated many times with many small variations until every quirk of cause and effect becomes a known quantity. For each momentary escape there is already a contingency plan in place, another torment. Could even these escapes play a part in the script? Some number of captives must discover the pit without plunging into it, but is our narrator the first to escape from the pendulum using his tray of food? Or is that the hidden purpose of the spiced meat? The first-person perspective creates an inherent observer bias, in that the narrator can only make use of those objects and details that command his attention. Yet the way that the story recalls its own minute details points to something hermetic and mechanical in its construction that may extend beyond the organizing consciousness of the narrator.

Jonathan Crary writes, "Perhaps the most important obstacle to an understanding of the camera obscura, or of any optical device, is the idea that optical device and observer are two distinct entities, that the identity of the observer exists independently from the optical device that is a physical piece of technical equipment" (30). Poe makes that kind of distinction hard to draw, fashioning both his narrator and his setting as a kind of optical device. On the one hand, the mechanical scenery assumes a degree of autonomy from the guiding consciousness through which it is disclosed; the conspicuous facts of structure and style become in themselves a type of authorial irony that sets the world of the tale at a distance. On the other hand, the tale's emphasis on stimulus and response threatens to turn the narrator's consciousness into a test case for the pure poetics of effect. Poe balances between the objectification of thought in the figure of the hysterical narrator and the abstraction of architecture in the perceptual metaphor of the camera obscura. The pathetic fallacy threatens to run in reverse, absorbing décor as mood instead of projecting emotion onto the material world.

Critics have interpreted "The Pit and the Pendulum" as a metaphysical exploration of death and spiritual intuition, abounding in apocalyptic imagery and elements of the idiosyncratic mysticism that Poe elaborates elsewhere, in tales such as "The Colloquy of Monos and Una" and "Mesmeric Revelation." But there is a substantial chance that these readings inflate the explanatory power of Poe's atmospheric touches, misreading the tale's gothic embroidery as its intellectual motivation. In a review of his own collection *Tales* (1845), Poe describes the credulous response to "Mesmeric Revelation" among mesmerists as "excruciatingly and unsurpassably funny – in spite of the air of vraisemblance that pervades the article itself" (Essays, 870). The practice of mesmerism, its literary presentation, and the truths uncovered all beg for credulity, but the article "is evidently meant to be nothing more than the vehicle of the author's views concerning the DEITY, immateriality, spirit, &c., which he apparently believes to be true" (Essays, 870). In the same review, Poe gives a half-dismissive account of "The Colloquy of Monos and Una": "The style, we think, is good. Its philosophy is damnable; but this does not appear to have been a point with the author, whose purpose, doubtless, was novelty of effect – a novelty brought about by the tone of the colloquy" (Essays, 871). As he sprinkles his commentary with expressions of certainty – "evidently," "apparently," "doubtless" – Poe establishes a tone of duplicity that makes the sincerity of any given tale secondary to the protocols of interpretation and belief that they take up. Any continuity between these tales seems to confirm Poe's impulse to test his audience as atmospheric effect shades into deliberate hoaxing. In the same way that the attribution of authorship "shifts attention away from the structures that enable the production of print-authority," according to Meredith McGill, the demand for sincerity shifts attention away from the procedures that move readers to credulity, whether at the level of abstract tenets or imagined sense impressions. William Butler Yeats dismissed "The Pit and the Pendulum as "an appeal to the nerves by tawdry physical affrightments," but it may be impossible to take the tale seriously on its own terms without first agreeing with him.

The emphasis on effect in Poe's literary criticism fits well with his often-stated view that beauty, not truth, is the proper aim of poetry. He values the brief excitation of lyric poetry above the sustained verisimilitude of epic poems or even novels, where the unity of effect proves to be both impossible and superfluous. Truth involves the kind of cognitive distance only possible over a duration that will admit distraction and reflection, while for Poe beauty appears to involve a kind of momentary trance. The same critical principles that guide Poe's verse toward incantatory charm have a very different result in his short tales, where "effect" often translates into sensationalism. Yet for Poe sensationalism is an ideal testing-ground for the study of sensation.

"The Pit and the Pendulum" establishes a paradoxical relationship between abstracts and particulars. From the narrator's point-of-view, every attempt to impose rational order on the upheavals of momentary experience proves short-lived. But at the level of structural irony the entire progress of the tale appears deterministic, every twinge of sensibility a function of the mechanized setting. The hallucinatory experience of the senses during reading depends on their autonomy from outer influences but also their subordination to language. In this way, the tale lays out a necessary contradiction in Poe's conception of literary effect: the work and the senses both figure as self-enclosed systems that somehow include each other. In "The Pit and the Pendulum," this conceptual fault finds its expression in the tenuous separation of the narrator from the apparatus of his chamber; the tale dramatizes the mind as it is subjected to a mechanistic metaphor of mind.

The pendulum's gradual descent meets with rising agitation, while its regularity drives the narrator to frenzy. Poe captures these dynamics at the sentence level through conspicuous repetition and variation. As the pendulum descends, three successive paragraphs begin with small variations on the same short sentence:

1. Down – steadily down it crept.
2. Down – certainly, relentlessly down!
3. Down – still unceasingly – still inevitably down!

The sequence of adverbs here jumps between virtual synonyms, yet with increasing portent, while the expansion of the syntax with each repetition mimics the pendulum's widening sweep: seven syllables, nine, thirteen. The narrator has internalized the rhythm of the pendulum not only in his descriptive language but in his body. We learn, after the fact, that the narrator has protected his food from the rats with a pendulous movement of his free hand: "I had fallen into an habitual see-saw, or wave of the hand about the platter; and, at length, the unconscious uniformity of the movement deprived it of effect" (Tales, 502). The narrator plots his escape when he realizes that the rats snapping at his fingers have a much simpler sense of danger, attuned to lifelike movement but not steady metronomic rhythm: "they wait but for motionlessness on my part to make me their prey" (Tales, 502). The narrator's fascination with "measured movement" proves to be a human trait; it must be set aside as he imagines the mind of a rat. Once the narrator lies still, the rats swarm him despite the nearness of the swinging blade: "The measured movement of the pendulum disturbed them not at all" (Tales, 503).

The torture of the pendulum effectively transforms time from a reliable empirical measure into a detached aesthetic experience. Instead of giving the material world stability and continuity, the steady beat of the pendulum heightens the narrator's dread until each stroke produces a psychosomatic response: "I gasped and struggled at each vibration. I shrunk convulsively at its every sweep" (Tales, 501). After the narrator begins his captivity feeling his way across a stone floor, an extreme of empiricism bordering on caricature, the tale maneuvers its reader from concrete sensation toward a blend of fancy and deduction that more resembles reading. When Poe aestheticizes time, narrowing the scope of his fiction to a ticking clock and a steady twitching of the nerves, he conversely gives literary effect a physiological actuality that takes the mereness out of fancy. Speculatively, Poe pictured his readers laying down "The Pit and the Pendulum" only to hear once again the ticking clock in a quiet room.

"The Rationale of Verse"

The frequently disorienting experience of time in Poe's tales seems remote from the meticulous timing of his poetry, yet the difference of genre provides a principle of explanation. The wobbly chronology of the tales - with "The Pit and the Pendulum" as a prime example – forcibly separates the experience of time from its habitual role in ordering the diegetic world. The experiential rhythm of Poe's tales obscures the imagined timeline of the fictional world in order to actualize all the more vividly the subjective time of reading. This approach involves conspicuous authorial interference and often renders the mediation of language opaque, but at the same time Poe tropes literary effect as having an almost objective character. The poetry achieves the same end through different means. The control of time in Poe's theory of verse, as opposed to its disruption in his fiction, stabilizes the category of poetry despite the flux of culture and

custom. To this end, "The Rationale of Verse" (1848) addresses the many irksome discrepancies between the received rules of prosody and the spoken sounds of poetry. The contradictory report of touch and vision in "The Pit and the Pendulum" returns as a disagreement between the eye and the ear, demanding another set of rationalizations.

In this article, Poe insists that past attempts to describe prosody have proceeded from "gross irrationality and subservience to authority," and he proposes to sweep away the arbitrary rules of scansion by revealing the intrinsic laws of verse (Essays, 31). Where he usually denigrates epic for far outlasting the reader's attention span, this time around Poe bemoans the misleading effect of its cultural pride of place, complaining that the *Iliad* "was made to stand in stead of Nature and common sense" (Essays, 32). Poe bypasses the copious archives of scholarship (in theory but not in the ostentatious erudition of his prose) by appealing directly to the facts of human sensibility.

The argument begins with the faculties but pointedly not the Aristotelian pleasure in imitation: "Verse originates in the human enjoyment of equality, fitness. To this enjoyment, all the moods of verse – rhythm, metre, stanza, rhyme, alliteration, the *refrain*, and other analogous effects – are to be referred" (Essays, 33). Poe clarifies and broadens the meaning of equality to extend beyond purely quantitative concepts: "Its idea embraces those of similarity, proportion, identity, repetition, and adaptation or fitness" (Essays, 33). Poe claims that verse "cannot be better designated than as an inferior or less capable music" in which "there is, luckily, little chance for complexity. Its rigidly simple character not even Science – not even Pedantry can greatly pervert" (Essays, 34).

In this article, metrical composition approaches the status of mechanical recording, dependent on physiological constants to transmit its melodies intact. Insofar as Poe countenances the formalized rules of classical scansion, he re-derives them from an abstracted body, such that the lengthening in Latin scansion of a vowel followed by two consecutive consonants rests upon "the physical difficulty of giving voice to such syllables" rather than the authority of "pedants" (Essays, 35). Instead of charting the historical development of verse, Poe creates a self-consciously speculative narrative that explains all the complexities of rhythm, rhyme, and stanzaic form as progressive variations upon the germ of the spondee, the unit in which the human pleasure in equal proportions finds its most simple verbal expression: "It must be observed that in suggesting these processes I assign them no date; nor do I even insist upon their order" (Essays, 37). This is a strange sort of history, unfolding from the logic of the medium rather than any documented series of innovations. For this kind of history, in which an abstract principle unfolds its preexisting potential over time, the dates will come when they come.

Poe will countenance an oral culture when it supports his theory that all of poetic convention has sprung from the impulse toward increasingly complex equalities of sound. "Lines being once introduced, the necessity of distinctly defining these lines *to the ear,*(as yet written verse does not exist,) would lead to a scrutiny of their capabilities *at their terminations*: - and how would spring up the idea of equality in sound between the final syllables – in other words, of *rhyme*" (Essays, 37). Once rhyme appears, Poe speculates, its application to trochaic and dactylic rhythms must spur the invention of double and triple rhymes, "as the chief force of rhyme must lie in the accented syllable" (Essays, 37). The scarcity of rhyme in classical poetry does not appear to give Poe much pause.

Poe's understanding of poetry as artifice does not lead him toward the enclosure of a shared tradition, whether founded on the scene of oral recitation or the archives of the pedants who seem to besiege him, but instead toward forms of logical abstraction:

The fact is that *Quantity* is a point in whose investigation the lumber of mere learning may be dispensed with, if ever in any. Its appreciation is universal. It appertains to no region, race, nor aera in especial. To melody and to harmony the Greeks hearkened with ears precisely similar to those which we employ for similar purposes at present; and I should not be condemned for heresy in asserting that a pendulum at Athens would have vibrated much after the same fashion as does a pendulum in the city of Penn. (Essays, 32)

The pun would be even better if he had written from Pittsburgh. Poe defers the rhythmic consequences of linguistic difference by framing the medium of verse as a constellation of instruments: the ear, the pendulum. His insistence upon "similar" purposes and "precisely similar" ears treats cultural and physical variations as matters of geometric scale irrelevant to the play of proportion, as if purposes could be similar in the same way as triangles. Oddly, though, Poe announces his scientific discoveries in the field of verse in words that recall his earlier juxtaposition of heresy and chronometry in "The Pit and the Pendulum."

Verse acquires a rationale at the same time that it behaves like a metronome; the clockwork of reason follows the clockwork of a clock. A "rationale," according to the Oxford English Dictionary, denotes "a reasoned exposition of principles," whether for the purpose of explanation or justification, but also "the fundamental underlying reason for or rational basis of a thing" (OED). The sense of the word is divided between superficial description and inward necessity, often to the effect of suggesting that the former will reveal the latter. The term "form" displays a similar ambivalence between extrinsic and intrinsic description. Notably, a "rationale" is also the breast-plate of a high-priest, such as Moses was commanded to make for Aaron, as well as an ornamental garment worn by bishops (OED). This term of logical determinism is not so far removed from questions of heresy as one might think.

Poe compares the pleasure caused by similar quantities of sound to those produced by observing the geometric facets of a cut crystal: "On bringing to view a second face in all respects similar to the first, this pleasure seems to be squared; on bringing to view a third it seems to be cubed, and so on. I have no doubt, indeed, that the delight experienced, if measurable, would be found to have exact mathematical relations such as I suggest; that is to say, as far as a certain point, beyond which there would be a decrease in similar relations" (Essays, 33). The calculus of aesthetic pleasure includes the theory of limits. Poe's aesthetic theory combines an element of absolute conviction ("I have no doubt…exact mathematical relations") with the conspicuous traces of a limiting point-of-view ("all respects *similar…seems* to be squared…*if* measurable, *would* be found"). The announcement of definite formulaic laws triggers a compensatory cluster of subjective markers. At the sentence level, individual sensibility may soften Poe's arguments into an elaborate conceit, yet a conceit pleasurable for the unexpected symmetry it imposes (sometimes) upon the resistant facts of literary history.[12]

When Poe distinguishes between rhythm and meter, he does not differentiate the contingencies of sound from the abstract pattern of scansion, but instead makes a narrower distinction between "the *character* of feet" and "the *number* of these feet" (Essays, 33). This is

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[12] But in the Kantian definition, aesthetic judgment is like a private mathematics, universally true for a single observer.

the difference, Poe explains, between "a sequence of dactyls," however many, and "a line or measure consisting of six of these dactyls" (Essays 33).

The difficulties that Poe circumvents in his curiously narrow distinction between rhythm and meter all return when he differentiates between quantity, accent, and emphasis. Despite his insistence on quantity, Poe does not maintain that all long and short syllables share the same actual length, "but for the purposes of verse we suppose a long syllable equal to two short ones: - and the natural deviations from this relativeness we correct in perusal" (Essays, 35). Once this pragmatic observation has opened the minimal gap between metrical quantity and spoken duration, the argument navigates with increasing caution between the traces of arbitrary convention and the intrinsic laws of verse:

> The more closely our long syllables approach this relation with our short ones, the better, *ceteris paribus*, will be our verse: but if the relation does not exist of itself, we force it by emphasis, which can, of course, make any syllable as long as desired; - or, by an effort we can pronounce with unnatural brevity a syllable that is naturally too long. *Accented* syllables are of course always long – but where *un*encumbered with consonants, must be pronounced among the *unnaturally* long. Mere custom has declared that we shall accent them – that is to say, dwell upon them; but no inevitable lingual difficulty forces us to do so. (Essays, 35)

Poe frets over the fact that two readers may pronounce the same line differently, some with a musical rhythm and some not. While the quantity of syllables has the regularity of a metronome, according to Poe, the emphasis given to individual words does not seem to possess any rationale of its own: "Any one who has taken the trouble to examine the topic of emphasis, (by which I here mean not *accent* of particular syllables, but the dwelling on entire words,) must have seen that men emphasize in the most singularly arbitrary manner" (48). "Little uniformity of emphasis prevails; because the thing itself – the idea, emphasis, – is referable to no natural – at least to no well comprehended and therefore uniform law. Beyond a very narrow and vague limit, the whole matter is conventionality" (48).

Poe ridicules the accentual scansion that Coleridge proposes in his preface to "Christabel" as a "nonsensical *system*" for what appears to him as an underdetermined sense of rhythm. Most of the preface preemptively rebuts charges of plagiarism, owing to the poem's long circulation in manuscript before publication, but the final sentences describe the its rhythmic experiment: "the meter of Christabel is not, properly speaking, irregular, though it may seem so from its being founded on a new principle: namely, that of counting in each line the accents, not the syllables" (Essays, 69). Coleridge also answers the presumed charge that this accentual line is arbitrary in construction compared to quantitative or accentual-syllabic meters: "this occasional variation in number of syllables is not introduced wantonly, or for the mere ends of convenience, but in correspondence with some transition, in the nature of the imagery or passion" (Essays, 69).

Instead of countenancing the interplay of quantity and stress in English verse, Poe invents a style of scansion that defines each short syllable as a precise fraction of the long. As Poe argues, these numerical markings account for how short a short syllable must be to preserve the foot as a unit of time, while traditional markers of long and short leave relative time to be sounded out by trial and error. This type of scansion resembles musical notation, with the long syllable as its whole note, and in theory minimizes the differences between metrical pattern and oral performance: "the scansion and the reading flow should go hand in hand" (Essays, 61).

Once he has defended quantity as the starting-point for versification, Poe makes the counter-intuitive gesture of contradicting the classical rules for quantitative scansion. He cannot abide the discrepancy between the formal scansion of lines and "the reading flow universally given them, and never denied them, by even the most obstinate and stolid of scholars" (Essays, 62).

Poe's theories have a tendency to vindicate his literary feuds. His insistence on quantity justifies his distaste for Coleridge's "Christabel," while his theory that ancient verse springs from the unit of the spondee gives him a reason chide Longfellow and Cornelius Felton for the preponderance of dactyls in their imitations of Greek hexameter. His objection is not that this makes bad meter but that it is rhythmically unlike Greek poetry. "In the construction of verse," Poe asserts, "*melody* should never be left out of view; yet this is the point which all our Prosodies have must unaccountably foreborne to touch" (Essays, 29). The analogy between poetry and music depends on quantity: "The perception of pleasure in the equality of sounds is the principle of *Music*. Unpracticed ears can appreciate only simple equalities, such as are found in ballad airs" (Essays, 33). Northrop Frye reminds us that "musical diction is better suited for the grotesque and horrible, or for invective and abuse" than for the "dreamy sensuous flow of sound" in Keats or Tennyson.[13] Frye aligns Poe with the fragmentary rhythm of lyric, but Poe's overriding cadences tend toward the strict sense of musical verse rather than the sentimental. Coleridge compares the early English and Italian poets to their inferior modern counterparts who compose poems "having in their very mechanism a specific overpowering tune, to which the generous reader humours his voice and emphasis, with more indulgence to the author than attention to the meaning or quantity of the words" (BL, 329). In comparison to "the numerous sounds of Greek and Roman poets," Coleridge finds the effect of this controlling rhythm "not unlike that of galloping over a paved road in a German stage-wagon without springs" (*BL*, 329).

The phantom orality central to Poe's theory places him in alignment with the general aesthetics of Romanticism, yet the geometric abstraction of his poetics associates the disembodied lyric voice with the conditions of mechanical reproduction in unusually explicit terms. Assuming the context of print to precede that of recitation, Poe dismisses lines that require the intermediary of an oral tradition or even a rhythmically adept reader: "*That* rhythm is erroneous, (at some point or other more or less obvious,) which *any* ordinary reader *can*, without design, read improperly" (Essays, 48). Poe seems not to have recalled the element of rhythmic contortionism that gives his trickier lines their puzzle-like pleasure. An impromptu recitation of "The Raven" is a feat best left to the nimble-tongued:

> `Prophet!' said I, `thing of evil! - prophet still, if bird or devil! -
> Whether tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here ashore,
> Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted -
> On this home by horror haunted - tell me truly, I implore -
> Is there - *is* there balm in Gilead? - tell me - tell me, I implore!'
> Quoth the raven, `Nevermore.'

Here, the sense of the lines works against the cadence that the preceding stanzas have trained the reader to repeat; the stanza's second line requires the reader to resist the natural pause after "sent" and insert a weak caesura after the second "whether" (or at least heighten the stress on its

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[13] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1957), 256.

first syllable). Meanwhile, the stanza's penultimate line depends for its coherence on drastic shifts of emphasis upon identically repeated phrases. So, yes, Poe breaks his own rules, but whether or not this critical principle inspires any great confidence in the author's sincerity, it does establish seamless reproducibility as a precondition of aesthetic worth. Lines insusceptible of immediate performance must seek refuge in the author's mouth: "The chief thing in the way of this species of rhythm, is the necessity which it imposes upon the poet of traveling in constant company with his compositions" (Essays, 49). In the age of mass culture, genius goes door to door.

Poe's fixation on rhythm spills over from his theory of versification to the subject-matter of his fiction, where the differentiated sounds of speech mark the threshold of ordinary human experience. "The Pit and the Pendulum" begins with the vanishing of language: "The sentence – the dread sentence of death – was the last of distinct accentuation which reached my ears" (Tales, 491). Poe's punning between the legal and grammatical meanings of "sentence" aligns the arbitrary law of the Inquisition with the mechanics of language. Both are opaque in this moment. The sentence, even with its "distinct accentuation," may not cohere into meaningful words over and above the familiar pulsations of speech. Faced with the horror of a death sentence, the narrator's consciousness regresses to a prelinguistic state. "After that," Poe continues, "the sound of the inquisitorial voices seemed merged in one dreamy indeterminate hum" (Tales, 491). Even the accentuation of speech vanishes into mechanical sound, like "the burr of a mill wheel" (Tales, 491). The tale concludes too with "a discordant hum of human voices" that signals the approach of the rescuing army (Tales, 505). Language fades into noise as the tale begins and as it ends the human voice just barely registers. Between these points, the narrator experiences himself as a disorganized bundle of faculties.

After its lengthy preamble, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" begins with the sound of mysterious voices: "EXTRAORDINARY MURDERS. – This morning, about three o'clock, the inhabitants of the Quartier St. Roch were aroused from sleep by a succession of terrific shrieks" (Tales, 405). A linguistic disturbance precedes the grisly details of the crime scene, first "horrific shrieks" and then "two or more rough voices, in angry contention" (Tales, 405). According to Dupin, "syllabification" is the last measure of human language, universal to all tongues. The absence of cadence, of some base rhythm, marks the loss of consciousness and rationality. The murderer speaks with "a voice foreign in tone to the ears of men of many nations, and devoid of all distinct syllabification" (Tales, 423). Notably, the "men of many nations" are Europeans and Americans, such that Poe's statements achieve an equivocal universality, one that creates a notion of the human within a limited and ambiguous scope. When the narrator proposes that this is the voice of a madman (one archetype of the poet, albeit an unfortunate one), Dupin permits with benign condescension that the idea is "not irrelevant" (Tales, 423). Not irrelevant, but still wrong. "Madmen are of some nation," Dupin clarifies, "and their language, however incoherent in its words, has always the coherence of syllabification" (Tales, 423).

Poe's fascination with the inhuman utterance of the orangutan, unable to be placed in any recognizable language, shades into his interest in cryptography. The insight that allows Dupin to distinguish between the speech of a foreigner and the meaningless vocalizations of an animal, also underlies Poe's claim that he can unpuzzle any alphabetic cipher, discerning the patterns of language in the gibberish of code. The minimal rhythm of syllable after syllable sets language apart from raw sound, while the pattern of letter frequency distinguishes a cipher from a pure jumble of letters. These features offers the bare shape of language without disclosing any particular content.

In "The Man that was Used Up," the narrator seeks out General John A.B.C. Smith, a veteran of "the Bugaboo and Kickapoo campaign" only to discover that this paragon of masculinity has become more machine than man (Tales, 310). The most surprising prosthetic transforms the general's voice. The narrator describes the general as having "one of the smallest, and altogether the funniest little voices, between a squeak and a whistle, that I ever heard in all the days of my existence" (Tales, 314). The general speaks through an artificial palette, "a somewhat singular-looking machine," that modifies his squeak into a voice of "rich melody and strength" (Tales, 314). This assault on the voice is the tale's most surreal moment, when the difference between human presence and mechanical effect becomes hardest to parse.

"The principle of equality, in verse, admits, it is true, of variation at certain points, for the relief of monotone, as I have already shown, but the point of *time* is that point which, being the rudimental one, must never be tampered with at all" (Essays, 43).

"The Philosophy of Composition"

"The Rationale of Verse" attends to the musical sounds of poetry in virtual isolation from semantic content, with barely a hint that poetic fitness embraces both sound and sense. The closest connection between sound and significance comes when Poe touches on the topic of refrain; the varied application of a repeated phrase, he observes, "is not strictly a rhythmical effect *alone*" (Essays, 41). But Poe restricts his remarks on the "application" of words to the microcosm of refrain, where verbal meaning has a suggestive relationship to the rhythmic effects of repetition and variation. Of course, "The Rationale of Verse" offers an account of refrain familiar from Poe's earlier criticism. In particular, "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846) includes a more sustained attempt to resolve the problematic relationship between form and content without compromising the primacy of sound and effect over the imitative function of poetic language; Poe simultaneously constructs and sabotages a theory in which sense must echo sound. But the relation of signifier and signified opens into the broader problem of tone.

Northrop Frye defines the rhythm of lyric as "an oracular, meditative, irregular, unpredictable, and essentially discontinuous rhythm, emerging from the coincidences of the sound pattern" (271). "With the Romantic movement a sense that the 'true voice of feeling' was unpredictable and irregular in its rhythm began to increase. Poe's *Poetic Principle* maintains that poetry is *essentially* oracular and discontinuous, that the poetic *is* the lyrical, and that verse *epos* consists really of lyrical passages stuck together with versified prose. This is a manifesto of the ironic age, as Wordsworth's preface was a low mimetic one, and announces the arrival of a third period of technical experiment in English literature, in which the object is to liberate the distinctive rhythm of lyric" (272).

Friedrich Kittler points to the syllable, rather than the letter or the word, as the basic unit of language in Romanticism: "Every culture has different techniques and standards to govern the concrete manipulation of language. The threshold that determines the possible extent and usefulness of analyses differentiates discourse networks from one another. In 1800 the threshold was drawn at the minimal element of significant sounds and sound combinations" (42). The poetic voice in Poe tends toward what Friedrich Kittler calls the "minimal signified," a unit of meaning that takes the syllable rather than the word as its point of origin. This concept has its limit in the exhaled "oh" of poetic apostrophe, an expression of spirit without an accompanying meaning. "In 1800," writes Kittler, "linguistic analysis was not allowed to approach the two forbidden borders of the word and the letter. Instead, analysis was confined within the concept of

the root, as instituted by a new science of language" (43). In this theory, language grows from the suggestive power of the single syllable, "a minimal element that unifies sound and meaning, Nature and Spirit" (43). Meanwhile, according to Dupin in Poe's first detective story, "syllabification" marks the threshold at which human speech becomes sheer animal noise.

Poe shares the impulse to derive meaning and even narrative from the rudiment of sound, but his account of the poetic voice exposes its artificial underpinnings instead of masking mediation beneath tropes of authorial presence or spontaneous impassioned utterance. Kittler frames his analysis of the "minimal signified" around scenes of mother-child pedagogy both as social practice and as a pervasive literary motif. According to Kittler, the mediation of writing through the mother's mouth promoted an understanding of literary language rooted in the voice and in nature and so "freed children from books."[14] The Romantic master-trope of living language does not exclude the ideas of mechanism or automatism but rather subsumes and mitigates them. Explaining his refrain, Poe expresses the kind of natural continuity between sound and sense offered in Kittler's figure of the mother's mouth, but his explanation focuses on the mechanics of speech letter by letter: "That such a close, to have force, must be sonorous and susceptible of protracted emphasis, admitted no doubt: and these considerations inevitably led me to the long *o* as the most sonorous vowel, in connection with *r* as the most producible consonant" (Essays, 18). There is a subtle difference between the Despite his insistence on the qualities of voice, Poe finds his chosen effects in qualities of sound that are only secondarily qualities of meaning. But in the same moment his logic back-constructs the mood of individual sounds from the words they compose, such as "sonorous" and "nevermore." Familiarity with the poem makes the word "nevermore" feel nearly inevitable as Poe's refrain: "In fact, it was the very first which presented itself" (Essays, 18).

The essay's claims about sound lead toward more encompassing questions about tone, both tied to the disjuncture between print and voice. The essay's central claims about poetic effect appear completely in earnest despite the many passages of reasoning that are as obviously facetious and factitious. Poe praises novelists who plot backwards from the ending, exhorts poets to reason backwards from a desired effect, and leaves little doubt that many steps in his writing process are themselves fanciful back-constructions from a completed poem.

In a deconstructive reading of "The Philosophy of Composition," Barbara Johnson argues that Poe's ruse of total artifice paradoxically points back toward the imitation of both objects and passions.[15] The objects of language may be perpetually deferred, she implies, but the signifier is never quite empty enough to dull the loss it marks: "Repetition engenders it own compulsion-to-sense. Poetry works *because* the signifier cannot remain empty – because, not in spite, of the mechanical nature of its artifice" (99). By the same token, the too-familiar paraphernalia of the Gothic ultimately vivifies the poem: "Poe writes a poem packed with clichés in order to show that those clichés cannot succeed in remaining empty, that there is a natural passion involved in repetition, that the mechanical is of a piece with the profoundest pain" (99). Johnson reads Poe as a deconstruction of Wordsworth, and vice versa. Accidental passions haunt Poe's hollow signs, while linguistic artifice both subtends and disturbs Wordsworth's poetic animism. Further, Johnson argues that Poe's backwards method turns "The Philosophy of Composition" into a depiction of the reading experience instead of the writing process (98). Johnson might have gone

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[14] Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, 34.

[15] Barbara Johnson, "Strange Fits: Poe and Wordsworth on the Nature of Poetic Language," in *A World of Difference* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

a step further to say that "The Raven" appears to write itself as the essay maneuvers its audience through a rereading.

Garrett Stewart echoes Poe's conviction that literary effect cannot outlive a single sitting: "All is over when the fever pitch of the moment wanes" (61). "For Poe," writes Stewart, "strident violations of every prose norm are the very stuff of his innovation, the true allure of his lurid verbal turmoil, whose rotary agitation of syllables presses forward relentlessly, motoring its own local climaxes, even while driving their narrators mad – or madder" (62). Under the pressure of this compulsive style, argues Stewart, "Poe's resuscitated gothic, dredged from the preceding century, is tortured into a parody of an intervening Romanticism, with its cult of sensitivity and its redemption of paranoia by pathetic fallacy" (63). Where Meredith McGill explains the introversion of Poe's stories as an adaptation to a market saturated with reprinted and anonymous text, Stewart views Poe's self-involved style as an ongoing formal experiment with emotional and sensory feedback.[16] According to Stewart, Poe's excessive prose "isn't a typical matter of form answering to content in the tremors of frenzy or dementia" but instead a means of emptying fiction of virtually everything but "the abjection of mere lettering" (62).

In this way, Stewart draws together the impulse toward significant syllables with the seemingly opposed fascination with opaque cryptographic symbols. Stewart asserts "a subterranean bond between the cryptographic instinct and a more unmotivated phonological undertone, between a semantics of concealment and the ephemeral antics of syllabic echoism" (67). This bond takes the form of "irrational addiction to the signifier"; Poe's cryptographic attention to the frequency of letters, in Stewart's view, corresponds to the suggestive recurrence of sound in his verse and prose (66). Ciphers reduce language into pure babble, but then so does uncurbed lyricism.

The frame of experiment coordinates Poe's genres but does not for that reason explain away his variable tone. Northrop Frye diagnoses Poe's stylistic moodswings between overt chicanery and breathless mysticism as a consequence of a heavily lyricized style: "There is a perilous balance in paranomasia between verbal wit and hypnotic incantation" (276). Poe recognizes and manipulates this tipping-point in his style. His commentary on "The Raven" describes "the force of contrast" between comedy and despair: "For example, an air of the fantastic – approaching as nearly to the ludicrous as was admissible – is given to the Raven's entrance" (Essays, 22). The poem's Gothic ingredients already hover between silliness and portent in a way that calls for Poe to elicit light mockery before he aims for pathos: "The effect of the *denouement* being thus provided for, I immediately drop the fantastic for a tone of the most profound seriousness" (Essays, 23). "From this epoch the lover no longer jests," Poe announces, but with this declaration his commentary also becomes more serious; the final paragraphs of the essay no longer strain credibility with comical feats of deductive reasoning. Poe's criticism duplicates his poetic strategy: "This revolution of thought, or fancy, on the lover's part, is intended to induce a similar one on the part of the reader – to bring the mind into a proper frame for the *denouement* – which is now brought about as rapidly and as *directly* as possible" (Essays, 23). The conclusion of the essay depends increasingly on quotations from "The Raven," giving the last word to the poem itself instead of the poet, a demonstration of effect following on the heels of its demystification.

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[16] Stewart's focus on prose poetics rather than lyrical poetics leads him to produce a contrast between Poe and Austen that comes uncannily close to Barbara Johnson's comparison of Poe and Wordsworth.

Poe continually adopts the tropes of rationalism for his own compulsive purposes, with the strange result that he appears to have parodied genres that did not yet exist, or that he himself would pioneer. "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," the first of Poe's self-styled tales of ratiocination, travesties the detective story in the process of discovering it. "The Philosophy of Composition" resembles the formalist readings of New Criticism more closely than the periodical criticism of Poe's contemporaries, except that it anachronistically pokes fun at their hermetic reasoning. As an aside, Northrop Frye identifies the tendency in New Criticism "to extract the lyrical rhythm from all genres," while he also notes Poe's tendency to excerpt lyrical passages from the sustained genre of epic (273). In the case of Dupin, though, one might argue that the detective story's disentanglement from the residual trappings of Gothic literature resembles self-parody. And, in the same vein, one might argue that Poe wishes his deliberate wit in "The Philosophy of Composition" to appear every bit as preternatural as the oracular genius it displaces. But nonetheless there is a self-defeated impulse in these texts that will not obligingly vanish in the face of this broad contextualization.

In many ways, Poe lures his reader from demystification into credulity, from distance into strange sympathy. The renunciation of madness is a frequent gesture for Poe. In his tales, the denial of madness signals an unreliable narrator. This is the first gesture in "Eleanora": "I come of a race noted for vigor of fancy and ardor of passion. Men have called me mad; but the question is not yet settled, whether madness is or is not the loftiest intelligence" (468). "The Mystery of Marie Roget" begins on a related note: "There are few persons, ever among the calmest thinkers, who have not occasionally been startled into a vague yet thrilling half-credence in the supernatural" (Tales, 506). "The Black Cat" does it again: "For the most wild, yet most homely narrative which I am about to pen, I neither expect nor solicit belief. Mad indeed would I be to expect it, in a case where my very senses reject their own evidence. Yet, mad am I not – and very surely do I not dream" (Tales, 597). "The Tell-Tale Heart" brings this tendency to its extreme: "True! – nervous – very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why *will* you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses – not destroyed – not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute" (Tales, 555). Even the comparatively calm narrator of "The Man of the Crowd" alludes to some illness in his recent past, just a moment after the tale begins with the idea that men die of their secrets: "There are some secrets which do not permit themselves to be told. Men die nightly in their beds, wringing the hands of ghostly confessors, and looking them piteously in the eyes – die with despair of heart and convulsion of throat, on account of the hideousness of mysteries which will not *suffer themselves* to be revealed" (Tales, 388). The denial of madness seems constitutive to Poe's aesthetic pose, an analogous position to his refusal of intuition. In each of these cases, the threat of madness carries with it the question of mediation, of heightened sense and bodily agitation, of the symptoms generated by unspeakable thoughts, those in search of their fit medium of expression.

Next to these invocations of madness, Poe's habitual dismissal of intuitive and irrational states becomes all the more suspect. In "The Philosophy of Composition," his fictional denial of madness echoes in a critical refutation of pure poetic inspiration: "Most writers – poets in especial – prefer having it understood that they compose by a species of fine frenzy – an ecstatic intuition – and would positively shudder at letting the public take a peep behind the scenes, at the elaborate and vacillating crudities of thought" (Essays, 14). Poe's thesis: "It is my design to render it manifest that no one point in its composition is referable either to accident or intuition – that the work proceeded, step by step, to its completion with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem" (Essays, 15). Poe's capacity to rationalize each feature of "The

Raven," albeit often in ridiculous ways, affirms his authorship of the poem. He demonstrates that "The Raven" is a machine that Poe understands, even if his specific reasoning appears too far-fetched to serve as a useful model for aspiring poets. It is a singular feat of literary effect that "The Philosophy of Composition" stages such a tongue-in-cheek string of deductions without reducing its thesis to a pure punchline.

For instance, once he has settled on the device of refrain, Poe searches for a plausible reason to repeat his refrain: "Here, then, immediately arose the idea of a *non*-reasoning creature capable of speech; and, very naturally, a parrot, in the first instance, suggested itself, but was superceded forthwith by a Raven, as equally capable of speech, and infinitely more in keeping with the intended *tone*" (Essays, 18). The uneasy marriage of tone-deaf reason and lyrical atmosphere cannot outlive the thought of a parrot squawking out "nevermore" at the poem's melancholic speaker. Poe begins the piece by alluding to his correspondence with Dickens, prompted by his review of *Barnaby Rudge*. Poe wrote two, one before and one after discovering the novel's ending. The second of these pieces appeared in *Graham's Magazine* in February1842, and so may have been familiar to the readers who would later encounter "The Philosophy of Composition" in 1846. Notably, Poe's review of *Barnaby Rudge* dwells for a moment on the talking raven: "The raven, too, intensely amusing as it is, might have been made, more than we see it, a portion of the conception of the fantastic Barnaby. Its croakings might have been *prophetically* heard in the course of the drama" (243). Poe excerpts his earlier piece, a self-styled "*prospective notice,*" in *Graham's Magazine*. Poe concludes, "if we did not rightly prophesy, yet, at least, our prophecy *should have been* right" (Essays, 235).

"Masque of the Red Death"

In "The Philosophy of Composition," Poe enigmatically claims in that "a close *circumscription of space* is absolutely necessary to the effect of insulated incident: - it has the force of a frame to a picture. It has an indisputable moral power in keeping concentrated the attention, and, of course, must not be confounded with mere unity of place" (Essays, 21). The interior in this sense has almost nothing to do with actual architecture; it is not a location but a dislocation, a partition from the common run of experience. And sometimes, for Poe, the circumscription of space is even necessary to the incidents themselves, as in "The Premature Burial," where it takes only a low ceiling and an active imagination to send the narrator into histrionics.

For his "Philosophy of Furniture," and his detective stories, Walter Benjamin has dubbed Poe "the first physiognomist of the domestic interior."[17] Benjamin theorizes "the phantasmagorias of the interior," the redefinition of domestic space as it is increasingly defined against the commercial character of public space (9). Benjamin styles the interior as "the asylum of art," the domain of the collector (9). "The collector dreams his way not only into a distant or bygone world but also into a better one – one in which, to be sure, human beings are no better provided with what they need than in the everyday world, but in which things are freed from the drudgery of being useful" (9). Benjamin describes the surreal experience of fetishized objects, whether in the market or the home, through the metaphor of the phantasmagoria; individual connoisseurship places its objects into a kind of shadow theater as surely as their abstraction into

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[17] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 6.

exchange value. The trick rooms in Poe's fiction literalize the notion that interiors are phantasmagoric; his characters surround themselves with peculiar props that exacerbate every hint of unreality. When he doesn't simply stuff corpses beneath the floorboards and behind the walls, he assembles the nightmare furnishings of "Ligeia" or "The Masque of the Red Death," backdrops that turn the interior into a non-metaphorical phantasmagoria, or even a kind of narrative engine in the case of "The Pit and the Pendulum."

The furnishings in "Masque of the Red Death" prove far more vivid than the tale's minimal characters or its allegorical plot. Before the nameless guests fall victim to the story's plague they are smothered by its décor. Poe makes the comparison to theater: "There were much glare and glitter and piquancy and phantasm – much of what has been since seen in 'Hernani'" (Tales, 487). Notably, "glitter" and "glare" are both qualities derided in "The Philosophy of Furniture" for their tendency of overwhelming the eye. The crypt of fiction has many windows but none opening directly onto the exterior: "There was no light of any kind emanating from lamp or candle within the suite of chambers. But in the corridors that followed the suite, there stood, opposite to each window, a heavy tripod, bearing a brazier of fire that projected its rays through the tinted glass and so glaringly illumined the room" (Tales, 486).

Hawthorne takes up the same essential scenario in "Lady Eleanore's Mantle," a tale that imagines the colonial governor's haughty young relation, the title character, as the cause of Boston's 1721 smallpox epidemic. This tale first appeared in the December 1838 issue of *The United States Democratic Review* before finding its way into the expanded edition of *Twice-Told Tales* in 1842. Poe's review of the book appeared in the same issue of *Graham's Magazine* that included the tale then titled "Mask of the Red Death. A Fantasy." Robert Regan speculates that the immense overlap between Poe's story and Hawthorne's series "Legends of the Province House," and especially "Lady Eleanore's Mantle," amounts to a playful case of plagiarism, in tension with Poe's claim that Hawthorne lifted a scene from "William Wilson."[18] The review and the tale form a doubled commentary on Hawthorne, an intermittently fictional critique paired with a tacitly critical fiction.

Poe pares away historical details, perhaps to simulate Prospero's retreat from the outer world, but the same labor removes the overt traces of Hawthorne's influence, replacing historical characters with allegorical figures. In its vague historical backdrop and scarcity of lived detail, "Masque of the Red Death" ventures far enough into abstraction that it resembles the raw archetype that Hawthorne has merely elaborated, even if Hawthorne got there first. After the disease has disfigured her, Lady Eleanore delivers the moral of the story: "I wrapt myself in PRIDE as in a MANTLE, and scorned the sympathies of nature; and therefore has nature made this wretched body the medium of a dreadful sympathy" (665). According to popular superstition, Hawthorne adds, the ceremonial burning of the mantle has alleviated the epidemic. Poe's rewriting of this scenario excludes any gesture of moral instruction or political optimism. The shift from fictionalized history into pure fantasy precludes any impulse to find political providence or moral satisfaction in the fact that death is a peerless democrat. For Poe, one thinks, death the great equalizer is still first and foremost death, his monarchial "conquerer worm."

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[18] In the review published alongside his tale, Poe accuses Hawthorne of plagiarizing a scene from "William Wilson" for his tale "Howe's Masquerade." Robert Regan argues that Poe's finger-pointing counterbalances his thorough pillaging of the Province-House sketches in "Masque of the Red Death." See Robert Regan, "Hawthorne's "Plagiary": Poe's Duplicity," *Nineteenth-Century FIction* 25, no. 3 (1970).

Hawthorne's characters compose themselves into pictorial groupings with a hint of self-consciousness, as if relishing the pictures they make. Upon exiting her carriage, Lady Eleanore steps down onto a poor man's back: "There was a brief interval during when Lady Eleanore retained this attitude; and never, surely, was there an apter emblem of aristocracy and hereditary pride, tramping on human sympathies and the kindred of nature, than these two figures presented at that moment" (656). Hawthorne pauses over the transitory appeal of fashion:

> The altered taste of the present day – a taste symbolic of a deep change in the whole system of society – would look upon almost any of those gorgeous figures as ridiculous; although that evening the guests sought their reflections in the pier-glasses, and rejoiced to catch their own glitter amid the glittering crowd. What a pity that one of the stately mirrors has not preserved a picture of the scene, which, by the very traits that were so transitory, might have taught us much that would be worth knowing and remembering. (657)

Hawthorne emphasizes the transition from monarchy to democracy, his "deep change in the whole system of society," as he chides the "gorgeous figures" for their quaint vanity. Hawthorne's conception moves between the fleeting impression of "glitter amid the glittering crowd" and the permanence of the "preserved" reflection, a conceit that evokes photography. By contrast, Poe collapses the distinction between self-regard and external scrutiny that gives Hawthorne's imagined picture its need of capturing "the very traits that were so transitory." Instead of freezing in dread whenever the clock chimes, these dancers enjoy glimpsing themselves in the mirror while the authorial voice chides them at a remote historical distance.

Unlike Hawthorne, Poe frames his allegory against abstract time rather than historical remembrance. The enclosure of Prospero's "castellated abbey" echoes the story's detached fantasy setting of the story itself, set in a vague allegorical offshoot of the middle ages. The layout of Prospero's suite exaggerates the effect of isolation: "The apartments were so irregularly disposed that the vision embraced but little more than one at a time. There was a sharp turn at every twenty or thirty yards, and at each turn a novel effect" (Tales, 486). Brett Zimmerman makes the case that the seven chambers occupy a semicircle, turning the suite into half of a clock's face, with one chamber for each digit from six to twelve midnight.[19] Zimmerman also suggests that Prospero and the figure of the Red Death behave as the minute and hour hands of the imaginary clock, one hastening through the rooms as the other walks at a gradual place.

Prospero's compromised moral stance doubles as a statement of aesthetic decadence: "The external world could take care of itself" (Tales, 485). In his review of *Twice-Told Tales,* printed the same month, Poe tests out his theory of effect, complete with its time-limits; according to Poe, in this piece, the short prose tale requires "from a half-hour to one or two hours in its perusal" (Essays, 572). Poe invents a disease with the compression of a good tale: "The whole seizure, progress and termination of the disease, were the incidents of half an hour" (Tales, 485). If one accepts Zimmerman's theory, then Prospero's suite even diagrams this same span of time. And his review takes on a sinister tone given the enclosures of his tales, so frequently laden with hauntings and traps: "During the hour of perusal the soul of the reader is at

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[19] Brett Zimmerman, "Allegoria, Chronographia, and Clock Architecture in "the Masque of the Red Death"," in *Edgar Allan Poe: Rhetoric and Style* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005). In this interpretation Zimmerman elaborates an earlier reading by TK.

the writer's control. There are no external or extrinsic influences – resulting from weariness or interruption" (Essays, 572).

The guests in "Masque of the Red Death" suffer an interruption of their pleasure every hour. Prospero's ebony clock chimes with "so peculiar a note and emphasis that at each lapse of an hour the musicians of the orchestra were constrained to pause, momentarily, in their performance, to harken to the sound; and thus the waltzers perforce ceased their evolutions" (Tales, 487). But for Poe's reader the chiming clock sets the story in motion, recalling the author's attention from the elaborate scenery to the activity of Prospero's unlucky guests. The dancers find their way onto the page when their movement turns to a still pictorial pose. Between the stretches of unmarked time when they recede into the setting, the dancers appear to the reader as they must appear to themselves, frozen in a self-conscious tableau: "while the chimes of the clock yet rang, it was observed that the giddiest grew pale, and the more aged and sedate passed their hands over their brows as if in confused reverie or meditation" (Tales, 487). In this scene, tableau vivant doubles as memento mori. The consciousness of mortality, as it breaks in on transitory pleasure, is at once the cause of the pale cheeks, the substance of the confused reveries, and the ostensible subject of the picture these reactions spontaneously create. The artifice of allegory proves less conspicuous than the narrative mechanism of musicians "constrained to pause" and waltzer "perforce" halted.

Unlike Hawthorne, who concentrates dramatic and thematic undercurrents in the form of tableau, Poe arranges his characters into pictures that are emblematic of little more than their own stillness. The masked ball explicitly turns the figures who populate the story into the figments of fancy, whether that fancy belongs to Prospero, Poe, or the reader:

> To and fro in the seven chambers there stalked, in fact, a multitude of dreams. And these – the dreams – writhed in and about, taking hue from the rooms, and causing the wild music of the orchestra to seem as the echo of their steps. And anon, there strikes the ebony clock which stands in the hall of the velvet. And then, for a moment, all is still, and all is silent save the voice of the clock. The dreams are stiff-frozen as they stand. But the echoes of the chime die away – they have endured but an instant – and a light, half-subdued laughter floats after them as they depart. And now again the music swells, and the dreams live, and writhe to and fro more merrily than ever, taking hue from the many tinted windows through which stream the rays from the tripods. (Tales, 488)

Twice in a short space, Poe notes the effect of the colored rooms on the masked figures, who are described as "taking hue from the rooms" and then as "taking hue from the many tinted windows through which stream the rays from the tripods." Notably, the second statement has a mechanical precision that the first leaves to metaphor. The décor has very literally colored the perception of the guests, but along with the hue of the color-coded rooms these dancers have taken on the peculiar atmosphere of the setting. Poe conveys a pervasive process of suggestion in terms of a specific optical effect. The costumed figures cease to be entirely real under this strange light, becoming instead like the images projected from a magic lantern. And the members of the crowd lack the kind of individual presence that would separate them from the mechanical influence of their surroundings. Even the shock that drives the guests into private reverie begins with the mechanism of the clock.

When the figure of the Red Death appears, Poe turns this supernatural presence into a stage effect: "The figure was tall and gaunt, and shrouded from head to foot in the habiliments of the grave. The mask which concealed the visage was made so nearly to resemble the countenance of a stiffened corpse that the closest scrutiny must have had difficulty in detecting the cheat" (Tales, 489). This phrasing lures the reader toward the idea that this corpse-like countenance is no cheat at all, and the unmasking of this figure reveals nothing beneath the appearance of death. The guests "gasped in unutterable horror at finding the grave-cerements and corpse-like mask which they handled with so violent a rudeness, untenanted by any tangible form" (Tales, 490). Perhaps the guests have unmasked a phantom, and perhaps they have suffered a collective delusion, but they may have torn a sick man limb from limb with the intention of removing a costume that simply isn't there.

In the course of its supernatural allegory, "The Masque of the Red Death" invokes elements of optical science and picturesque aesthetics. But unlike many of Hawthorne's tales, Poe's piece does not rigorously consign its supernatural visions to the eye of the beholder. Hawthorne frequently dramatizes the passage from aesthetic fascination into superstitious credulity so minutely that his apparitions explain themselves away. Poe's conspicuous artifice will not sustain the same fine-grained ambivalence between fact and fancy; instead he implies that the visible world may be no more substantial than his own theater of the bizarre. In his gothic excursions Hawthorne infuses the ordinary world with spiritual intensity, but Poe annihilates it instead.

"The Pit and the Pendulum" was published in *The Gift* only months after "The Mask of the Red Death" (as it was then called) appeared in the May 1842 issue of *Graham's Magazine*. Both tales involve an enclosed space and an unusual clock, but their affinity extends beyond general themes to a moment of apparent self-plagiarism. Just after the narrator has received his death sentence in "The Pit and the Pendulum" he describes the momentary experience of losing consciousness:

> And then there stole into my fancy, like a rich musical note, the thought of what sweet rest there must be in the grave. The thought came gently and stealthily, and it seemed long before it attained full appreciation; but just as my spirit came at length properly to feel and entertain it, the figures of the judges vanished, as if magically, from before me; the tall candles sank into nothingness; their flames went out utterly; the blackness of darkness supervened; all sensations appeared swallowed up in a mad rushing descent as of the soul into Hades. Then silence, and stillness, and night were the universe. (Tales, 492).

This pattern of imagery and phrasing is a near match for the final sentences of "The Masque of the Red Death":

> And now was acknowledged the presence of the Red Death. He had come like a thief in the night. And one by one dropped the revelers in the blood-bedewed halls of their revel, and died each in the despairing posture of his fall. And the life of the ebony clock went out with that of the last of the gay. And the flames of the tripods expired. And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all. (Tales, 490)

The order of publication suggests that "Masque" was written first, but whatever the order of composition Poe has adapted his imagery in response to differences in genre and point-of-view. The first passage simulates the narrator's loss of consciousness, while the second itemizes the events of an apocalyptic fantasy. The first becomes more and more sibilant as the narrator looses hold of himself; the second passage flaunts the rhetorical artifice of its syntactic inversions and biblical polysyndeton. In other words, "The Pit and the Pendulum" falls into an urgent whisper, while "The Masque of the Red Death" calls for declamatory pomp.

Both tales explore the deterministic relationship between setting and character as a diegetic analogy for the interplay of form and effect, but the shift between first-person and third-person narration changes the status of stylization. In "The Pit and the Pendulum," cautious similes preserve the distinction between fact and fancy as the narrator loses hold of his senses. When the judges vanish "as if magically," this gothic flourish remains confined in the susceptible medium of the senses. Meanwhile, when the Red Death arrives "like a thief in the night" the simile recapitulates the action of the tale in a way that raises questions about the status of personification and figuration throughout. Further, it makes sense that the narrator's deepening swoon causes the world around him to vanish in "The Pit and the Pendulum." When the candles disappear – "their flames went out utterly" – the objective description of a subjective event conveys vividness but carries no real ambiguity. The equivalent moment in "The Masque of the Red Death" proves much more unstable. The arrival of the Red Death undoes every element of the setting in a kind of chain reaction, the clock along with the characters. Poe writes that the revelers "died each in the despairing posture of his fall" and that "the life of the ebony clock went out with that of the last of the gay." Without the device of a swooning narrator, Poe leaves his literary showmanship in the open.

Conclusion

Poe's almost invariable emphasis on time and measure reveals his debt to the contemporary science of sensation, an interest he shares with more conventional Romantics such as Wordsworth and Coleridge, but also his acute awareness of the isolating effects of mediation. It is no coincidence that his gothic fantasies appropriate and subvert the very tools that produced a knowable and navigable world in the previous century: the camera obscura and the chronometer. These instruments hold out the promise of principles and proportions that will remain fixed despite physical distance and cultural drift, they promise laws of sensation verified in isolation from any outer impression. For Poe, the stable patterns of abstract measure offer both an ideal for literary aesthetics in the disjointed world of print, but they also form the basis of a fine hoax when he sets about testing whether tone and feeling will yield to method. "The Pit and the Pendulum" is a fictional study in human sensibility, centered on the search for certain knowledge under conditions of extreme isolation, but also a paranoid tale that imagines the senses under the control of sinister agents. Poe seems to regard the seamless projection of fancy through language as both a critical wish and a fictional terror.

In his fiction and criticism, Poe treats empirical doubt as a figure of cultural relativity, whether at the social scale of codified racial difference in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* or at the micro-level of verbal tone. As Cindy Weinstein has argued, the relation of maritime chronometry to geographic coordinates in *Pym* generates an abstract rationale for racial hierarchy that Poe alternately caricatures and enforces. In "The Philosophy of Composition," with much lower social stakes, Poe illustrates the internal logic that allows "The Raven" to fend for itself in

the wild, but he also takes the precaution of walking his readers through the correct response. The essay's central term of "effect" is social in its connotation but applied in the context of formalism, with the faint implication that the sociology of literature may be treated on the mathematical principle of demonstrative certainty. Like many of his British contemporaries and models, such as Wordsworth and Coleridge, Poe sees the definition of the human as bound up with the theory of poetry. Yet even as he frames a theory of rhythmic effect particular to no single language, he also problematically stretches this gesture of inclusion to the cries of animals and the sounds of machines.

Poe's interest in matters of quantity and measure extends from his fiction to this poetics, yet these intellectual preoccupations also accentuate generic difference. Clock time in tales such as "The Pit and the Pendulum" and "The Masque of the Red Death" stands at odds with the dilation and contraction of experiential time, yet also provides a model for the mechanistic logic of setting and genre. In the genre of the tale, where Poe concedes that truth has a place alongside beauty, the subjective category of effect stands in an ambiguous relationship with objective causality. In fiction, where beauty coexists with truth, the difference between form-as-thought and form-as-mechanism plays out in the way that narrative stages the relationship between figure and ground as alternately contingent and dependent. In poetry, where Poe will admit only aim of aesthetic beauty, the metronomic consistency of verbal rhythm denatures content for the sake of form.

CHAPTER THREE
LINE AND LINEAGE IN *PIERRE* AND *TIMOLEON*

Ralph Waldo Emerson begins *Nature* with a plea for renewed immediacy: "Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchers of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories, and criticism. The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe?"[1] While Emerson had doubtless intended this question rhetorically, the adolescent hero of Herman Melville's *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities* (1852) stumbles upon a number of unbidden answers in the course of his misguided attempt to "gospelize the world anew." [2] At the novel's turning point, Pierre declares his break from family and tradition by refusing even the most trivial forms of mediation "Hitherto I have hoarded up mementoes and monuments of the past; been a worshiper of all heirlooms; a fond filer away of letters, locks of hair, bits of ribbon, flowers, and the thousand-and-one minutenesses which love and memory think they sanctify: - but it is forever over now! If to me any memory any memory shall henceforth be dear, I will not mummy it in a visible memorial for every passing beggar's dust to gather on" (197). Pierre's first act, following this declaration, is to burn his father's portrait in a strikingly literal moment of iconoclasm.

Emerson's dissatisfaction with his retrospective age already amounts to a new sort of relation to the universe, in that his unease signals a diminished sense for the authenticity of inherited social forms. Paradoxically, Emerson's eagerness to encounter nature "face to face" is more or less the same desire that would make the reality-effects of photography such an attractive means of drawing the world closer. "For the first time in the process of pictorial reproduction," writes Walter Benjamin, "photography freed the hand of the most important artistic functions which henceforth devolved only upon the eye looking into a lens."[3] The exclusion of the hand from the process of representation bypasses the artistic training that adheres in the hand, a body of experience and convention that formerly regulated both the objects and the manner of pictorial representation.

The impulse to move beyond images to truths coexists with the desire to give an image to invisible truths. Under the "despotism of the eye," Coleridge writes in *Biographia Literaria*, "we are restless because invisible things are not the objects of vision; and metaphysical systems, for the most part, become popular, not for their truth, but in proportion as they attribute causes a susceptibility of being seen, if only our visual organs were sufficiently powerful."[4] "Some nameless struggles of the soul can not be painted," Melville concedes in *Pierre*, but this recognition does not prevent him from straining the resources of literary pictorialism to capture these elusive inner truths (181).

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[1] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Collection Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: Volume 1: Nature, Addresses, and Lectures*, ed. Robert E. Spiller and Alfred R. Ferguson (Cambridge: Harvard Univesity Press, 1971), 7.

[2] Herman Melville, *Pierre; or, the Ambiguities*, ed. Harrison Hayford et al., The Writings of Herman Melville, (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and The Newberry Library, 1971), 273. Subsequent citations from this edition will be parenthetical.

[3] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 219.

[4] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Major Works*, ed. H.J. Jackson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 213.

Pierre explores the problem of social reproduction in the age of mechanical reproduction; the problematic status of written texts, family heirlooms, and especially images underlies Pierre's increasingly hostile relationship to the life he has inherited and the estate from which he is eventually disinherited. Pierre's troubled contemplation of his father's two portraits, and in particular the unauthorized "chair portrait" portraying his father as a bachelor, prepares for his attempted break with the social authority of his family and community. Yet a series of troubling memories conditions his view of these images as well. *Pierre* enacts the material history of its protagonist's fantasies, tracing both his hereditary pride and his utopian wishes to a substratum of images and objects. On the other hand, the novel elaborates the fantasies embedded in images, such that Melville must provide a brief case history (the novel's fourth book, entitled "Retrospective") in order to establish what Pierre sees when he looks at his father's portrait.[5]

Antebellum readers abhorred *Pierre* for its seeming insanity, and early twentieth century critics admired the book for its psychological subtlety, but more recent readings have treated Pierre's attempted escape from home and hearth as a satirical assault upon domestic ideology, particularly as manifested in the conventions of sentimental fiction.[6] The critical turn from depth psychology to ideology critique has brought urgency to the question of insides and outsides, not least because the novel will absorb seemingly endless amounts of contextualization without becoming appreciably less strange, but also because the balance between the mind and the world is at stake in the novel's plot: "Pierre was not arguing Fixed Fate and Free Will, now; Fixed Fate and Free Will were arguing him, and Fixed Fate got the better in the debate" (182). The novel's recent critical history has more or less reproduced this experience of alienation; Emory Eliot attributes the failure of Pierre's rebellious impulses to "Pierre's powerlessness to escape his bonds of his own predispositions,"[7] while William Spanos regards Pierre's downfall as "an absolute silencing – committed by the truth discourse of America."[8] The novel's paradoxical treatment of individual agency and nefarious social determinism becomes, if not clear, then at least more distinctly ambiguous in light of Melville's engagement with aesthetic theory and visual media.

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[5] For a reading of *Pierre* the hinges upon what Melville might have seen when he looked at pictures of his own father, images that clearly served as models for the fictive portraits in *Pierre,* see James Creech, *Closet Writing / Gay Reading: The Case of Melville's Pierre* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

[6] For example, see Wyn Kelley, "Pierre's Domestic Ambiguities," in *The Cambridge Companion to Herman Melville*, ed. Robert S. Levine (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998). For a fine-grained reading of *Pierre* for its value as political critique see Michael Paul Rogin, *Subversive Genealogy : The Politics and Art of Herman Melville* (New York: Knopf, 1983).

[7] See Emory Eliot, "Art, Religion, and the Problem of Authority in Pierre," in *Ideology and Classic American Literature*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

[8] See William V. Spanos, "Pierre's Extraordinary Emergency: Melville and the 'Voice of Silence'," in *Herman Melville and the American Calling* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), pg. 24.

Critics such as Susan Williams and Timothy Sweet have read the novel for what it reveals about the literature's relationship to media such as portraiture and photography.[9] Along similar lines, Douglas Robillard has traced the extent to which Melville relates Pierre's mental states to a series of actual and imagined art objects evoked in ekphrastic prose.[10] The grouping of Pierre, the young author, with his sister Isabel, a musician, and his cousin Lucy, a portrait artist, raises the question of the sister arts in none too subtle terms. Henry Murray, in his introduction to the novel, has suggested that the pairing of Lucy and Isabel resembles the Nietzschean distinction between the Apollonian and the Dionysion, a dichotomy that associates pictures with surface fancy and music with imaginative depths.[11] In her account of the ethical force of the sublime in *Pierre*, Nancy Fredricks has distinguished strongly between the conservative force of visual perception in the novel, associated with Lucy, and the non-representational possibilities intimated by music, associated with Isabel, who for Fredricks embodies the repressed of the novel's social world where Henry Murray had already marked her out as "the personification of Pierre's unconscious."[12]

Christopher Sten has characterized Melville's career-long engagement with the visual arts as a case of highly informed amateurism rather than systematic expertise: "in [Melville's] dealings with artistic matters generally, his interest was personal and subjective, not technical or social, and only marginally historical."[13] By this account, the contextual knowledge Melville acquired from his reading on the arts and his experience viewing works of art (both considerable) sharpened his eyes without lessening the value he set on his own impressions. Melville approached the visual arts with an eye that no one could call quite innocent, given the ease and range of his allusions, but which Sten aptly describes as "savage," more intent upon hidden truths than the fine points of their expression. According to Sten, this aesthetic attitude corresponds to a theory of art rooted in "mystery" and "indeterminacy," in which works of art suggest "a way of seeing, feeling, and thinking that carries one beyond what can be perceived or known, even with the most educated eye."[14] This is one way of saying that the visual arts must transcend visibility, which leaves the question of how this transcendence may be detected upon the surface of images without becoming frozen into a static sign.

For Melville, the innocent eye does not represent an original relation to the universe so much as a perception trained to misread the contingencies of history as facts of nature. Samuel

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[9] See Susan S. Williams, *Confounding Images : Photography and Portraiture in Antebellum American Fiction* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997). Timothy Sweet, *Traces of War : Poetry, Photography, and the Crisis of the Union*, Parallax (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

[10] See Douglas Robillard, *Melville and the Visual Arts: Ionian Form, Venetian Tint* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1997).

[11] See Herman Melville, *Pierre; or, the Ambiguities*, ed. Henry A. Murray (New York: Hendricks House, 1949), liii.

[12] See Fredricks, *Melville's Art of Democracy*. For the quotation from Henry Murray's introduction see *The Hendricks House Pierre*, lii.

[13] See Christopher Sten, ed. *Savage Eye : Melville and the Visual Arts* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1991), pg. 1. For an account of Melville's reading on the visual arts, see Douglas Robillard's contribution to this edited volume, aptly titled "Melville's Reading in the Visual Arts."

[14] *Savage Eye : Melville and the Visual Arts* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1991), 35.

Otter has argued that the idyllic scenery of Saddle Meadows, as visualized through Melville's grotesque variations upon picturesque convention, discloses a history of racial conflict and economic dispossession unperceived by the young Pierre: "Rather than a lament about the contemporary generation squandering its noble inheritance, *Pierre* tells the story of how the past suffuses and encumbers the present, how the present is scored over with the lines of the past."[15] In other words, it is not the land that loses its innocence, but the eye, which Melville trains to detect the marks of history upon the orderly garden world of Pierre's "hamlet-home." Hawthorne's *Blithedale Romance*, published in the same year as *Pierre*, arrives at similar conclusions about the utopian attempt to escape history by returning to a pastoral world: "Altogether, by projecting our minds outward, we had imparted a show of novelty to existence, and contemplated it as hopefully as if the soil, beneath our feet, had not been fathom-deep with the dist of deluded generations, on every one of which, as on ourselves, the world had imposed itself as a hitherto unwedded bride."[16]

Presently, the central question is how Melville adapted the terms and concepts of the visual arts, such as outline and foreshortening, to express problems of literary form. Throughout *Moby-Dick* and *Pierre,* Melville conducts himself as an iconophobe, distrustful of pictures and eager to arrive at the truths they conceal, but this skeptical stance toward the visible world seems only to have intensified his interest in the visual arts. Melville imagined the features of paintings as mental operations, such that certain pictures disclose a process of picturing rather than a set of static figures and notions. Outline is a complex concept for Melville, for whom this element of visual form frequently stands in for the dialectical boundary between representation and suggestion, offering a means of exploring and conjoining the disparate meanings housed in the elusive concept of form. As Samuel Otter has observed in a special issue of *Representations* devoted to this over-determined term, the idea of form covers a disparate range of meanings; form "refers to disposition, contour, structure, and specificity. It opens, rather than closes, questions about the relations of parts to wholes and inside to outside."[17] The focus on outline reduces finished works to designs, such that one looks at a painting in order to see a drawing, yet whether this type of attention finally idealizes or schematizes the work of art depends upon which form of form is the proper object of imitation, the inner impulse or the outer appearance. William Blake, who insisted "Painting is Drawing on Canvas & Engraving is Drawing on Copper," grasped this difference intuitively: "Men think they can Copy Nature as Correctly as I copy Imagination this they will find impossible."[18] In his treatment of the arts, Melville relies on the ambiguity of the written word to sustain the tension between optical illusion and visionary projection, so that Melville's suspicion of images continually frustrates his desire to picture the truth (and so perpetuates it).

The turn to outline creates an imaginary original beneath even unique images, or a virtual copy, so that even the observation of the work of art amounts to a form of reproduction. This separation of designs from finished works raises the question of just how an original originates, whether from the outer shape or the core idea. In a similar vein, Melville's poems on ancient

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[15] Otter, *Melville's Anatomies*, 207.

[16] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), 128.

[17] Samuel Otter, "An Aesthetics in All Things," *Representations*, no. 104 (2008): 120.

[18] See Blake's public address on his picture of Chaucer's Canterbury Pilgrims in William Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (New York: Anchor Books, 1988), 574, 75.

architecture approach the problem of authenticity through the relationship between image and place, or "sight" and "site," to borrow a recurrent pun from Melville's poetry. The search for origins in *Pierre* informs Melville's treatment of art and aesthetics throughout the 1850s, both in the theoretical chapters of *The Confidence Man* and in the poetry inspired by Melville's tour of the Mediterranean during 1856 and 1857. While these poems did not reach publication until 1891, in the section of *Timoleon* entitled "Fruit of Travel Long Ago," many of them may have been drafted or even completed much earlier, possibly in preparation for the volume of poetry Melville attempted to publish, without success, in 1860.[19] While the exact timeline of their composition remains a matter for informed speculation, these poems extend the meditation upon art, imitation, and reproduction that Melville began in his fiction of the 1850s.

Melville reveals the philosophical preoccupations driving *Pierre* in his letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne dated April 16th 1851. The letter's strong affinity with the events and imagery of *Pierre* reveals the extent to which the novel unfolds from the problem of visualizing the truth, while its resonance with post-Kantian aesthetic theory situates Melville within a discourse that he alternately adapts and parodies in pursuit of this problem. The discussion of aesthetics in Melville's correspondence continues in *The Confidence Man*, where Melville has interspersed three chapters of literary theory among the dramatic episodes. In these chapters, Melville derides the value set on consistent characterization and proclaims the rarity of original characters in literature, arguments that place the opposition of visibility and truth within a wider set of literary terms and parameters. The argument turns to outline in order to show how Melville adapted the etherealized aesthetic discourse of British Romanticism, both in his fiction and poetry, in order to suggest a type of literary form suspended between suggestion and representation, creating pictures while also complicating their claim to truth. While outline creates the trace of an absent object, imposing some concept of distance upon even free-floating imagery, the translation of spatial relationships into a pictorial code takes on a more forceful presence as Melville explores the concept of foreshortening, a term that applies to the portrayal of depth as well as the tension in the whale lines. In either case, term conveys an attempt to pull the world closer, whether through the physical mechanism of the ropes or the figurative compression of space onto the flat picture surface.

Aesthetic education and the "visable truth" [sic]

As a model for aesthetic experience that highlights the balance of opposed faculties, Friedrich Schiller describes the contradictory effects of Juno's sculpted image: "even as we abandon ourselves in ecstasy to her heavenly grace, her celestial self-sufficiency makes us recoil in terror. The whole figure reposes and dwells in itself, a creation completely self-contained, and, as if existing beyond space, neither yielding nor resisting; here is no force to contend with force, no frailty where temporality might break in. Irresistably moved and drawn by those former qualities, kept at a distance by these latter, we find ourselves at one and the same time in a state of utter repose and supreme agitation, and there results that wondrous stirring of the heart for

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[19] For evidence of the unpublished volume of poetry and informed speculation on the composition history of Melville's poems see Hershel Parker, *Melville : The Making of the Poet* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2008). This text is nearly identical to the historical note for *Published Poems*, but the thorough index seems cause enough for a separate citation.

which mind has no concept nor speech any name."[20] Generally, Melville projects the "state of utter repose" outward onto the looming whiteness of whales or mountain peaks and reserves the experience of "supreme agitation" for his characters and himself. This dynamic seems to have repeated itself in the exchanges between the loquacious Melville and the taciturn Hawthorne, to whom Melville wrote as if art itself might answer.

During the composition of *Moby-Dick*, after he had received a presentation copy of *The House of Seven Gables,* Melville acknowledged the gift by letter in the manner of a periodical notice, "a little criticism extracted for your benefit from the 'Pittfield Secret Review.'" Before long, this parody lapses into metaphysics:

> There is a certain tragic phase of humanity, which, in our opinion, was never more powerfully embodied than by Hawthorne. We mean the tragicalness of human thought in its own unbiased, native, and profounder workings. We think that into no recorded mind has the intense feeling of the visable truth ever entered more deeply than into this man's. By visable truth, we mean the apprehension of the absolute condition of present things as they strike the eye of the man who fears them not, though they do their worst to him, – the man who, like Russia or the British Empire, declares himself a sovereign nature (in himself) amid the powers of heaven, hell, and earth. He may perish; but so long as he exists he insists upon treating with all Powers upon an equal basis. If any of those other Powers choose to withhold certain secrets, let them; that does not impair my sovereignty in myself; that does not make me tributary. And perhaps, after all, there is *no* secret. We incline to think that the Problem of the Universe is like the Freemason's mighty secret, so terrible to all children. It turns out, at last, to consist in a triangle, a mallet, and an apron, - nothing more! We incline to think that God cannot explain His own secrets, and that He would like a little information upon certain points Himself. We mortals astonish Him as much as He us. But it is this *Being* of the matter; there lies the knot with which we choke ourselves. As soon as you say *Me,* a *God*, a *Nature*, so soon you jump off from your stool and hang from the beam.[21]

Melville cannot describe Hawthorne without revealing more about himself. In this case, a private review of *The House of Seven Gables* unfolds into a fair prospectus of *Pierre*. At this time, according to Hershel Parker, Melville "began to think about placing a book of his own in a contemporary American setting, ashore rather than afloat, and embellished with Gothic trappings such as Hawthorne had used in *The House of Seven Gables*."[22] The earlier portion of Melville's private review amply supports this claim about setting and genre, but the section on the "visable truth" also reveals the intellectual kernel of *Pierre*. The novel repeats the letter's imagery as well as its overall trajectory as the plot proceeds from Pierre's problematic assertion of self-reliance to

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[20] Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters*, ed. Elizabeth M Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 109.

[21] Herman Melville, *Correspondence*, ed. Lynn Horth (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and Newberry Library, 1993), 186.

[22] Hershel Parker, *Herman Melville : A Biography: 1819-1851* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 835.

his discovery of the ego's vacancy. Once he learns of his lost half-sister, Pierre announces his personal independence in language that unmistakably recalls the letter:

> On my strong faith in ye Invisibles, I stake three whole felicities, and three whole lives this day. If ye forsake me now, - farewell to Faith, farewell to Truth, farewell to God; exiled for aye from God and man, I shall declare myself an equal power with both; free to make war on Night and Day, and all thoughts and things of mind and matter, which the upper and the nether firmaments do clasp! (107)

In place of the ceremonious freemasons, *Pierre* introduces the odd philosophical brotherhood at the Apostles. The "knot with which we choke ourselves" resonates with the novel's repeated metaphors of fate as entanglement. The letter's figurative hanging anticipates Ahab's death ("the flying turn caught him round the neck, and voicelessly as Turkish mutes bowstring their victim, he was shot out of the boat, ere the crew knew he was gone"), but also the hanging Pierre avoids through his suicide by poison: "*Hung by the neck till thou be dead.* – Not if I forestall you, though!."[23] As a miniaturized facsimile of *Pierre*, the only glaring hiatus discoverable in this sweetly-writ manuscript is the omission of a sister, although the letter hardly wants for fraternal warmth in its address to a brother artist.

Parker writes that the metaphysical portion of Melville's response to *The House of Seven Gables* "was not so much evoked by the book as by his own now habitual tendency to see all things as problems to be brooded about, and specifically to see the best, dark books and authors of those books as embodying problems or riddles" (834). The letter further reveals that Melville conceived of these problems in terms of the aesthetic theory he had absorbed. Melville's letters to Hawthorne are unusually expansive by the standard of his generally businesslike correspondence, coupling practical communications with lengthy passages in which Melville tests his ideas and muses over the theories he has come across. Melville's correspondence with Hawthorne reveals his interest in both Schiller ("though I don't know much about him") and Goethe, whose mantra "Live in the All" meets with the charges of "nonsense" and "flummery" for "the universal application of a temporary feeling or opinion."[24] The record of Melville's reading contains no evidence that he read Kant, but it confirms his familiarity with a range of second-hand sources for German philosophy, such as Coleridge, Carlyle, De Quincy, De Stael, and Emerson.[25] Melville's shipboard conversations with George Adler comprise another point of access to German aesthetic philosophy.

For the Romantic in Melville, who could write with apparent conviction that "all visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks" that half-conceal "the living act, the undoubted deed," the phrase "visable truth" presents something of a contradiction in terms. The combination of pasteboard visibility and vital truth seems to inspire enough anxiety in Melville that the words must be further vitalized as "the intense feeling of the visable truth." Perhaps, the desire to animate the image even underlies the suggestive misspelling of "vis*a*ble," an error that

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[23] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; or, the Whale* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), 623. The passage from *Pierre* falls on page 360.

[24] *Correspondence*, 190-94.

[25] For a listing of books that Melville owned or borrowed see Merton Sealts, *Melville's Reading* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1988). See also Mary Bercaw, *Melville's Sources* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1987).

turns the truth's passive presence before the eye into a power of the observer. The formulation of "the apprehension of the absolute condition of present things" carries a sense of immediacy that is barely neutralized by the following qualification: "as they strike the eye of the man who fears them not." This passage arrives at truth by way of aesthetic experience, in that truth becomes visible only through a particular set of eyes under specific conditions, yet the qualifications attached to the perspective of the observer barely register beside the insistent markers of its vividness: "intense," "absolute," "present." The sharp division of "present things" from their appearance only intensifies the final representation, an impression that will "strike the eye" rather than unfolding before it.

Melville's conception of individual freedom as the capacity to form a disposition toward the world cannot but seem latently Kantian, although he wastes no time Miltonizing the idea into a cosmic stand-off. If the experience of the aesthetic condition awakens the mind to its freedom, for Melville this state becomes instantly embattled. Disinterest takes the form of fearlessness; the capacity to dwell in indeterminacy, in a state of suspension, receives the disturbing metaphor of hanging.[26] Melville seems to have fallen into a mood similar to Schiller's when he wrote, "Not for nothing does the ancient myth make the goddess of wisdom emerge fully armed from the head of Jupiter. For her very first action is a warlike one. Even at birth she has to fight a hard battle with the senses, which are loath to be snatched from their sweet repose."[27] The representation of the mind as a monarchy cynically dashes the strain of political optimism that emerged within continental aesthetics following the collapse of the French Revolution. Where Schiller formulated his theory of aesthetic education as a means of fashioning subjects prepared for political liberty, the aesthetic subject in Melville's letter becomes like an imperial power in

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[26] If this reading seems like a stretch, then it seems pertinent that Melville consistently positions hangings as scenes of indeterminacy, in which it becomes necessary to question the application of both terrestrial and cosmic codes of law. "The Portent," the introductory poem of *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*, turns the body of the executed John Brown, "slowly swaying (such the law)," into the focal point for meditation on the retrospective ordering of historical causation and the moral ambiguity of creating a teleological account of the past. Similarly, the execution of Billy Budd provides a climax to the novella's meditations on both law and desire, but in a way that implies a hidden cross-subsidy, as it were, between the two. Although the event remains undramatized in the text, mentioned only in passing, the gibbeting of Babo in "Benito Cereno" tempts the comparison of state-sanctioned execution and lynching. Babo's post-mortem decapitation symbolically separates the rational man from the sensuous, a repressive gesture that reverses the unifying (and humanizing) work of aesthetic education. Although the law is central to these examples, the legalism of these texts offsets the limitations of determinative judgments, those that apply fixed concepts, in order to move toward a form of reflection available to literature but not to the courts. In short, Melville aestheticizes hanging not in the snoozy school-board sense that he prettifies its nastiness, but in the sense that he invariably suspends paradigms of judgment alongside the bodies of the accused. These moments demand what Kant would call a reflective judgment, moving from the case to the rules and not the other way around. Since these scenes require the reader to defer the question of guilt, those sentenced to hang in Melville's works display what might be termed negative culpability.

[27] Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, 51.

the midst of a conflict that escalates within the space of a single sentence from mere world-historical scale to something more on the order of *Paradise Lost.*[28]

The content of the aesthetic theory announced in this letter bears an ironic relationship to its rhetorical context, in that the letter announces a theory of perception from an elusive point of view. In his imitation of anonymous criticism, Melville intermittently adopts the editorial "we" even as he conveys private judgments and sermonizes individual autonomy. The letter's feigned impersonality only intensifies Melville's ambition to uncover the hidden meanings of Hawthorne's novel and Hawthorne himself, meanings invisible to the critics he parodies. This ruse of anonymity also seems calculated to remind Hawthorne that Melville had already penned an unsigned review, "Hawthorne and his Mosses," for *The Literary World*. The letter turns criticism into a social call; already a regular guest at Hawthorne's Lenox home, Melville here pays a leisurely visit to his neighbor's house of fiction, spending "almost an hour in each separate gable."[29] As a final assurance of intimacy, to the extent that intimacy amounts to an all-confiding tactlessness, Melville makes no attempt to mitigate his penchant for speculative and comical blasphemies. For this reason, Sophia Hawthorne copied the letter for her sister with the injunction "*do not show it*": "it would betray him to make public his confessions & efforts to grasp – because they would be considered perhaps impious, if one did not take in the whole scope of the case."[30]

Even as he mounts a panegyric to the sovereign mind, lapsing momentarily from the impersonally plural "we" into the impulsive singular of "my sovereignty in myself," Melville's impassioned recognition of his own nascent thoughts among Hawthorne's pages dramatizes the porous character of the mind rather than its unassailable selfhood. The letter combines self-subsuming admiration and seemingly accidental solipsism; in the same moment that Hawthorne's mind threatens to overrun Melville's own, Melville's verbal portrait of Hawthorne appears increasingly like a misrecognized self-image.

Not unlike the excessive prose of *Pierre*, at least as treated by unwelcoming contemporary reviewers, the excitable style of the letter gives the impression that controlled expression has somewhere lapsed into an unconscious symptomatic display. The letter's warmth and self-effacing humor counterbalance the moments when Melville's intellect withdraws into itself, when he seems to be writing not only about himself but to himself, momentarily oblivious of his reader. After he had offered up his book of appalling whiteness to the fascinating blackness in Hawthorne, Melville would explore the "intense feeling of visable truth" in his next novel, testing the limits of metaphysical pictorialism against the unseen terrors of inner life.

Confidence in Originals

In one of *The Confidence Man*'s chapters of literary theory, Melville sets out to distinguish original characters from the novelty types who populate his riverboat setting. As examples of original literary characters, Melville offers Hamlet, Don Quixote, and Milton's

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[28] For Melville's response to the failed 1848 revolutions and the following resurgence of monarchism, as reflected in the royalty of Mount Greylock, see Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Rites of Assent : Transformations in the Symbolic Construction of America* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

[29] Melville, *Correspondence*, 185.

[30] *Correspondence*, 184.

Satan, who possess the common trait of an imaginative life that overshadows the actual. The tendency toward social isolation that marks the individual stories of these characters as tragic, even if Hamlet alone occupies a tragedy, overlaps with the isolation of thought itself. The inward turn that redirects thought onto its own mechanisms and materials, ensuring that "the mind is its own place," to use Milton's phrase, becomes a sort of tragedy in itself.

Not only do the original characters named by Melville project their thoughts onto their surroundings, but their personalities also color the reader's perceptions: "what is popularly held to entitle characters in fiction to being deemed original, is but something personal – confined to itself. The character sheds not its characteristic on its surroundings, whereas, the original character, essentially such, is like a revolving Drummond light, raying away from itself all round it – everything is lit by it (mark how it is with Hamlet), so that, in certain minds, there follows upon the adequate conception of such a character, an effect, in its way akin to that which in Genesis attends upon the beginning of things."[31] It seems impossible that Melville could write these words, scarcely a page after naming Milton's Satan as one of literature's original characters, without recalling that Milton dramatizes the book of Genesis at the turning point of *Paradise Lost*, with the effect of belittling Satan's heroic stature. Satan's insistence that the sovereign mind "can make a Heav'n of Hell" amounts to a pale facsimile of divine creation, yet this problematic refashioning of the world subtends Melville's concept of imitation. The destabilizing effect of this allusion complements the oddly particular choice of the Drummond light, better known in the theater as a limelight. As Herschel Parker and Mark Niemeyer have noted, the first Drummond lights seen in New York illuminated the façade of P.T. Barnum's museum, an emporium of good-humored fraud rather than glistening truths.[32] To imply that a stage light might produce an effect "akin to that which in Genesis attends upon the beginning of things" is to say let there be sleight.

Melville develops a series of similar metaphors to account for the uncertainty wrought by Pierre's interviews with Isabel. In place of the Drummond light, Melville constructs the first of these figures around the unusual illumination of the aurora borealis. In the "hyperborean regions" reached by intrepid truth-seekers, writes Melville, "all objects are seen in a dubious, uncertain, and refracting light" (165). Pierre's contemplation of *Hamlet* yields another version of this idea: "The intensest light of reason and revelation combined, can not shed such blazonings upon the deeper truths in man, as will sometimes proceed from his own profoundest gloom. Utter darkness is then his light, and cat-like he distinctly sees all objects through a medium which is mere blindness to common vision" (169).

In the context of *The Confidence Man*, meanwhile, the Drummond light anticipates the "solar lamp," bearing the image of Christ, that is extinguished at the end of *The Confidence Man*'s next and final chapter. The appeal of such a lamp for Melville seems assured by the fact (supplied in Parker and Niemeyer's notes) that it would burn whale oil and not quick-lime. The juxtaposition of these lamps suggests the difference between the tricky wisdom of tragic figures and the absolute truth they ruinously fail to attain. Even as an emblem of divine revelation, the

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[31] *The Confidence-Man : His Masquerade : An Authoritative Text, Contemporary Reviews, Biographical Overviews, Sources, Backgrounds, and Criticism*, ed. Hershel Parker and Mark Niemeyer (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2006), 238.

[32] *The Confidence-Man : His Masquerade : An Authoritative Text, Contemporary Reviews, Biographical Overviews, Sources, Backgrounds, and Criticism*, ed. Hershel Parker and Mark Niemeyer (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2006), 238n.

solar lamp carries the limitation of once again reducing moral truth from a subjective stance toward the world into a trinket, a representation. In other words, the contrast of the Drummond light with the solar lamp is a deceptive presentiment of the contrast between vehicle and tenor. The problem of turning virtue into a thing captures the pattern of the novel, which puns endlessly on the entanglement of the mind and the wallet, unavoidably in the evocation of "confidence" as meaning interchangeably "faith" and "credit," but also in many passing touches such as the one that populates the riverboat with "northern speculators and eastern philosophers."

Melville's insistence that the effect of an original character is "akin to" divine creation anticipates Clement Greenberg's claim that "the avant-garde poet or artist tries in effect to imitate God by creating something valid solely on its own terms, in the way nature itself is valid," and that such a search for absolutes within the "relative values" of representation leads to the imitation of "the disciplines and processes of art and literature themselves."[33] Greenberg departs from Romantic theories of organic form, but with the freedom to treat the theological resonance of these theories as a metaphor. This transition from theology to aesthetic self-reference would carry more optimistic associations for Greenberg, for whom theology amounted to a dilapidated cultural infrastructure, than for Melville, who held theology as a lively concern and attached tragic consequences to the gulf between absolute and relative values. Melville makes this clear in *Pierre*: "The world is forever babbling of originality; but there has never yet was an original man, in the sense intended by the world; the first man - who according to the Rabbins was also the first author – not being an original; the only original author being God" (259).

The plot of *Pierre* strains against plausibility just enough that the internal logic of personality must complete its structure; this is nearly as true of *Moby-Dick*, in which obsession proves more lethal than the whale, but is unmistakable against the backdrop of the domestic sphere. According to Evert Duyckinck, in his review for *The Literary World*, Isabel proves her identity "to the satisfaction of Pierre, though on testimony that would not pass current in any court of law."[34] Duyckinck was not alone in this criticism of the novel's plot; the reviewer for the *Boston Globe* held Pierre's forensic acuity in equal contempt: "his proof of the fact that the girl is his father's offspring is just nothing at all."[35] Even the reviewers who gloss over the tenuousness of Isabel's case tend to find Pierre's response wildly out of proportion with the discovery. In any case, the slipperiness of Isabel's story does not escape Melville. The moral conundrum posed by Isabel's existence and the epistemological anxiety raised by her shaky claim to kinship are subordinate to the complex motivations that underlie Pierre's eagerness to plunge himself into the moral and metaphysical depths.

Melville arrives at the "visable truth" by repeating and honing his idea of what Hawthorne has captured in *The House of Seven Gables*, a process of paraphrase that begins with genre and moves toward an account of perception: "a certain tragic phase of humanity," "the tragicalness of human thought in its own unbiased, native, and profounder workings," "the apprehension of the absolute condition of present things as they strike the eye of the man who

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[33] See Clement Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoon," in *Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record*, ed. David Shapiro and Cecile Shaprio (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
[34] See Brian Higgins and Hershel Parker, *Critical Essays on Herman Melville's Pierre, or, the Ambiguities* (Boston, Mass.: G.K. Hall, 1983), 40.
[35] See *Critical Essays on Herman Melville's Pierre, or, the Ambiguities* (Boston, Mass.: G.K. Hall, 1983), 33.

fears them not." In sequence, these statements more than suggest that Melville approached the problem of visualizing truth by way of the tragic scene of recognition. In one of his more infuriating moments, with rigor that is nonetheless broad, Aristotle defines the scene of recognition as "a change from ignorance to knowledge, disclosing either a close relationship or enmity, on the part of people marked out for good or bad fortune" (*Poetics*, section 6.4). As Pierre paranoically links portraits, faces, and heirlooms to form his account of the past, he undergoes this type of experience repeatedly, but the novel offers no assurance that Pierre's discoveries are not unwitting fabrications. The closes thing to a singular scene of recognition, a scene of undeception rather than narcissistic projection, takes the form of a recognition about recognitions as Pierre looks on an unknown portrait in a gallery hung with copied paintings.

Pierre arrives in this gallery just when the world around him has lost its sense of reality: "All the walls of the world seemed thickly hung with the empty and impotent scope of pictures, grandly outlined, but miserably filled" (350). This expression of Pierre's world-weariness introduces a scene that tests his assumptions so far; the condition of the world hinges in some degree on whether the plot Pierre inhabits, the one he has concocted for himself, has any basis in truth. The narrator later indicates "the uncharacterizing style of the filling-up seemed to offer no small testimony" that the unknown hand that composed the *Stranger's Head* did so without the benefit of a model, "a pure fancy piece" (353). The same abstraction that earlier in the novel had reduced Lucy to an "empty *x*" to be tossed about in algebraic calculations tends during the gallery scene to diminish the effect of the pictures before Pierre.

This gallery scene prompts Melville to explore the incidental causes of aesthetic enthusiasm: "it is not the abstract excellence always, but often the accidental congeniality, which occasions this wonderful emotion" (350). That is, spectators are apt to feel enthusiasm for pictures of no particular reputation. This experience of viewing pictures recalls the model of reading images proposed by Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida*, an account of photography that dwells on the details (the "punctum," in his term) unabsorbed and unabsorbable by the general meaning of the pictures. In effect, Barthes discovers that photographs have a peculiar capacity to reveal the difference between aesthetics and formalism.

"Pallid composure"; or, The Problem with Chaste Outline

After his fraught carriage ride, in recovery from the haunting presence of the phantom face that is yet to be revealed as Isabel's, Pierre plans to rejoin Lucy for an uneventful evening, "a pretty time" spent over illustrated books: "there's the book of Flemish prints – that first we must look over; then, second, is Flaxman's Homer – clear-cut outlines yet full of unadorned barbaric nobleness" (42). If it isn't too literal-minded an observation, John Flaxman's outlines aren't full of anything; his figures appear without coloring or shadow, realistic in their proportions yet with little illusion of physical volume. Flaxman suggests depth by grouping his figures into flat layers instead of emphasizing the receding lines of point-perspective. The nearly schematic quality of these images, according to David Bindman, reveals the engravings as something like sculptures in the planning stage: "The clarity, the simplicity, and the reduction of naturalistic space Flaxman's contemporaries so much admired were, then, partly a consequence of his attempt to see the designs in terms of marble cuttings in low relief."[36] Minimally rendered

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[36] David Bindman, "Italian Drawings, 1784-94," in *John Flaxman*, ed. David Bindman (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979), 87.

and dramatically understated, these illustrations derive their interest from suggestion rather than sensuousness, in large part because Flaxman has withheld any ornamental intricacy in which the eye might tarry. Homer's memorable scenes appear in moments of suspended climax that foreground the actions and relationships of the characters. Whatever "unadorned barbaric nobleness" these pictures contain rests on the first adjective. Still, Flaxman's outlines were more often described as "chaste."[37] The formal purity of these designs ensures that they possess great narrative immediacy, are full of it even, because they are shrewdly empty of practically everything else. Flaxman favors dramatic understatement to the point that even the violence of his images seems somehow polite; no splash of blood in the brass pan will spoil Pierre's pretty time.

Next, Pierre considers and rejects Flaxman's Dante, dissuaded from it when he realizes that the mental image of Isabel's face "minds me a little of pensive, sweet Francesca's face – or, rather, as it had been Francesca's daughter's face" (42). It does not bode well that Pierre cannot contemplate a single picture without speculating into Isabel's parentage; she will later become the daughter of his father's portrait as well. Pierre fears that the engravings would push his ideal mental images into painful actuality: "Francesca's mournful face is now ideal to me. Flaxman might evoke it wholly, - make it present in lines of misery – bewitching power" (42). This wording seems calculated to conceal whether Francesca's face is mournful in its expression or in its meaning to Pierre, whether evocation is the same thing as representation, or even whether the "lines of misery" are Flaxman's outlines or Dante's verses. Further, whose misery? Susan Williams observes that Pierre is on the brink of repeating a scene about literary repetition: "For Dante, of course, Francesca is a bad reader because she cannot separate art from reality; she falls in love with Paolo, her husband's brother, as they read the tale of Launcelot and Guinivere. Pierre tries to avoid being such a reader by viewing an idealized, artistic image only in his mind's eye, thereby withholding it from the realities of a 'whole evocation'"[38] This account of the passage captures Pierre's attitude but not Melville's comment upon it as he supplies his character with words that confuse reading and seeing. For Melville, a whole evocation of the face does not seem to be the same thing as actuality or verisimilitude. The probable pun on "holy," in reference to the seeming innocence of Francesca's sin, resonates with Pierre's misguided magnanimity toward Isabel, suggesting that he may have as much to fear from ideals as from actualities.

Flaxman's illustrations deepen the ambiguity of the passage. In the two plates that portray Francesca, Flaxman produces nothing like a detailed portrait that would substantially sustain or refute the claim of personal resemblance between Francesca and Isabel. In the first of these plates, Paolo and Francesca appear posed over their book, more or less the scene that Pierre plans to enact with Lucy; Francesca's face is a sliver in profile, gaining its expression (Pierre's adjectives, "pensive" and "sweet," sound about right) from the inclination of her neck and the

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[37] According to Francesca Salvadori, the phrase "chaste outline," coined by George Cumberland, "was applied to Flaxman's art so often that it almost became a definition." This expression became so popular that it lost any flexibility of usage, continuing through the more sophisticated and knowing era of twentieth-century." See Francesca Salvadori, "The Painted Atmosphere: Inside John Flaxman's Dante Studio," in *John Flaxman: The Illustrations for Dante's Divine Comedy* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2004), 27.

[38] Williams, *Confounding Images : Photography and Portraiture in Antebellum American Fiction*, 145.

objectless direction of her gaze rather than her features. In the next plate, Flaxman portrays the two lovers in Hell, hovering over the fallen figure of Dante. Pierre imagines the composite face of Isabel and Francesca "wafted on the sad dark wind, toward observant Virgil and the blistered Florentine," which is just the scene that Flaxman shows, but with the significant difference that in the engraving Francesca conceals her face entirely. Francesca's mournful face seems to have been scarcely less ideal to Flaxman than to Pierre, although her body-length drape of hair certainly anticipates Isabel. Pierre's curse – "Damned be the hour I read in Dante! more damned than that wherein Paolo and Francesca read in fatal Launcelot!" – places the emphasis on reading rather than seeing, with the implication that Flaxman's images would be harmless enough if not for the narrative elements and literary associations that allow them to be read as well as seen.

In the rarified climate of Romantic aesthetics, outline is an odd thing, caught somewhere in the messy traffic between shape and concept, content and form, a mediating boundary not only between figure and ground but also actual and ideal presence. This scene with Flaxman prefigures Pierre's contemplation of the chair portrait, in which a "lineament" common to Isabel and Pierre's father becomes the crucial piece of evidence for Isabel's identity. After he has taken Isabel's note home, but before he has read it, the sight of a mirror shocks Pierre: "It bore the outline of Pierre, but now strangely filled with features transformed, and unfamiliar to him; feverish eagerness, fear, and nameless forebodings of ill!" (62). In Lucy's room at the Apostles, Pierre chances to see "his own portrait, in the skeleton" (357).

In the *Poetics,* Aristotle uses the metaphor of outline and coloration to explain the primacy of plot over character: "So the plot is the source and (as it were) the soul of tragedy; character is second. (It is much the same in the case of painting: if someone were to apply exquisitely beautiful colours at random he would give less pleasure than if he had outlined an image in black and white.) Tragedy is an imitation of an action, and on account above all of the action it is an imitation of agents" (*Poetics*, Section 4.4). The interiority of "source" and "soul" seems intuitively opposed to the bare exterior frame of outline, yet for Aristotle the expression of an inner impulse depends upon the completeness of works rather than the expressive value of their parts. His notion of imitation hinges upon structural relationships rather than strict adherence to reality.

The Romantic conviction that the value of an artwork consists in the ideal form it evokes in the spectator led many thinkers of the period to favor the bare formal clarity of outline over the shadings and textures of finished work. For Kant, in his third critique, outline has the advantage of addressing the intellect rather than the senses: "In painting and sculpture, indeed in all the pictorial arts, in architecture and horticulture insofar as they are fine arts, the drawing is what is essential, in which what constitutes the ground of all arrangements for taste is not what gratifies in sensation but merely what pleases through its form."[39] Loosely, line and color stand in for form and content. Colors, Kant dismissively notes, "can of course enliven the object in itself for sensation," yet they are limited to this brute visibility. Kant's elevation of the drawing over the finished work as the proper object of aesthetic judgment places value on art works as they are planned and not as they are executed. This mode of judgment has no place for the "accidental congeniality" of a painting, as Melville puts it, nor for the contingent details that Roland Barthes relishes in photography.

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[39] Immanuel Kant. *The Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Translated by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pg. 110.

   "But he must have a strange organization of sight," writes William Blake, "who does not prefer a Drawing on Paper to a Dawbing in Oil by the same master, supposing both to be done with equal care."[40] Blake's preference for the crisp outlines of the Italian Renaissance over the "Venetian & Flemish Ooze"[41] of chiaroscuro signals his anxiety that visual art will copy the forms of tradition and nature rather than displaying the imagination at work: "The great and golden rule of art, as well as of life, is this: That the more distinct, sharp, and wiry the bounding line, the more perfect the work of art; the less keen and sharp, the greater is the evidence of weak imitation, plagiarism, and bungling."[42] Melville would have encountered neither of these statements by the time he had completed *Pierre*, but the common interest shared by these writers suggests that Melville's interest in outline was shared by his contemporaries.

   The vogue for outlines seems best expressed by the very existence of George Cumberland's *Thoughts on Outline, Sculpture, and the System that Guided the Ancient Artists in Composing their Figures and Groupes*. This text argues for "*the inestimable value of chaste outline*" as a prerequisite for capturing the design of Greek sculptures on paper.[43] William Blake engraved several of the plates for Cumberland's book and instructed the author how to complete the rest himself, praising the completed work as a "beautiful book" in a personal letter to Cumberland: "such works as yours Nature & Providence the Eternal Parents demand from their children" (Erdman, 700).

   Their friendship notwithstanding, Blake and George Cumberland's differences on the subject of outline make a tidy synecdoche of their ideological differences. Blake's "hard and wiry line of rectitude and certainty" echoes Cumberland's "pure line of sober rectitude,"[44] yet the selection of adjectives betrays that these men experienced ideal form through very different temperaments. The iconoclastic Blake, an unapologetic polemicist in his remarks on painting and engraving, liable to describe his aesthetic opposites as "Demons" who "cause that every thing in art shall become a Machine,"[45] favors a line as sharp and absolute as his judgments; the more tactful Cumberland, whose politeness verges ever on sanctimony, a theatrical apologist compelled to give offense for the greater good of English taste, prefers an outline that is "*fine, firm, flowing, and faint*," but the greatest of these is "faint." (19). For Cumberland, outlines must describe detailed forms ("admitting of the nicest correction and decision") without infringing upon their ideal presence. The firm-faintness of Cumberland's ideal outline embodies his rhetorical passive-aggression, but the contradictory qualities combined in this line also expose the paradox of locating ideal form within a particular visual style. After a certain point, when his descriptions have outstripped the demonstrable features of his examples, Cumberland's anatomy of the ideal outline gives way to a search for the invisible threads of tradition itself, faint yet binding.

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[40] Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose*, pg. 549.

[41] *The Complete Poetry and Prose*, 513.

[42] See "A Descriptive Catalogue of Pictures" in *The Complete Poetry and Prose*, pg. 550.

[43] George Cumberland, *Thoughts on Outline, Sculpture, and the System That Guided the Ancient Artists in Composing Their Figures and Groupes Accompanied with Free Remarks on the Practice of the Moderns.* (London: printed by W. Wilson; and sold by Messrs. Robinson; and T. Egerton, 1796).

[44] For the first quotation in this sentence see Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose*, 550. For the second see Cumberland, *Thoughts on Outline*, 7.

[45] Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose*, 547.

Although Cumberland declares outline "that best rudiment of art" (1) and proclaims in didactic italics that "*there can be no art without it*" (8), he still takes pains not to aestheticize outline itself: "we ought, in fact, to dismiss it, if possible, from our minds, and consider only the form it surrounds" (15). Even as he defines his central term, Cumberland does so through a series of concessions and qualifications:

> Although, mathematically speaking, there is no such thing as Outline, yet, to be more intelligible, we must use that term instead of boundary: for, notwithstanding, I see figure without Outline, I cannot describe it on paper, unless I begin with that process; and hence arises the beauty of shadows, and the pleasure they afford us, possessing a design bounded, yet without any Outline. (15)

On this basis, Cumberland abhors "works copied from the ancients, or invented in their stile, with Outlines *thick and thin alternately*, like the flourishes of a penman" as a "very unmathematical idea of form" that betrays the formal ideals of Greek sculpture in favor of ornamentally expressive line, a fault for which he tisk-tisks "the very tasteful Homer and Eschylus of Mr. Flaxman" (16). In calling this sort of line-work "unmathematical" and denying that outline exists "mathematically speaking," Cumberland expresses the wish for outline to approximate the abstract forms of geometry, with no thickness, no visible qualities at all, only an insubstantial contour. Any uneven lines found on Greek vases, Cumberland insists, "were only occasioned by the instrument they used, and the necessity of being quick, not from any intention of the artists; and in fine specimens, as I can prove, were carefully avoided" (18). The reliance upon "fine specimens" gives this claim the ring of tautology.

Since an outline "to be distinct" must appear as "a wire that surrounds the design" (15), tempting the eye away from the enclosed figure, Cumberland insists "we take more delight in a shadow, or a form circumscribed by shade, than in the bald outline of a form" (20). In the case of finished compositions, whether painted or carved in low relief, Cumberland prefers works that conceal the wirey line. For this reason, Cumberland recommends the painterly technique of "blending the Outline into the ground," a quality he praises in Rembrandt, Corregio, and Titian, all of whom would eventually provide fodder for Blake's epigrams and imprecations (25). Even the quality of line must be calculated to leave a minimal impression: "lines, if hard and sharp, have the effect of attaching to the ground the forms they describe; but, if soft and mellow, they detach the ideal figure" (22).

Cumberland maintains that "a statue is *all* Outline; a creation, the bounds of whose surface require inconceivable knowledge, taste, and study, to circumscribe, so as to entitle it to judicious and lasting admiration" (9). Cumberland writes, "as well might we expect to see fine writing from men who reversed the rules of grammar, or any writing at all without the alphabet, as artists formed, where correct Outline is overlooked; the ancients little venerated; and where sculpture is not considered as the fountain of the Art" (11). The practice of rotating statues for the sake of display underlies Cumberland's suggestion that "there are statues in the world which, if turned round on a pivot before a lamp, would produce, on a wall, some hundreds of fine Outlines" (33).

"As a statue planted on a revolving pedestal, shows now this limb, now that, now front, now back, now side; continually changing, too, its general profile, so does the pivoted, statued soul of man, when turned by the hand of Truth. Lies only never vary; look for no invariableness in Pierre. Nor does any canting showman here stand by to announce his phases as he revolves.

Catch his phases as your insight may" (337). Pierre's variable character prefigures the theory of characterization that Melville expounds in *The Confidence Man*: "That fiction, where every character can, by reason of its consistency, be comprehended at a glance, either exhibits but sections of character, making them appear for wholes, or else is very untrue to reality."[46] The changing silhouette of the revolving statue seems to underlie the "sections of character," as well as Melville's description of Dickensian characterizations founded on telegraphic details as "mere phantoms which flit along a page, like shadows along a wall," a metaphor that evokes Plato's allegory of the cave.[47] Still, even if this doctrine of inconsistency seems true to Melville's practice in *Pierre* and elsewhere, fully consistent with his artistic personality, the truth of this theory should not eclipse its ironic value as a description of the shape-shifting Confidence Man.

The sections of character in *The Confidence Man* echo the problem caused when Pierre must decide between two contradictory portrayals of his father, each displaying only one aspect of him. As Pierre contemplates the chair-portrait, the imagined voice of the picture implies that a single portrait will not reveal all the intricacies of character: "Pierre, believe not the drawing-room painting; that is not thy father; or, at least, is not *all* of thy father" (83). The two images of Pierre's absent father, one austere and the other rakish, condition him to regard virtue and vice as "two shadows cast from one nothing" when he converses with Isabel (274). These "two shadows" are suggestively alligned with the two women, light Lucy and dark Isabel, who contend for Pierre's attention. In his final attempt at self-annihilation, Pierre rejects both: "Away! – Good Angel and Bad Angel both! – For Pierre is neuter now!" (360).

Melville's preoccupation with outlined figures corresponds their status as suggestions or projections of an absent original; they are traces in every sense of the word, both skeleton and silhouette, imitations that give only an aspect of their originals. John Ruskin, whose notion of imitation hinges on the pleasurable deception of the eye, seizes on just this distinction: "A pencil outline of the bough of a tree on white paper is a statement of a certain number of facts of form. It does not yet amount to the imitation of anything" (21).[48] For Ruskin, like Cumberland, outline belongs with sculpture rather than painting: "a marble figure does not look like what it is not: it looks like marble, and like the form of a man, but then it *is* marble, and it *is* the form of a man. It does not look like a man, which it is not, but like the form of a man, which it is. Form is form, *bona fide* and actual, whether in marble or in flesh – not an imitation or resemblance of form, but real form. The chalk outline of the bough of a tree on paper, is not an imitation; it looks like chalk and paper – not like wood, and that which it suggests to the mind is not properly said to be *like* the form of a bough, it *is* the form of a bough."[49]

There is no record that Melville ever read Cumberland's *Thoughts on Outline*, nor any compellingly suggestive punning in the body of his war poem "The Cumberland," about the sinking of a wooden frigate by that name, but it is likely nonetheless that Melville encountered the cliché of "chaste outline," along with the some of Cumberland's aesthetic attitudes. In his poem "The Attic Landscape," for instance, Melville's description resonates with Cumberland's theories of art and Flaxman's style of illustration, particularly in the association of the Greek style with "pure outline" and "sculptural grace":

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[46] Melville, *The Confidence Man*, 75.
[47] Ibid.
[48] John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, vol. 1 (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1873), 21.
[49] *Modern Painters*, vol. 1 (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1873), 18.

Tourist, spare the avid glance
That greedy roves the sights to see:
Little here of "Old Romance",
Or Picturesque of Tivoli.

No flushful tint the sense to warm –
Pure outline pale, a linear charm.
The clear-cut hills carved temples face,
Respond and share their sculptural grace.

'Tis Art and Nature lodged together,
Sister by sister, cheek to cheek;
Such Art, such Nature, and such weather
The All-in-All seems here a Greek.[50]

The shift from the garden views of Tivoli to the rockier terrain of Athens marks the transition from the poems set in Italy to those set in Greece, while the apostrophe to the reader as "tourist," a position equivalent to the "stateroom sailors" of *Typee* or the "sojourner from the city" in *Pierre,* highlights the physical and intellectual distance bridged by the poem. This caricature of the tourist, whose glance is acquisitive rather than reflective, embodies the popular taste for green gothic scenery that the rest of the poem will displace in favor of "pure outline pale" (a phrase which suggests that Melville thought of "outline" as denoting an outlined figure rather than the line enclosing it).

The "clear-cut hills" of the second stanza echo Pierre's musings over the "clear-cut outlines" of John Flaxman's Homer (42). In the expression that "the clear-cut hills carved temples face," the delay of the verb confuses subject and object, with the effect that the "sculptural grace" of the next line might belong to either the hills or the temples. Although the "clear-cut hills" precede the "carved temples" in Melville's word order, this priority is reversed in the "Art and Nature" of the final stanza.

The ideality of this scene, abstracted into the harmonious outlines fetishized by Cumberland, is perhaps undercut by its bleakness. The "flushful tint" absent from the landscape verges on personification even before final stanza makes both "Art" and "Nature" into nuzzling sisters. This convergence of the beautiful and the feminine in the final stanza is a Romantic cliché, but the preceding lines siphon off its warmth. Without a "flushful tint, the idealized cheeks will not blush, but remain appallingly white. Further, the cohabitation of Art and Nature, "lodged together," perhaps implies that the ideal sisters may yet be spinsters. The "avid glance / That greedy roves the sights to see" retrospectively has the air of thwarted libido, an eye starved for the sensual appeal of the female form and deflected onto cold marble. Perhaps "such weather" has kept some of the more fetching local specimens indoors, leaving the tourists at the mercy of more ancient attractions.

Melville praises the placidity of the Attic ideal, at least as it was celebrated by his contemporaries, but the constrained smoothness of his verse amounts to a submerged lament at

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[50] Herman Melville, *Published Poems : Battle-Pieces ; John Marr ; Timoleon*, ed. Robert Charles Ryan and Hershel Parker, The Writings of Herman Melville, Vol. 11 (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and Newberry Library, 2009), 300.

the lifelessness of the chastely classicized classics.[51] This much seems confirmed in "The Archipelago," in which the speaker reflects on the barren look of the Greek isles as a fallen form of the lush tropics: "'Tis Polynesia reft of palms, / Seaward no valley breaths her balms - / Not such as musk thy rings of calms, / Marquesas!"[52] Grey-eyed Athena is no Fayaway.

Following directly after "The Attic Landscape," the poem entitled "The Same" reduces the scenery before the poetic speaker to pure type. Written in four lines of four iambic feet, the poem suggests a square, approaching the abstraction of a Platonic form in its metrical regularity, its unity as a single sentence, and its willful lack of sensuous detail:

> A circumambient spell it is,
> Pellucid on these scenes that waits,
> Repose that does of Plato tell –
> Charm that his style authenticates.

The reliance on abstract nouns such as "spell," "repose," "charm," and "style" to the exclusion of concrete things renders the poem opaque, in contrast to the "pellucid" atmosphere it describes. Or rather, inspired by the clear Greek air, the poem creates a mode of perception so idealized, so penetrating, that the material world itself becomes transparent, disclosing the essence of the landscape unobstructed by any of its actual features. Still, the spatial presentation of a "circumambient spell" that waits "*on* these scenes" frames the poem's idealism as a way of seeing rather than a truth beneath appearances. The compact square of the poem's structure is undone by the circle of the horizon. The charm of the landscape tempts the observer with a secret content not unlike the elusive interior attributed to the sperm whale. "If the Sperm Whale be physiognomically a Sphinx," writes Melville, "to the phrenologist his brain seems that geometrical circle which it is impossible to square."

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[51] Potentially, the ironic undertow of "The Attic Landscape" explains the inconsistency pointed out in the notes of the Northwestern-Newberry *Published Poems* between the poem itself and the related journal entry in which Melville wrote, "Strange contrast of rugged rock with polished temple. At Stirling – art & nature correspond. Not so at Acropolis" (*Journals,* pg. 99). If the subject of the poem is an art-historical ideal rather than the landscape itself, then the abstraction of the contrasting textures of "rugged rock" and "polished temple" into harmonious arrangements of line makes sense; the idealized Greece that appears at an aesthetic distance from the actual ruins gains pictorial unity at the expense of the tactile reality that Melville observed during his travels. Speculatively, the poem may register the difference between what Melville saw first-hand in Greece and the black-and-white engravings that fell under his eye during the periods of anticipation and after-thought. This private twist on the poem's meaning, even if it remains unsubstantiated by any hard documentary evidence, fits with Melville's pattern of disappointment at visiting historical and religious sites without feeling their aura, an experience he describes at length in *Clarel.* While the editors of *Published Poems* suggest that this piece "represents something of a change from Melville's view in his journal entry of February 8, 1857," this theory too readily superimposes Melville himself upon the speaker of the poem, whose voice may represent an ironic interfusion of Melville's persona with the etherealized art-historical consensus ("Art's long after-shine," to borrow a phrase from another poem) that the poem renders deathly and inhuman.
[52] Melville, *Published Poems*, 308.

The poem's verbs assert states of being instead of actions, each positioned to end-stop its line as a distinct syntactic unit, without any of the grammatical suspense that compels the reader onward in a Miltonian enjambment. The symmetry of the quatrain form determines the poem's length, not the ongoing demands of sense-completion. Instead of extending itself in time as a narrative or an argument, the poem offers a series of equivalent descriptions for a single object of attention: "…it…that…that…that…." True to the title, each line evinces sameness by offering only a new name or quality for the spell over the landscape, a spell which is itself only a paraphrase for the absent "it" at the center of the poem's structure. The series of internal rhymes between "spell," "pellucid," "tell," and possibly "style" heightens the sense that repetition is the poem's main activity, but each word in the series marks the imagined medium (magical, visual, oral, written) of the abstract content that the poem repeats.

The only transitive verb in the poem, "authenticates," is uncertain in its reference. The poem's invariable delay of the verb conceals whether "style" is the subject or object of its relative clause, even if the former reading comes more naturally. Either Plato's style authenticates the charm of the landscape, which becomes an expression of his ideal forms; or the charm of the landscape authenticates Plato's style, showing his idealism to be grounded in the observation of nature. Perhaps both of these statements must be true for either to be, so that the poem's only action is necessarily a reciprocal one. Further, the poem's emphasis upon atmospheric qualities gives the impression that "style" denotes a sensibility of expression, loosely synonymous with the poem's "circumambient spell," but style might almost mean stylus, pen, not a dispersed aura but a fixed point. The pun within "style" pits the sensory gestalt of atmosphere against the minute particulars of representation, raising once again the problematic relationship between concepts and sensations without showing which term carries priority. In Schiller's theory of aesthetic education, the paradoxical relationship between ideal spaces and determinate positions reveals that neither the sensuous nor the intellectual faculty can be prior to its opposite: "Before we determine a point in space, space does not exist for us; but without absolute space we should never be able to determine a point at all."[53] The near-presence of the stylus also turns the whiteness of the scene into something like paper. The invocation of Plato, now pen in hand, yields an ideal outline, if not writing. The features of this landscape, never visualized in the poem's description, approach Platonic forms as they lose their substance.

The poem's title tweaks the poetic convention of "In Eandem," on the same, by presenting a case in which the self-sameness of idea and impression, ekphrasis and picture, imitation and original, is the defining characteristic of the place, the distinctive sameness of identity rather than the indifferent sameness of a mechanical copy. This aesthetic feat of unifying conceptual oppositions becomes the poem's means of authenticating itself as a truthful imitation, but the poem's opaque and minimal approach threatens to locate this strong sense of identity within the studium of the eye rather than the genius of the place. In other words, it is not entirely clear whether Melville has invoked Plato as an emblem of philosophical idealism or as a critic of imitation. Perhaps, as he composed "The Same," Melville recalled the idealists on the Pequod's mast-head, sailors unlikely to spot any whales: "those young Platonists have a notion that their vision is imperfect; they are short-sighted; what use, then, to strain the visual nerve? They have left their opera-glasses at home" (MD, 172). The poem's complete lack of pictorial description turns its Platonism into a form of willfull blindness, such that the evocation of a "spell"

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[53] Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, pg. 131.

precludes the representation of a scene. There is not a trace of the landscape in the poem unless "it," in the first line, refers obliquely to the Parthenon.

Even as the poetry of *Timoleon* addresses subjects far removed from modernity, Melville's preoccupation with place in his Parthenon poems reveals his anxiety over the detachment of reproducible images from their originals. As an aside, the odd vacancy of Melville's Greek poems may well amount to a quiet repetition of Byron's fierce polemic against the removal of the Elgin marbles in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, such that representation of the site from many angles both withholds the genius of the place from any one view and symbolically repeats the partial disassembly of the temple. For Walter Benjamin, the question of place depends upon authenticity: "Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be."[54] Along these lines, Benjamin defines the aura of "natural objects," such as the features of landscape, in terms of "the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be."[55] While the natural world remains secure in its authenticity, the creation of images and copies threatens the uniqueness of "historical objects," including works of art and architecture, by depriving them of this distance: "Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction."[56] The poetry of "Fruit of Travel Long Ago" foregrounds the problem of place. The poems reproduce architectural landmarks through ekphrasis, yet Melville restricts his visual description of these sites in order to preserve the experience of a distance, whether by omitting visual details, as in "The Same," or by assigning the poetic speaker a well-defined vantage point.

"The Parthenon" is divided into four sections that offer four distinct views of the temple: "*Seen aloft, from afar," "Nearer viewed," "The Frieze," "The Last Tile.*" The surrounding poems provide additional vantage points. "The Attic Landscape" and "The Same" both offer a view of the Acropolis, while manuscript evidence suggests that Melville may have considered "Greek Masonry" and "Greek Architecture" as additional sections of "The Parthenon" before settling on the poem's four-part structure.[57] In the order of the poems, the landscape precedes the temple, while a rubble of fragments follows after it. This structure reinforces the conceptual unity of the Parthenon itself, which becomes the focal point of the entire sub-sequence of Greek poems, yet perhaps at the cost of troubling the unity of the four-part poem named for the temple.

In the first section of "The Parthenon," under the heading "*Seen aloft, from afar,*" Melville plays upon the linked effects of physical, temporal, and cognitive distance. The poem details the optical effects created by the speaker's vantage point, but then this experiment in perspective figures as an extended metaphor for the distancing effects exerted by the ideas of art and tradition:

> Estranged in site,
> Aerial gleaming, warmly white,
> You look a sun-cloud motionless
> In noon of day divine;
> Your beauty charmed enhancement takes

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[54] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 220.
[55] "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 222.
[56] "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 223.
[57] See *Published Poems*, notes.

In Art's long after-shine.

The first line both establishes that the Parthenon is set apart from its immediate surroundings and emphasizes the speaker's physical distance from the temple, but the sense that the temple has been somehow "estranged" hinges upon the dislocation of art from the everyday world. Notably, the line sounds indistinguishable from "estranged in *sight*." The rhyme of "site" and "white" extends this contrast between spatial fixity and visual abstraction. While architecture is necessarily situated, the poem's pictorialism estranges the temple from its fixed spot, so that it appears to float above the ground as "a sun-cloud." The adjective "charmed" hovers ambiguously between "beauty" and "enhancement," so that that the authentic presence of "beauty charmed" remains indistinguishable from the illusory effect of "charmed enhancement." This ambiguity corresponds to the possible meanings for "Art's long after-shine." This phrase might encapsulate the way that the temple's form rarifies itself in the spectator's memory. It might also have to do with the idealization of the site as it becomes detached from its original function, set apart from the commonplace, and celebrated as an embodied ideal. The poem compares the "after-shine" to the glare of sunlight on the "warmly white" temple, an optical effect that blurs the stone structure into a cloud. The "after-shine" becomes something like the color perceived upon the retina once the eye has been closed or averted, not a direct perception of the world but an image internal to the eye.

In the fourth and final section of "The Parthenon," entitled "*The Last Tile,*" the completion of the monument calms the surrounding scenery:

> When the last marble tile was laid
> The winds died down on all the seas;
> Hushed were the birds, and swooned the glade;
> Ictinus sat; Aspasia said
> "Hist! – Art's meridian, Pericles!"

The temple's transformative effect on its surroundings marks "The Parthenon" as a prototype of Wallace Steven's "Anecdote of the Jar," although perhaps a prototype that Steven's never read. The poem plays upon the many meanings of "meridian" to raise the paradoxical relationship of fixity with universality; the Parthenon's situation, spatial and art-historical, troubles the placeless aesthetic ideal the temple represents in a naïve reading of the poem. In the most immediate sense, Aspasia declares the Parthenon "Art's meridian" because it represents the zenith of artistry, yet as in the sun's trajectory the highest point is also the midpoint. Fittingly, "The Parthenon" is the centerpiece in the central grouping of "Fruit of Travel Long Ago," between the Italian poems and the Egyptian. The stillness of the scene activates the secondary meaning of "meridian" as a midday rest, a pun that resonates with the earlier description of the temple as "a suncloud motionless / in noon of day divine." Of course, in the verse of a sailor-poet, "Art's meridian" must also suggest a line of longitude; this odd phrase fixes the temple's geographical coordinates, yet also hints at an absolute aesthetic ideal not unlike the chronometrical moral ideal of Plotinus Plinlimmon's pamplet, in which god figures as the "sole source" of truth (with a probable pun on "sol," sun) and "the great Greenwich hill and tower from which the universal meridians are far out into eternity reckoned" (211). In short, the Golden Mean meets the Greenwich Mean in this geographical metaphor. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*,

"meridian" has the specialized sense of "a locality, situation, or constituency considered as separate and distinct from others, and as having its own particular character."

Foreshortening and Pictures

In *Pierre*, truth only appears at a distance, vanishing whenever Pierre draws too close to the metaphoric sites that house the world's secrets. Melville adopts the metaphor of a moral compass only to thwart its navigational value: "arrived at the Pole, to whose barrenness only it points, there, the needle indifferently respects all points of the horizon alike" (165). In a passage that resembles the poetic magnification of the Parthenon in *Timoleon*, Melville likens Pierre's search for the absolute truth to opening of a pharaoh's tomb: "By vast pains we mine into the pyramid; by horrible gropings we come to the central room; with joy we espy the sarcophagus; but we lift the lid – and no body is there! – appallingly vacant as vast is the soul of a man!" (285). It cannot be coincidental, of course, that the narrator imagines the resting place of "the old mummy" barely a page before Pierre learns of his mother's death (285). At least in part, the absence of the pharaoh reflects the structure of Pierre's family, in which Mary Glendinning brandishes a general's baton to compensate for the early death of Pierre's father. The disappearance of the father presumably also determines Pierre's perception of virtue and vice as "two shadows cast from one nothing." In *Timoleon,* the path toward the Parthenon concludes with a sort of origin story, anchored in the figure of Pericles, who becomes both the genius of the place and the recipient of the poem's final address. In *Pierre*, images do not coalesce into accessible spaces or disclose an original character at the source of representation. The relationship of image and place is deeply troubled one, only somewhat ordered by the metaphor of foreshortening.[58]

In *Pierre*, Melville tends to frame his characterizations around pictures, whether the portraits that confront Pierre or the imagined landscapes drawn from his inner life. For Melville, the simulation of solidity and volume upon the flat picture surface seems to have suggested the mind's grasping after truth and order. The self-formation achieved through aesthetic education emerges in terms of optics. The purpose of aesthetic education, according to Friedrich Schiller, is

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[58] The pressure of reification registers in Pierre's interaction with the world as a set of images, but also in the tension between pictorial genres. The genres of portraiture and landscape prove less distinct on the page than on the wall; the horizontal canvas of the landscapist becomes as much a mirror for young Pierre as portraiture's vertical frame. Positioned a story above Arrowhead's north-facing piazza, Melville's writing desk offered the view of Mount Greylock, the royal dedicatee of his novel, while Pierre's writing desk at the Apostles offers the view of Plotinus Plinlimmon. As psychological representations, both portrait and landscape converge. Still, the continued distinctness of these genres despite their convergence reveals the tension internal to the mind they mutually represent. The unity of figure and ground is wishful. As it is variously expressed in these painted forms, shifting from portrait to landscape and back, Pierre's self-image vacillates between figure and ground, never quite resolving into a self-grounded whole. Coleridge asserts that self-consciousness "is groundless, but only because it is itself the ground of all other certainty." The personification of Mount Greylock resolves figure and ground into the portrait of a landscape, sovereign not only as a metaphorical monarch but as figure seemingly grounded in itself.

to restore wholeness to the fragmented state of human life. In Schiller's view, aesthetic education places life back into its proper perspective and proportions, correcting for the unbalanced development of the senses and the intellectual faculties. At the turning point of *Pierre*, the scene of Pierre's resolution to disguise Isabel as his wife, Melville describes Pierre's misapprehension of human relations figures as an error of pictorial perspective:

> That all-comprehending oneness, that calm representativeness, by which a steady philosophic mind reaches forth and draws to itself, in their collective entirety, the objects of its contemplations; that pertains not to the young enthusiast. By his eagerness, all objects are deceptively foreshortened; by his intensity each object is viewed as detached; so that essentially and relatively every thing is misseen by him. (175)

Unable to compose himself, Pierre proves equally unable to compose a unified picture of his circumstances. It is strange, though, that this optical distortion would take the particular form of foreshortening. The metaphor recurs later in the chapter:

> Not that impulsive Pierre wholly overlooked all that was menacing to him in his future, if he now acts out his most rare resolve; but eagerly foreshortened by him, they assumed not their full magnitude of menacing; nor, indeed, - so riveted his purpose – were they pushed up to his face, would he for that renounce his self-renunciation; while concerning all things more immediately contingent upon his central resolution; these were, doubtless, in a measure, foreseen and understood by him. (176)

The idea of a deceptive foreshortening houses two possibilities: first, the compression of the entire visual field and, second, the local confusion of depth-cues with lines of contour. The repeated association of foreshortening with eagerness, the wishful compression of time, suggests that the "full magnitude of menacing" has been concealed within an abnormally compressed visual field, as in a long lens.[59] On the other hand, the indication that Pierre would not heed these menaces "were they pushed up to his face" implies that he may also have mistaken a sizable menace in the distance for a smaller one near at hand.[60] The foreshortening of solid things into

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[59] In his glossary of cinematic terms, James Monaco offers the definition of foreshortening as "the distortion cased by a telephoto lens: the illusion of depth is compressed," and refers to the opposite sort of optical distortion as forelengthening: "The linear distortion caused by a wide-angle lens: the perception of depth is exaggerated." See *How to Read a Film: The Art, Technology, Language, History, and Theory of Film and Media*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981, 433.

[60] This is one of the moments when the whale is most sorely to be missed: "Ahab could discover no sign in the sea. But suddenly as he peered down and down into its depths, he profoundly saw a white living spot no bigger than a white weasel, with wonderful celerity uprising, and magnifying as it rose, till it turned, and there were plainly revealed two long crooked rows of white, glistening teeth, floating up from the undiscoverable bottom. It was Moby Dick's open mouth and scrolled jaw; his vast, shadowed bulk still half blending with the blue of the sea" (MD 597).

flat visual signs signals Pierre's temporary transition from a participant in his own life to a detached observer. Pierre abstracts his painful situation into a casuistical puzzle that he may contemplate at an emotional remove.

Melville's treatment of foreshortening comes into focus through a pair of figurative associations. First, Melville associates foreshortening with weaving. "Foreshortened" is a fairly rare word in Melville's writing, appearing only twice in *Pierre*, where it refers to the technique of portraying depth, and once in *Moby-Dick*, where it refers idiosyncratically to the tightening of the whale lines; in each novel, though, the term appears in close proximity to a metaphor of weaving gone wrong, whether the "twist of Fate" that snares Pierre or the tangled loom formed as the whale boats cross their lines. Since the figure of foreshortening appears at moments of precipitate resolve, when the drive toward action has created a heightened sense of the inevitable, it only makes sense that the specter of Fate, frequently invoked and ominously capitalized, would attract images of weaving and entanglement. As an expression of eagerness and intensity, qualities to which it is linked in *Pierre*, foreshortening becomes a manner of drawing the objects of perception closer, as if by rope, yet this process paradoxically isolates the mind within its own representations, apart from the exterior world. Second, Melville associates both weaving and foreshortening with mathematics. Given the geometrical rigor of point-perspective and the historical relationship between the power loom and the early computer, the historical connection between these three disciplines provides an immanent rationale for their poetic association. Still, Melville invokes mathematics to signal that the order among signs has overtaken their referential value.

In the chapter's third iteration of the same basic idea, Melville all but discards the metaphorical optics of the previous versions in favor of mathematics:

> Though in some things he had unjuggled himself, and forced himself to eye the prospect as it was; yet, so far as Lucy was concerned, he was still at bottom a juggler. True, in his extraordinary scheme, Lucy was so intimately interwoven, that it seemed impossible for him to cast his future without some way having that heart's love in view. But ignorant of its quantity as yet, or fearful of ascertaining it; like an algebraist, for the real Lucy he, in his scheming thoughts, had substituted but a sign – some empty x – and in the ultimate solution of the problem, that empty x still figured; not the real Lucy. (181)

A residue of the previous metaphor lingers here in Pierre's effort to "eye the prospect as it was." The novel's preoccupation with mountain peaks ensures that any reference to "prospect" will link the word's temporal and geological meanings in a Miltonian pun. In *Pierre*, any view of the future is blocked by the figure of Mount Greylock, the novel's royal dedicatee and the model for the "delectable mountain" of Saddle Meadows. The concealed magnitude of menace echoes here in an unknown quantity of love; in this shift, the compression of the visual field has proceeded far enough to flatten things into signs. The passage seems ambivalent about the force of the "empty x"; in that the internal necessity of this emotional algebra contrasts with the emptiness of its signs.[61] An "ultimate solution" that retains a variable is no solution at all; what the narrator

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[61] "Unjuggled" is another verbal oddity here, but it apparently marks the difference between acting with knowledge and taking blind chances. A passage from *Moby-Dick* clarifies the probable turn of Melville's thought: "Thus the whale-line folds the whole boat in its complicated

says of Plotinus Plinlimmon's pamphlet holds equally true here: "For to me it seems more the excellently illustrated re-statement of a problem, than the solution of the problem itself. But as such mere illustrations are almost universally taken for solutions (and perhaps they are the only possible human solutions), therefore it may help to the temporary quiet of some inquiring mind; and so not be wholly without use" (210).

This language of mathematics recurs, along with a metaphor of weaving, when Pierre brings the novel's plot to an abrupt conclusion with the murder of his cousin Glen. As Pierre stalks his cousin on the city streets, Melville turns to the certainty of mathematical logic in order to distinguish Pierre's singular purpose from the anonymous bustle of the urban crowd: "Unentangledly, Pierre threaded all their host, though in its inmost heart. Bent he was, on a straightforward, mathematical intent" (359).

The reviewer for the *Washington National Era* called for Melville's return to the sea: "Mr. M. has evidently taken hold of a subject which has mastered *him*, and led him into all manner of vagaries. He is more at home in the manifold intricacies of a ship's rigging than amid the subtleties of psychological phenomena."[62] It would be closer to the truth to say that Melville is more at home symbolizing psychological phenomena through the manifold intricacies of a ship's rigging than presenting them straight-forwardly as psychological phenomena. For this reason, perhaps, the scene of Pierre's resolution abounds in abstract formulations that closely parallel the symbolism of the three-chapter chase that concludes *Moby-Dick*, a sequence that might as well be called "13 Ways of Looking at a White Whale," at a low estimate, for the sheer variety of perspectives and figurative frameworks directed at Moby Dick.

Melville's prose fiction contains only one other mention of foreshortening, during the second day of the chase in *Moby-Dick*:

> But at last in his untraceable evolutions, the White Whale so crossed and recrossed, and in a thousand ways entangled the slack of the three lines now fast to him, that they foreshortened, and, of themselves, warped the devoted boats towards the planted irons in him; though now for a moment the whale drew aside a little, as if to rally for a more tremendous charge.[63]

The lines have "foreshortened" in the sense that they have tightened in advance of the whale's further exertions; the term evokes the perception of time rather than depth: "to shorten or curtail in advance" (OED). It's not difficult to imagine the optical definition as a special case of this one; insofar as the illusion of depth is a property of the visual medium itself, the objects of representation are shortened in advance of their appearance. By this logic, Melville writes that the lines have *fore*shortened and not merely shortened specifically because they have acted "of themselves," as an effect of their entanglement, without the influence of external forces. If the ropes have become dangerously self-involved, then that should be reason enough to associate

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coils, twisting and writhing around it in almost every direction. All the oarsmen are involved in its perilous contortions; so that to the timid eye of the landsman, they seem as Indian jugglers, with the deadliest snakes sportively festooning their limbs" (MD, 305). In this light, Pierre has "unjuggled himself" insofar as he has untangled the moral knot in which one finds Lucy "intimately interwoven."

[62] Higgins and Parker, *Critical Essays*, pg. 37.
[63] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, pg. 608.

them with Ahab, who is described before the chase as "tied up and twisted, gnarled and knotted with wrinkles" and whose "close-coiled woe" has taken on a life of its own, precipitating a fate that might have remained imaginary (MD, 589, 590).

The sense of a separate will in the ropes, an impulse that preempts the whale's assault, marks the intrusion of aesthetic perception upon physical determinism. The trailing lines approach a form of objectified thought, a hempen nervous system, as they imperfectly trace the whale's "untraceable" path. The whale's "evolutions" both produce and contrast the involutions of the ropes. Melville's skepticism at the mind's capacity to reproduce the world is perhaps what necessitates the shrewd "as if" that marks the impression of malice in the whale as a projection. Meager evidence supports the impression; the fussy qualifications in the description ("for a moment," "a little") hardly dampen the suspicion that the ruse of forensic exactitude screens for a trick of the eye.

The underlying metaphor of this passage is not pictorial technique, as in *Pierre*, but weaving. Although the scene passes without an overt mention to weaving, the resemblance of the entangled lines to a loom produces a probable pun on "warped," in that the boats are hauled on ropes (satisfying one definition) in the same moment that they are figuratively woven on a warp (satisfying another). Apart from linking the boats to shuttles, though, this word raises a series of associations that range freely between physical and cognitive operations: "to twist aside," "to deflect," "to entwine," "to contrive," or even "to misinterpret." Melville has prepared his reader to associate matters of fate, foresight, and natural design with the figure of the loom; drowning Pip sees "God's foot upon the treadle of the loom" (MD, 453), Ishmael imagines "the Loom of Time" as he weaves a mat with Queequeg (MD 233), the woods at Arsacides become the living tapestry of a "weaver-god" with the sun as his "flying shuttle."[64] In *Moby-Dick*, the intricate workings of the loom suggest the hidden causality of natural phenomena; just as each detail of a woven design originates in a series of mechanical operations, each object and each event in nature becomes reducible to an underlying pattern, even if it is too complex to be discerned. Depending upon whether the emphasis falls on the weaver or the loom, this metaphor has affinities with both Romantic design theology and secular conceptions of a mechanical universe.

The image of weaving that emerges during the chase builds upon the scene of mat-weaving between Ishmael and Queequeg:

> As I kept passing and repassing the filling or woof of marline between the long yarns of the warp, using my own hand for the shuttle, and as Queequeg, standing sideways, ever and anon slid his heavy oaken sword between the threads, and idly looking off upon the water, carelessly and unthinkingly drove home every yarn: I say so strange a dreaminess did there then reign all over the ship and all over the sea, only broken by the intermitting dull sound of the sword, that it seemed as if this were the Loom of Time, and I myself were a shuttle mechanically weaving and weaving away at the Fates. (233)

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[64] This last instance generates an echo of the perplexed God, who "would like a little information upon certain points Himself," of Melville's letter to Hawthorne: "The weaver-god, he weaves; and by that weaving is he deafened, that he hears no mortal voice; and by that humming, we, too, who look on the loom are deafened; and only when we escape it shall we hear the thousand voices that speak through it" (MD 490).

Ever a meditative worker, Ishmael embroiders this conceit more attentively (one expects) than he weaves the mat, elaborating the components of this "Loom of Time" into a system encompassing "chance, free will, and necessity – no wise incompatible – all interweavingly working together" such that these abstractions correspond in respective order to the sword, the shuttle, and the warp (MD, 234).

As the description of the loom continues, the encompassing concept of "Fate" vanishes in favor of "necessity"; the metaphor shifts from a mythological conception to a secular one, such that "Fate" transforms from a mysterious agency beyond the pale of human life into the penumbra effect of discernable rules, choices, and events. This orderly scheme quickly succumbs to divine intervention, or at least its comical proxy: "Thus we were weaving and weaving away when I started at a sound so strange, long drawn, and musically wild and unearthly, that the ball of free will dropped from my hand, and I stood gazing up at the clouds when that voice dropped like a wing" (MD, 234). The voice belongs to Tashtego, who makes an unlikely angel: "you would almost have credited the superstitions of some of the earlier Puritans, and half-believed this wild Indian to be a son of the Prince of the Powers of the Air." The confusion of divine and demonic associations in this moment sets the stage for the abrupt appearance of Ahab's "five dusky phantoms," Fedallah and his fellows. Further, the "unearthly" voice delivers a message of economic rather than spiritual import: "There she blows!" This ironic confusion of divine revelation and economic opportunity, the two pillars of American enthusiasm, sweeps aside the delicate balance of Ishmael's previous meditation. Ishmael's philosophical state of mind cannot outlive the "dreaminess" of his working conditions. The frenzy of activity that follows the appearance of the novel's first whale also inspires frenzied feelings in Ishmael, who in the excitement of the moment cannot distinguish between religious conviction and earthly greed. When Ishmael drops "the ball of free will," the comical blending of vehicle and tenor signals his abrupt emergence from dreamy thoughts, but this joke also implies the extent to which philosophical positions, for Melville, are contingent upon material conditions and emotional states.

The first mention of foreshortening in *Pierre* occurs within the same paragraph as an image that uncannily recalls the tangled lines of the whale-boats: "And now we behold this hapless youth all eager to involve himself in such an inextricable twist of Fate, that the three dextrous maids themselves could hardly disentangle him, if once he tie the complicating knots about him and Isabel" (175). The metaphor of pictorial perspective barely has time to register before Melville returns to weaving. The poetic thoughts of *Moby-Dick* seem to break in upon the parallel meditations of *Pierre*. Like the sailors in *Moby-Dick*, endangered by their own ropes rather than the whale, Pierre prepares to seal his own doom before any supernatural tormentors have their chance. Tragedy will ensue, but not because it must. Melville reverentially capitalizes "Fate" only to introduce the mythological Fates in the prosaic guise of "three dextrous maids," as if in anticipation of Pierre's future residence with three unlucky women: Isabel, Delly, and Lucy.

The domestic setting of Saddle Meadows tempts Melville into frequent invocations of "those Three Weird Ones, that tend Life's loom," an allusion that gives mythic scope to Pierre's struggle with the feminine world of his upbringing, such that the cosmos is ordered through the homely labor (70). When Pierre contemplates his escape from Saddle Meadows, a place defined by his obligations to women, the narrator considers the delicacy of the social fabric: "how light as gossamer, and thinner and more impalpable than airiest threads of gauze, did he hold all common conventional regardings; -- his hereditary duty to his mother, his pledged worldly faith and honor to the hand and seal of his affiancement?" (106). Still, even after transplanting himself

to the city, Pierre feels himself "helplessly held in the six hands of the Sisters" among which one must count the four sisterly hands of Pierre's mother and his pretended wife, with nun-like Lucy as a likely source for the final pair (287). Pierre encounters a number of weird sisters, but they are elevated into Fates by unconscious compulsion rather than supernatural potency.

Images of weaving and entanglement appear throughout *Pierre* as a regular figure of moral and social constraint, not least when Pierre warns Isabel of "the myriad alliances and criss-crossings among mankind, the infinite entanglements of all social things, which forbids that one thread should fly the general fabric" (191). A sewing circle, organized by "pious spinsters," sisters at that, affords Pierre his first glimpse of Isabel (44). At one point, the narrator faults popular novels for "trying to unravel, and spread out, and classify, the more thin than gossamer threads which make up the complex web of life" (141). Pierre tells his mother of his fictitious marriage in front of "a marble group of the temple-polluting Laocoon and his two innocent children, caught in inextricable snarls of snakes," an allusion that links Pierre's crime against domestic tranquility to the earlier transgression of his father, who has become responsible for the suffering of his own two children (184). The tableau formed by the corpses of Isabel and Pierre nearly repeats this image: "she fell upon Pierre's heart, and her long hair ran over him, and arbored him in ebon vines" (362).

Between the craft of loom-weaving and the abstract discipline of mathematics stands Charles Babbage, who invented the computer from the rudiments of the power loom (and subscribed to design theology on the side). As the narrator shifts from weaving to mathematics, from practical artistry to theoretical science, the sequence of metaphors signals Pierre's retreat from lively memory into moral abstraction. The metaphor of weaving simulates Melville's intuition for the patterns operating beneath his impressions, particularly his impressions of scenes too intricate or too vast to be perceived all at once. In response to the disruptive effects of these sublime sights, the figure of interwoven lines materializes the obscure principle of connection that gives the world its coherence. In short, weaving symbolizes the unity of symbols. In one case, the metaphor of weaving links Isabel's bizarre melodies to the intricacies of the whale line. When Isabel sings over the tones of her guitar, the layering of sounds attracts another metaphor of entanglement: "Among the waltzings, and the droppings, and the swarmings of the sounds, Pierre now heard the tones above deftly stealing and winding among the myriad serpentinings of the other melody" (126). Not even the pure forms of music entirely escape this entanglement. Melville concludes the chapter with his final verdict on moral pictorialism, albeit in a statement that itself requires the suspension of any final sense: "But here we draw a vail. Some nameless struggles of the soul can not be painted, and some woes will not be told. Let the ambiguous procession of events reveal their own ambiguousness" (181).

Conclusion

Even in casual usage, the concept of "form" separates objects and artworks from themselves, distinguishing an outer shape or an inner germ of inspiration from the completed whole. The pictorial metaphors in *Pierre* draw attention to the internal divisions that allow pictures to suggest more than they represent (or to embody facts that the artist would never have imagined). The term of outline intercedes between the conceptual registers of representation, while the concept of foreshortening emphasizes the intermingling of subjective and objective experience on the picture surface, which for Melville always seems to involve a fatal misrecognition. In Melville's writing, these terms of art disturb the unity of pictures, breaking

them into their elements and techniques, but also invest them with the movements of thought. In consequence, critics have misread Melville whenever the pictures under his eye have figured as abstract instantiations of "the visual." Rather, because of Melville's attention to features such as outline, pictures disclose the uneasy balance between abstraction and raw perception that leads Pierre toward truths and illusions, each destructive.

Pierre does not parody the premises of aesthetic education, but rather pursues them at a minute scale. Schiller instructs his readers to surround the "equivocal company" of their contemporaries with "great and noble forms of genius…until Semblance conquer Reality, and Art triumph over Nature" (61). In *Pierre*, semblance and art *do* triumph over reality and nature, but the result is tragic rather than utopian. Pierre's formative encounters with *Hamlet* and *The Divine Comedy* must compete with the martial heirlooms and sentimental trinkets that clutter his home at Saddle Meadows, a landscape itself overwritten with family stories and picturesque conventions. Pierre's experience is subject to more influences than either he or the novel can reasonably trace; the objects surrounding Pierre both shape his memory and are interpreted through it. The novel's superabundance of mediation so thoroughly confuses cause-and-effect that over-determination looks surprisingly like intuition. "Far as we blind moles can see," writes Melville, "man's life seems but an acting upon mysterious hints; it is somehow hinted to us to do thus or thus. For surely no mortal who has at all gone down into himself will ever pretend that his slightest thought or act solely originates in his own defined identity" (176). The novel makes a provisional attempt to trace the "mysterious hints" to their sources, but the truth recedes behind layer upon layer of representation, memory, and history. Truth figures in the novel as a disturbance, both emotional and stylistic, rather than a knowable content. The "invisibles" and "ambiguities" of the novel, those things that cannot be told or painted, find expression in distortions and excesses of style. The language of *Pierre,* in its elaborate figurations, models the process of suggestion that characterizes the hero's inner life.

CHAPTER FOUR
COPIED ART AND ORIGINAL SIN IN *THE MARBLE FAUN*

Introduction

Hawthorne's early thoughts about the Daguerreotype appear in his correspondence with Sophia Peabody, in a letter dated December 11, 1839: "I wish there was something in the intellectual world analogous to the Daguerreotype (is that the name of it?) in the visible -- something which should print off our deepest, and subtlest, and delicatest thoughts and feelings, as minutely as the above-mentioned instrument paints the various aspects of Nature."[1] Hawthorne composed this letter during the same month that *The Knickerbocker* and *The New-Yorker* announced the first display of Daguerreotypes in America, although other reports had appeared in the American press as early as February of that year.[2] Hawthorne absorbed the Daguerreotype into his imaginative life before he was comfortable spelling out its name. Hawthorne's brief reflection on the Daguerreotype has made the rounds in quotation, but its rhetorical context, a love letter, has been neglected for no better reason than its relative banality. The Daguerreotype initiates a conventional lover's complaint about the inadequacy of the pen. As he wishes for greater powers of expression, Hawthorne tacitly reminds Sophia how painstakingly his writings have evoked the minute sentiments that the imagined instrument (something like a poetic cardiograph) would mechanically "print off."

Hawthorne playfully echoes other early accounts of photography as he invokes the new medium's minute optical detail and its capacity to fix transitory images. The precision of the Daguerreotype, translated into the sphere of emotion, prompts a string of superlatives in an emphatic polysyndeton – "deepest, and subtlest, and delicatest" – words that proceed from obscurity to intricacy. Because the imagined instrument records passively, without the conscious exertion of the artist's hand or mind, Hawthorne implies that it might capture the inspirations that only become distinct when the attention wanders: "It seems as if Sophie Hawthorne fled away into infinite space, the moment I strive to fix her image before me in order to inspire my pen; - whereas, no sooner do I give myself up to reverie, than here she is again, smiling lightsomely by my side" (384). The evanescent image of Sophia marks her absence, a doleful circumstance in any love letter, but it also anticipates the future fixity of marriage. She was not yet Sophie Hawthorne; the pair would not marry until 1842. Sophie herself plays the role of the instrument and also its image, the object of Hawthorne's affections as well as their privileged interpreter.[3]

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[1] Thomas Woodson, L. Neal Smith, and Norman Holmes Pearson, *Nathaniel Hawthorne; The Letters, 1813-1843* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State, 1989), 384.

[2] Specifically, the *Boston Mercantile Journal* and *Boston Daily Advertiser* both printed notices in February, each of which erroneously describes images on paper, not the metallic plates of Daguerre's process. Robert Taft speculates that these early articles might have received more attention had they not reminded skeptical readers of the New York *Sun*'s 1835 moon hoax. See Robert Taft, *Photography and the American Scene : A Social History, 1839-1889* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1938).

[3] This correspondence has not exhausted its strangeness. In his next letter, Hawthorne will imagine Sophia crawling into his heart to read the unutterable sentiments recorded there.

The Marble Faun contains exactly one direct reference to photography, and even then only as the vehicle of a metaphor, but this isolated moment suffices to show that photography occupies a persistent position in Hawthorne's thinking about art. Hilda, a talented copyist, explains how she managed a "genuine copy" of "the very saddest picture ever painted or conceived," the image of Beatrice Cenci attributed to Guido: "It was Thompson, who brought it away piece-meal, being forbidden (like the rest of us) to set up his easel before it. As for me, I knew the Prince Barberini would be deaf to all entreaties; so I had no resource but to sit down before the picture, day after day, and let it sink into my heart. I do believe it is now photographed there" (65).[4] So much for copper plates. This mechanical variation on the common sentimental trope of writing upon the heart turns Hilda herself into the kind of fictive instrument imagined in Hawthorne's letter, capable of recording her emotional experience of the original painting with the minute precision of a photograph. Further, this copyist herself is, according to the narrator, "only visible by the sunshine of her soul" (63). Hawthorne cannot celebrate photography without searching for ways around its association with pure vision, to the exclusion of moral and imaginative truths, but he still envies the new technology for its seemingly spontaneous capture of more minute detail than the conscious mind can seize for itself.

The fidelity of Hilda's work is not to the optical detail of the originals but their spirit, an intrinsic ideal rather than an arrangement of visible form: "Her copies were indeed marvelous. Accuracy was not the phrase for them; a Chinese copy is accurate. Hilda's had that evanescent and ethereal life – that flitting fragrance, as it were, of the originals – which it is as difficult to catch and retain as it would be for a sculptor to get the very movement and varying color of a living man into his marble bust" (58). Hawthorne's preference for spirit over form becomes more heavy-handed with each successive adjective connoting lightness and life. The trace of original inspiration proves so transitory that it demands a series of grasping and indistinct references, concluding with a metaphor that loosely evokes the myth of Pygmalion. Notably, "movement and varying color" are exactly the qualities excluded from photographs. Hilda does not copy the whole of her chosen painting, but "some high, noble, and delicate portion of it, in which the spirit and essence of the picture culminated" (58). "The copy would come from her hands with what the beholder felt must be the light which the Old Master had left upon the original in bestowing his final and most ethereal touch" (59).

The success of Hilda's copy leads to yet another reproduction of the portrait: "As Miriam gave utterance to these words, Hilda looked from the picture into her face, and was startled to observe that her friend's expression had become almost exactly that of the portrait; as if her passionate wish and struggle to penetrate poor Beatrice's mystery had been successful" (67).[5] Miriam's accidental mimicry suggests yet another production not of the portrait's visible form

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[4] See Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun; or, the Romance of Monte Beni* (New York: Penguin, 1990), 65. All subsequent citations of this text will appear parenthetically. The Thompson mentioned in this passage is the American painter Cephas Thompson, who painted Hawthorne's portrait in 1850 and crossed paths with him again in Italy as Hawthorne gathered his material for *The Marble Faun*.

[5] Cf. Poe in "The Purloined Letter" (1844): "When I wish to find out how wise, or how stupid, or how good, or how wicked is any one, or what are his thoughts at the moment, I fashion the expression of my face, as accurately as possible, in accordance with the expression of his, and then wait to see what thoughts or sentiments arise in my mind or heart, as if to match or correspond with the expression." See Poe, *Poetry and Tales*, 690.

but the secret behind Beatrice's expression. The circulation of the picture proves less interesting to Hawthorne than the invisible transmission of its "mystery." The painting's mystery is in one respect like a criminal case, in which Beatrice's face provides the most compelling testimony. Miriam and Hilda return very different verdicts. The way that Hilda's copy becomes evidence in an imagined trial anticipates the confusion that Hawthorne will create around forensic questions throughout the text.

The judgment of Beatrice anticipates the question of Miriam's guilt later in the novel, not least because the evidence is incomplete. Even the severe Hilda, a virtual caricature of unforgiving Puritan rectitude, is willing to admit Beatrice's innocence before she recalls her story. Hawthorne, for his part, never entirely clarifies Miriam's personal history. Hilda initially regards Beatrice as "fallen, and yet sinless" but immediately changes her tune once Miriam reminds her of the story surrounding the portrait: "Her doom was just" (66). After this abrupt reversal of opinion, Hilda's explanation sets painting at odds with narrative: "I really had quite forgotten Beatrice's history, and was thinking of her only as the picture seems to reveal her character" (66). Hawthorne orchestrates the scene in such a way that the intuitive knowledge of the copyist remains unreliable and opaque. Hawthorne gives Miriam the last word: "It is strange, dear Hilda, how an innocent, delicate, white soul, like yours, has been able to seize the subtle mystery of this portrait; as you surely must, in order to reproduce it so perfectly" (67). Surely.

The Marble Faun is Hawthorne's final completed romance, composed after a long hiatus in his literary career during which he served as the American consul in London. Hawthorne introduces his central cast of four characters. Miriam, Hilda, and Kenyon are expatriate artists working in Rome, while Donatello is a carefree Italian count whose resemblance to the Faun of Praxiteles extends from his physical appearance to the unthinking cheer that marks him for the others as the creature of a prelapsarian age. Miriam, the dark-haired Hawthorne woman in the model of Hester Prynne and Zenobia, finds herself followed by Donatello, whose innocent affection she cannot accept, and the mysterious Model, a dark figure like Chillingsworth to whom she is bound by some secret sin that Hawthorne never divulges. Relatively early in the novel, Donatello impulsively flings the Model from the Tarpeian Rock. Hawthorne spends the rest of the novel dramatizing how this one sin transforms his characters and alters the relationships between them.

The Marble Faun's plot accounts for a notoriously small proportion of the book, supplemented by frequent and elaborate descriptions of Rome's cultural attractions. The narrator habitually digresses from the unfolding plot to take inventory of the landmarks and famous facades looming over his scenes, even when the characters themselves remain more or less oblivious. *The Marble Faun* is just barely a novel, behaving more often as a guidebook in narrative form, complete with a thorough itinerary of sites and a healthy supply of opinionated banter over each of them, ideal for tourists in want of a literary companion. The musings of Hawthorne's characters likely supplied his readers, during their travels, with a sounding-board for personal reflections as well as a stock of material to be passed off in conversation. In his 1879 study of Hawthorne, Henry James confirms *The Marble Faun*'s appeal for tourists: "It is part of the intellectual equipment of the Anglo-Saxon visitor to Rome, and is read by every English-speaking traveler who arrives there, who has been there, or who intends to go."[6]

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[6] Henry James, *Hawthorne* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1879), 165.

It is hard to say whether *the Marble Faun* would have supplied travellers with "intellectual equipment" had it not also become part of their actual equipment, an illustrated guidebook and keepsake. The Tauschnitz edition (1868) was printed with blank pages where both booksellers and individual readers pasted photographs of the monuments and masterpieces featured in the Hawthorne's descriptions.[7] In this way, readers commemorated and augmented the experience of tourism with personalized copies of the book. Even if Hawthorne did not anticipate such a use for his novel, his focus upon intellectual and emotional response invites a purely visual supplement that the novel supplies only intermittently by means of ekphrasis. But *The Marble Faun* was already involved in the paper-trail of tourism even before it was reprinted as a keepsake; the novel names the monuments of Rome in a way that presumes their familiarity as cultural touchstones. During the scenes at the Coliseum and the Fountain of Trevi, for instance, Hawthorne alludes to the descriptions of Byron and Madame de Stael, whose literary interpretations of these sites shape the experience of his characters.

Given the vivid competition between literary and photographic representations of Rome in *The Marble Faun*'s reception history, the virtual absence of photography from the narrative itself becomes one of its most conspicuous features. Under the influence of Rome's collections, the novel's young artists sketch, paint, sculpt, and endlessly talk, but never once does any of them create or view a photograph, except in metaphor. Insofar as the novel addresses the labor of the many copyists haunting Rome's galleries, the vaunted material accuracy of photographs would seem to warrant at least a mention in passing, especially from the author who had featured this young medium so prominently in *The House of Seven Gables*.[8] Hawthorne's exclusion of photography from *The Marble Faun* nearly registers as a repudiation of the young medium in favor of painting and sculpture, yet his discussion of the fine arts dwells upon aesthetic issues that figure centrally in the early theory of photography.

In *The Marble Faun,* Hawthorne spends a great deal of time thinking about how images and impressions become fixed. As usual, his descriptions carefully delineate the qualities of light and point-of-view. His exploration of artistic process distinguishes between conscious labor and automatism; Hawthorne notes that many sculptors do not execute their designs with their own hands and laments the related trend in sculpture toward minute optical fidelity at the expense of overall expression. Hawthorne's account of the fine arts shows the pressure of photography upon his aesthetic categories, in that he resists automatism while privileging the fleeting insights captured in momentary arrangements of light and shadow. Notwithstanding the Foucauldian insight that discourse constitutes its object, it is also true that objects reconstitute their discourses, altering the previous equilibrium between terms and concepts. According to Marshall McLuhan, new media "amplify or accelerate existing processes," such that the "message" of any technology amounts to "the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human

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[7] The Tauschnitz edition of *The Marble Faun* appeared under the alternate title of *The Transformations; or, The Romance of Monte Beni*. For two readings of the novel that address the circulation and illustration of this edition see Williams, *Confounding Images : Photography and Portraiture in Antebellum American Fiction*; Timothy Sweet, "Photography and the Museum of Rome in Hawthorne's the Marble Faun," in *Photo-Textualities :Reading Photographs and Literature*, ed. Marsha Bryant (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1996).

[8] See especially Trachtenberg, "Seeing and Believing: Hawthorne's Reflections on the Daguerreotype in the House of Seven Gables."

affairs."[9] *The Marble Faun* does not represent the medium of photography but instead captures a disturbance in the pattern of aesthetic ideas that had preoccupied Hawthorne since his earliest sketches, many written before Daguerre announced his discovery.

Instead of focusing upon the technical innovations that made the earliest photographs possible, Geoffrey Batchen has traced the desire to create photographs; Batchen broadens the early history of photography through the resources of Foucouldian discourse analysis, following the basic methodology of Jonathan Crary's history of vision. [10] This history has the effect of showing that the technologies of Daguerre and Niepce fulfilled a widespread cultural wish that preceded and inspired their experiments. Of course, there is no reason why the history of this desire for photography must end with the invention of a working chemical process. Hawthorne, in the process of writing *The Marble Faun*, takes up the role of a belated proto-photographer working in the photographic age, pushing the actualities of the medium to the periphery of his work to recover its promise. In short, Hawthorne seeks to retrieve the wish for photography from its fulfillment.

Hawthorne's concern with the fixity of images resonates at many textual registers. At the level of aesthetic theory, Hawthorne privileges inspiration over mediation, with the effect that a rough sketch or sensitive copy may bring the observer closer to the artist's genius than a finished work. At the level of sentiment, Hawthorne distinguishes between the humanizing sympathy offered freely to sufferers and the mechanistic conception of sympathy as an irresistible affinity with sin. At the level of narrative style, Hawthorne strictly limits use of free indirect style to suggest inner states through simulated perception, yet he will only conjecture at inner states that do not have this kind of optical anchor. These levels explain and reinforce each other. Hawthorne may restrain himself from reporting thoughts as well as perceptions because this would force the reader's sympathies.

Perspectivalism

Following a routine familiar readers of *Moby-Dick*, enacted most memorably before Ahab's doubloon, Hawthorne parades his principal characters past Rome's artistic treasures one by one, reporting each interpretation as a reflection of the interpreter. For a novel so centered on the arts, the serial contemplation of singular artifacts provides an efficient mode of characterization, but also illustrates the difficulty of extracting general truths from a personal response. As a method of characterization-by-contrast, this trick may benefit criticism as well. The juxtaposition of Hawthorne and Melville, as twin interpreters of the same formal strategy, reveals the impulsive bi-polarity of Melville's intellect and the strained decorum of Hawthorne's. For Melville, perspectivalism empties the visible world of innate meanings, turning all of existence into a blank white screen on which personality shadows itself. Melville's intuition of innate meaning in objects shades almost instantly into despair: "some certain significance lurks in all things, else all things are little worth, and the round world itself but an empty cipher,

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[9] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002), 8.

[10] See Batchen, *Burning with Desire : The Conception of Photography*. Batchen broadens the early history of photography through the resources of Foucouldian discourse analysis, following the basic methodology of Jonathan Crary's history of vision. See Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer : On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990).

except to sell by the cartload, as they do some hills about Boston, to fill up some morass in the Milky Way" (470). Hawthorne also treats individual insight as a product of the observer's temperament and mood, but for him the accumulation of incompatible meanings does not cast doubt on the providential character of the visible world but exposes the unreliability of its mortal beholders. Melville's grim thoughts pull his works toward absurdism, but Hawthorne tends to afflict individual characters with his pessimism, figures such as Chillingsworth and Ethan Brand whose moral despair the author sets at a polite distance from his readership.

According to Richard Brodhead, Hawthorne and Melville achieve the density and heterogeneity of the novel form "through local intensities and variations in the novel's imagined surface itself," rather the perspectives embedded in the novel's social world.[11] Modulations of style take the place occupied in the nineteenth-century British novel by "minor characters whose existences can either dimly adumbrate alternative life-possibilities or simply serve to fill out those worlds with redundant life" (HMN, 17). The variety of their characters expresses stylistic difference more strongly than social difference: "Their characters seem to have been greeted into being in different ways, created and ushered into the novel's house by different kinds of imagination" (HMN, 18). In these remarks, Brodhead anticipates Alex Woloch's theorization of the "character systems" that regulate the balance between structural integrity and individual life as readerly attention moves between major and minor characters.[12] These insights combined would suggest that Melville and Hawthorne write novels structured as much by a system of media as by a system of character, which is not to suggest that these alternatives are fundamentally incompatible. For instance, Melville's scene before the doubloon in *Moby-Dick* coordinates a series of characters with a taxonomy of reading practices: Ahab regards his own psychology as the key to the doubloon's imagery, while Starbuck turns to rote moral allegory, Queequeg his tattoos, Stubb a printed almanac, and Pip a conjugation recalled from *Murray's Grammar*. Incapable of even accidental poetry, literal-minded Flask can translate the doubloon only into "sixteen dollars" and then "nine hundred and sixty cigars" (474). The coupling of characters with discourses in *Moby-Dick* often has the quality of a momentary association, while Melville pursued a more rigid approach in *Mardi*, constructing characters as the persistent mouthpieces for their chosen genre of discourse, whether poetic or philosophical. *The Marble Faun* and Melville's *Pierre* both feature a community of artists that doubles as a stylistic taxonomy. The characters in these later novels are not the allegorical figments of *Mardi*, circumscribed by the styles they represent, but in speaking for the arts they also permit artificial perspectives to be focalized through them.

Brodhead observes that Hawthorne and Melville's novels "frequently articulate strong thematic or conceptual designs which are not at odds with their story's content but which are at odds with its dramatic method" (HMN, 11). Brodhead points to the sharp alternation between temporal drama and atemporal symbolism as the distinctive feature of the style shared by Hawthorne and Melville (HMN, 14). Garrett Stewart defines his practice of "narratography" as "*the apprehension of mediated narrative increments as traced out in prose or image by the analytic act of reading.* Where the specialized vocabularies of narratology often aim at the hard science of overarching story forms apart from a given medium, the text-driven work of

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[11] Richard Brodhead, *Hawthorne, Melville, and the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 17. This work will be cited parenthetically as HMN.

[12] Alex Woloch, *The One Vs. The Many : Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton, N.J. ; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003).

narratography offers instead a micropoetics of one narrative medium at a time."[13] Stewart's version of prose poetics directed toward discovering "the story told by mediation itself," not the abstracted structures of narrative theory but instead plot as it is captured in the local movement and patterning of the textual surface (NV, 9). This type of criticism sees the abstractions of "story, character, or theme" as "built up from just such minutiae" as syntactic and verbal detail (8). Stewart reads "textures or execution" and "the surface adhesions of technique, where a degree of resistance to governing narrative formats may well set in" (NV, 13).

Hawthorne dramatizes the resistance between technique and narrative explicitly in *The Marble Faun*. This opposition is not only a feature of the novel's form but a portion of its explicit content, a recurrent feature of the narrator's commentary. "The Gentle Reader, we trust, would not thank us for one of those minute elucidations, which are so tedious, and after all, so unsatisfactory, in clearing up the romantic mysteries of a story. He is too wise to insist upon looking closely at the wrong side of the tapestry, after the right one has been sufficiently displayed to him, woven with the best of the artist's skill, and cunningly arranged with a view to the harmonious exhibition of its colors" (455).

Hawthorne's prefaces, in their account of Romance, emphasize the genre's distance from the scenes of ordinary life, through metaphors of medium and technique that stress the artifice of the fictional world rather than the social immersion of reading. The Romancer, writes Hawthorne, "may so manage his atmospherical medium as to bring out or mellow the lights and deepen and enrich the shadows of the picture."[14] In part, Hawthorne distinguishes romance from realism to discourage his readers from understanding him as a practitioner of the roman a clef. Hawthorne jokingly treats the proximity of fancy settings to real-life models as the grounds for a property dispute: "He trusts not to be considered as unpardonably offending by laying out a street that infringes upon nobody's private rights, and appropriating a lot of land which had no visible owner, and building a house, of materials long in use for constructing castles in the air" (4). In his preface to *The Blithedale Romance*, Hawthorne insists that the writer of romances sets his scene as "a theatre, a little removed from the highway of ordinary travel, where the creatures of his brain may play their phantasmagorical antics, without exposing them to too close a comparison with the actual events of real lives."[15]

Case-Study: The Murder Scene

The novel's meditations on guilt and art both take the murder scene as a focal point. Jonathan Auerbach has pointed out that both the novel's moral reflections and its aesthetic theories revolve around the execution of a model in one sense or another.[16] Beyond this structural pun, the novel explores both murder and art under conditions where the hand acts in isolation from the conscious mind. Donatello believes that he has acted out Miriam's unspoken command, conveyed in a glance, while Miriam detects her own violent impulse only in

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[13] Stewart, *Novel Violence : A Narratography of Victorian Fiction*, 9. This work will be cited parenthetically as NV.

[14] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), 3.

[15] *The Blithedale Romance* (New York: Penguin, 1983), 1.

[16] Jonathan Auerbach, "Executing the Model: Painting, Sculpture, and Romance-Writing in Hawthorne's Marble Faun," *ELH* 47, no. 1 (Spring, 1980).

retrospect. In other words, the act originates nowhere. The guilt for this murder spreads to individuals who had no hand in the crime, who become participants through observation and sympathy. The pattern of sympathetic response in the staging of the murder translates into a problem for the display of art, which may become capable of transmitting the guilt of past sins and imagined sins.

F.O. Matthiessen writes, "Hawthorne's acumen is dependent upon one of his fundamental beliefs, that in contrast with these romantic speculators, the creative writer whose business it is to be trained in the distinctions between fact and imagination will not confuse the two realms."[17] Of course, Hawthorne illustrates this belief most vividly when he arranges for his characters to conflate the imaginary with the actual, an error that marks the moment of climax in surprisingly many of his works, from the supernatural dream sequence of "Young Goodman Brown" to the climax of "My Kinsman Major Molineux," when the narrator describes the protagonist's mind "vibrating between fancy and reality" (80). In his account of Hawthorne as a tragedian, Matthiessen observes that the author's protagonists "participate in the purgatorial movement" of tragic catharsis, which he admits "may seem an unwarranted transfer of the tragic catharsis from the audience to the protagonist" (350).[18] Presumably, this transfer "may seem unwarranted" because the author presumes to represent the reader's response. Matthiessen keeps this aesthetic flaw tucked away in the subjunctive, an objection raised and dropped for the benefit of any Aristotelian purists lying in wait. Still, this potentially objectionable blending of characters and readers seems like a calculated effect. Hawthorne repeatedly confuses the boundary between intradiegetic and extradiegetic effects in order to explore the ethics of artistic creation and audience response.

The Model occupies a position between fact and imagination. His appearances to Miriam often have the quality of a hallucination, brought on by her attempts to set aside the unspecified guilt that she carries, even for a moment. His appearance in her sketches makes him even more of a figment escaped from the mind and given autonomy. Hawthorne mystifies this figure through multiple origin stories that would make him into a Capuchin monk or a centuries-old wanderer of the Roman catacombs. His face appears in an antique sketch that Hilda wishfully identifies as a study from Guido's image of the Archangel Michael, as if to suggest that he modeled as the defeated demon, or that a dark thought (later mastered) brought his likeness into the rough version of the image.

When the Model enters the scene, Hawthorne compares him to a statue: "In the basement-wall of the palace, shaded from the moon, there was a deep, empty niche, that had probably once contained a statue; not empty, neither; for a figure now came forth from it, and approached Miriam" (171). Hawthorne's treatment of light during this moment preserves realism without entirely dispelling suggestions of the supernatural. Because the niche is both "deep" and "shaded from the moon," the narrator mistakenly declares it "empty" before correcting himself. The sentence does not behave as absolute commentary but the record of momentary observation from the narrator's imaginary vantage point. Suggestively, the narrator's knowledge fails just as another unseen observer reveals himself. The darkness that obscures the niche from the narrator allows a series of scenarios to co-exist without disrupting the novel's grounding in actuality;

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[17] F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance : Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), 258.
[18] *American Renaissance : Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), 350.

Hawthorne is careful not to describe the scenario he suggests, in which the statue tucked away in this niche transforms into the living Model (who may even have posed for the sculptor during his unnaturally long life). The suggestion that the Model enters the scene as a living sculpture reinforces his status as a dark double for Donatello, whose uncanny resemblance to the Faun of Praxiteles turns him into another animated work of art. When the Model's actual fall brings about Donatello's spiritual fall, the doubling between the two makes the action nearly self-generating.

The omission of the artist's hand from the execution of finished marbles also prepares for the indirect murder of Miriam's model. In effect, she commits a deed through the hands of another that she could not have been done with her own. Donatello turns himself into the loose equivalent of a camera, acting out the impulse that he finds in Miriam's glance: "I did what your eyes bade me to do, when I asked them with mine, as I held the wretch over the precipice" (172). Hawthorne studiously obscures where the impulse for this murder has originated. Donatello has received a command from Miriam's eyes, yet he turns to her as he is already poised to kill the model, so that it makes just as much sense to say that she unconsciously assents to his contemplated murder. Further, the narration of this scene virtually invites the reader to wish the model dead before confirming that he has been killed. As the model approaches, the novel assumes Miriam's unstable point-of-view:

> She must have had cause to dread some unspeakable evil from this strange
> persecutor, and to know that this was the very crisis of her calamity; for, as he
> drew near, such a cold, sick despair crept over her, that it impeded her breath, and
> benumbed her natural promptitude of thought. Miriam seemed dreamily to
> remember falling on her knees; but, in her whole recollection of that wild
> moment, she beheld herself as in a dim show, and could not well distinguish what
> was done and suffered; no not even whether she were really an actor and sufferer
> in the scene. (171)

Delivered in the mode of conjecture, this passage obscures the particulars of Miriam's distress, dramatizing her emotions while stripping them of their causes. The "unspeakable evil" remains unspoken (a decisive difference between Hawthorne and Lovecraft) and Hawthorne delivers a miniature masterpiece of circumlocutionary blankness in the surmise that Miriam "must have had cause…to know that this was the very crisis of her calamity," the opaque climax of an unspecified plot. This language imposes the narrative logic of progression and intensification on an unaccountable scene, in the absence of any concrete knowledge of Miriam's history with the Model. Still, even if this description withholds access to Miriam's personal history, the very fact of narrative distance places the reader in sympathy with Miriam's bewilderment. Just when the novel itself becomes notably dim and theatrical, Miriam observes herself "as in a dim show," perceiving her circumstances as a "scene." Her dissociative state blurs the distinction between immediate sensation and the vicarious experience of observers and readers. Hawthorne has arrived at an inverted version of the free indirect style, with a character who briefly and almost unconsciously occupies the position of the narrator, placed at an uncertain distance from her own experience.

Hawthorne arranges the scene in such a way that the reader's expectations, sympathies, and desires approach the status of indirect causation. The deliberate opacity of the murder scene dramatizes uncertainty rather than inspiring it – Donatello has obviously flung the Model over

the cliff - but the reader must wait until the next chapter for retrospective confirmation. By placing the reader in roughly the same position as Miriam, this delay turns anticipation into a form of partial causality; the novel shapes the reader's impulse and then assents to it, in much the same way that Donatello invites and executes Miriam's unconscious command.

The Optics of Romance

The Marble Faun's passages of aesthetic speculation revisit ideas that had preoccupied Hawthorne since the first decade of his literary career, in the tales and sketches published before the advent of photography and shortly afterward. Hawthorne's sketches of the 1830s belong to a period when many experimenters attempted without any practical success to fix the image in the camera obscura.[19] The optical effects that Hawthorne imagined belong to a culture that imagined and desired photography before any working process existed. By the time that news of Louis Daguerre's invention reached American shores, Hawthorne had already developed a keen interest in optical devices and pictorial effects, evident in his subject matter as well as his style. Many of Hawthorne's short pieces focus explicitly on arts, crafts, and picturesque views, including tales such as "The Prophetic Pictures" (1837), "Chippings with a Chisel" (1838), and "Sights from a Steeple" (1831). But even in the tales that do not thematize a central visual motif, Hawthorne still foregrounds pictorial elements such as dramatic tableaux and picturesque patterns of light and shadow. In "My Kinsman, Major Molyneaux" (1832), for instance, the narrator observes that the moonlight creates, "like the imaginative power, a beautiful strangeness in familiar objects."[20]

Hawthorne's sketches impose the type of the artist upon a series of tradesmen, including the carver of tombstones in "Chippings with a Chisel," the sculptor of figure-heads in "Drowne's Wooden Image," and the effete watchmaker of "The Artist of the Beautiful." In his pose as a provincial storyteller, Hawthorne prefers that his heroes seek their high ideals in the practical arts, where the contrast between useful labor and aesthetic repose becomes inescapable. In "Drowne's Wooden Image," Hawthorne styles the carver as "a modern Pygmalion in the person of a Yankee mechanic," invoking a type that he seems eager to repeat (937). Hawthorne returns again and again to variations on the myth of Pygmalion, both when he wishes to infuse works of artifice with the impression of life and in an inverted form when he treats his characters figuratively as art objects. Both of these directions are at work in "Drowne's Wooden Image," in which Hawthorne suggests that Drowne has been able to infuse life into his wooden figurehead because of the influence of a living woman whose image he seeks to capture. The trope of animation appears in close contact with petrification. The watchmaker of "The Artist of the Beautiful" comes to regard his task as "the spiritualization of matter" or "putting spirit into machinery" (917). The scientist of "The Birthmark" will also be compared to Pygmalion, with the irony that he has not spiritualized matter but reified his wife as an imagined sculpture: "Even Pygmalion, when his sculptured woman assumed life, felt not greater ecstasy than mine will be" (768).

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[19] Batchen, *Burning with Desire : The Conception of Photography*.

[20] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Tales and Sketches* (New York: The Library of America, 1982), 78. Unless otherwise noted, all parenthetical citations of Hawthorne's short fiction refer to this volume.

Hawthorne's short pieces prove endlessly preoccupied with the concerns and contraptions of the proto-photographers.[21] His tales and sketches abound in optical devices drawn from the visual culture of the 1830s and optical effects discovered in the phenomena of nature. In "Main-street," one of the sketches reprinted in *the Snow Image,* Hawthorne narrates the history of Salem through a mechanized display that seems calculated to evoke the diorama of Louis Daguerre, a landscape painting transformed by a variety of stage effects into a moving scene, with changes of season and processions of puppet-like figures. Rather than presenting his "shifting panorama" as a purely imaginary vision, Hawthorne first invites his readers to picture the behind-the-scenes mechanisms of the show. After the first stretch of description, Hawthorne produces an exchange between a critic in the audience and the showman, a figure subsumed in the narrator's voice up to this point. Hawthorne frequently makes reference to the diorama, another element of 19th century visual culture pioneered by Daguerre.[22] "Ethan Brand" features a traveling diorama, similar to the contraption that provides the central metaphor of "Fancy's Showbox," a sketch in which the personification of fancy appears to the protagonist in "the garb and aspect of an itinerant showman, with a box of pictures on her back" (451). "The Haunted Mind" (1835) begins as the narrator steers the reader through the predawn on a sleepless winter night: "you peep through the half drawn window curtain, and observe that the glass is ornamented with fanciful designs in frost work, and that each pane presents something like a frozen dream" (201). The transitory features of nature create a series of reflective and refractory optical effects.

In "The Vision of the Fountain" (1835), the fifteen-year-old narrator fancies that he has seen a young woman in the water of a natural spring, then glimpses her again in the refracted light of a rainbow. Until the tale's conclusion, the narrator will not declare whether the young woman is a mythical being, a psychological projection, an optical illusion, or a simple reflection; he refers to her at various points as "the Naiad of the spring," "daughter of my fancy," and "Daughter of the Light" (324, 325, 329). The image becomes an object of pursuit. In his enthusiasm for picturesque effects, the narrator sublimates his desires into the ethereal language of the sentimental beautiful, most noticeably when sees the young woman "robed in the rainbow" and declares that "the hues of Heaven were the only garment for her beauty" (326). He must mean that these hues were the only *fit* garment for her beauty, but the effect is still an accidental nude. This lapse from aesthetic disinterest into thinly veiled lust seems all the more pronounced after the narrator has already clothed his imaginary Naiad with the features of the fountain itself, "a gown of filmy water-moss, a belt of rainbow drops, and a cold, pure, passionless countenance" (324). Descriptors such as "cold" and pure" compensate poorly for the utter transparency of the Naiad's garments. When the vision is transferred from the spring's reflective surface to the open air, the narrator loses his capacity to rationalize his bare impressions.

As if in reaction to the narrator's unspoken desire, the tale flashes forward to a winter scene. The young man revisits the scenes of his vision, disillusioned by their barren appearance: "I found that the spring had a frozen bosom, and nothing but the snow and a glare of winter sunshine on the hill of the rainbow" (327). The residual personification of the spring's "frozen

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[21] For a reading of Hawthorne through Batchen's framework, and an admirable analysis of the photographic language in "The Birthmark," see Andy Smith, "Sensitive Emulsions: Hawthorne's Proto-Photography," *Nathaniel Hawthorne Review* 35, no. 1 (2009).

[22] Benjamin Lease, "Diorama and Dream: Hawthorne's Cinematic Vision," *Journal of Popular Culture* 5, no. 2 (1971).

bosom" cancels the sexual charge of the previous scene but also parodies the unstated thought that the frozen water might capture the young woman's reflection in an enduring form. The winter scene strips away the variegated color of the picturesque mode, but the bleakness of the frozen landscape marks a developmental stage. The seasonal change literalizes the narrator's comparison between "the burning fancy of my early youth" and "manhood's colder gift, the power of expression," qualities which together evoke the poetic formula of emotion recollected in tranquillity (327). This sketch follows a pattern that Hawthorne frequently repeats, a progression from projected fancy to demystified actuality to an interior spiritual truth (conflated with domestic coziness) that resolves fact and fancy. Once his fancies fade, the disenchanted Hawthornian hero discovers a picturesque within, happier far.

The frost chases the narrative indoors, to the crowded fireside of a local preacher, where homely sympathies displace picturesque spectacle. The dim light privileges insight over direct perception: "We were aware of each other's presence, not by sight, nor sound, nor touch, but by an inward consciousness" (328). In a gentle irony, the narrator declares this "inward consciousness" before he has any inkling that the woman of his visions sits nearby. The change of setting underscores the narrator's growing capacity to distinguish private reveries from shared social experience. The tale concludes with an abrupt apostrophe:

> Fair ladies, there is nothing more to tell. Must the simple mystery be revealed, then, that Rachel was the daughter of the village 'Squire, and had left for boarding-school, the morning after I arrived, and returned the day before my departure? If I transformed her to an angel, it is what every youthful lover does for his mistress. Therein consists the essence of my story. But, slight the change, sweet maids, to make angels of yourselves! (329)

The closing address to the female reader turns the domestic sphere into a place of literalism, where the tale's elaborate fancies have already collapsed back into unremarkable truths, but where shared sentiment may displace solipsistic projection. Our hero has grown just wise enough to compare his audience to angels instead of water-nymphs. The story reads as an exercise in style rather than a fully realized work of fiction, with only a thin pretense of plot to link its picturesque set-pieces, but the half-hearted conclusion makes the tales mystery seem all the more trivial. The motif of the fountain emphasizes that the attempt to seize the image will disturb it. The transition from narration to direct address is sharp enough to disrupt the tale's atmosphere. By implication, the picturesque spell of Hawthorne's language is every bit as transitory as the fountain's wavering images.

Hawthorne portrays photography, when he does, as one pursuit among many for odds-and-ends polymaths like the mad scientist Alymer in "The Birthmark" and the provincial tradesman Holgrave in *The House of Seven Gables*, men whose manifold researches occupy the unruly spectrum between modern miracles and commercial parlor tricks, the same phantasmagoric snake-oil circuit that Melville would take up in *The Confidence Man*. As Alymer attempts to distract his wife, it becomes evident that he has quietly invented photography: "he proposed to take her portrait by a scientific process of his own invention. It was to be effected by the rays of light striking upon a polished plate of metal" (771). Alymer discards the resulting portrait when he discovers that it blurs his wife's features and accentuates the hand-shaped mark. In both cases, a domestic pursuit displaces an artistic one. Hawthorne puts the daguerreotypist's trade in its place by framing the marriage at the end of *The House of Seven Gables* as the moral

analogue of a photograph; Holgrave has captured Phoebe, whose association with light only begins with her suggestive name. Meanwhile, Alymer's attempt at retouching causes him to confuse physical and spiritual truths. The spiritual mysteries of the high arts demand more caution in the attempt to seize truths and discard their containers.

The Hand and the Eye

"For the first time in the process of pictorial reproduction," writes Walter Benjamin, "photography freed the hand of the most important artistic functions which henceforth devolved only upon the eye looking into a lens" (219). The mechanism of the camera, guided by the eye, performs the work of composition and inscription that formerly required not merely a hand, but an expert hand. Benjamin leaves one important implication of this change unstated, which is that the hand creates images only with the benefit of technical training. The artistic education that enables the hand to do its work indirectly shapes the selection of subject matter as well as the manner of its representation. When the eye has usurped the hand, the authority of convention no longer saturates the practical education of copyists and artists to the same degree, whether they draw their material from nature or from other representations. The copyist is no longer by necessity a student or apprentice in the arts, but an experimenter or simply an observer. The shift from the painter's hand to the photographer's eye demands a new kind of technical expertise, but with respect to artistic tradition it promotes the spirit of amateurism. The intermediate stage between perception and expression now has a different content, but may appear to be elided altogether.

For Hawthorne, the hand is not primarily the site of technical training but rather sensuous immediacy with the materials of art; the legible trace of the hand in sketches and clay models links the creation of art object to gesture, which Hawthorne conceives as a spontaneous language of the passions without reliance on the abstract mediation of words. Hawthorne writes of Donatello: "His usual modes of demonstration were by the natural language of gesture, the instinctive movement of his agile frame, and the unconscious play of his features, which, within a limited range of thought and emotion, could speak volumes in a moment" (77). "With every step she took, he expressed his joy at her nearer and nearer presence by what might be thought an extravagance of gesticulation, but which doubtless was the language of the natural man, though laid aside and forgotten by other men, now that words have been feebly substituted in the place of signs and symbols" (77). Gestural "touches" infuse the arts with the uncalculated language that Donatello expresses in movement, allowing the spectator to imagine the hand of the living artist. The act of copying sets the hand in motion again by sympathy.

Hawthorne's emphasis on expressive touches gives the plastic arts an emotive and mimetic immediacy that the medium of language cannot achieve, but places the visual artist at the mercy of largely unconscious inspirations and impulses. "Touch" is not an uncommon way to say "detail," but when Hawthorne describes the creation of sketches and clay models each "touch" literally refers to a stroke of the artist's hand. To the extent that Hawthorne acknowledges technique, it has become habitual and unconscious, so that the artist's hand moves "with apparent carelessness, but sure effect" (116). When he discusses the artistic achievements of his characters, Hawthorne emphasizes the individual expressive "touches" that stand out from the general design, often with the implication that a single impassioned "touch" may either elevate an unfinished piece into a work of genius or else deface it entirely. The image of Beatrice Cenci provides an example: "The whole face was quiet; there was no distortion or disturbance of any single feature; nor was it easy to see why the expression was not cheerful, or why a single touch of the artist's pencil should not brighten it into joyousness" (64). Like the fine phrases in a

bad poem, the inspired touches in painting invite admiration even when the work as a whole does not. No poem is all poetry and apparently no painting is all poetry either.

For example, the watchmaker of "The Artist of the Beautiful" tinkers at a mechanism so delicate that "the slightest possible touch, with the point of a needle" will crush "the toil of months" (918). The fragile clockwork device echoes the delicate sensibility of the creator, whose character is "thrown off the balance to which Providence had so nicely adjusted it" by the stresses of the material world (918). "Alas, that the artist, whether in poetry or whatever other material, may not content himself with the inward enjoyment of the Beautiful, but must chase the flitting mystery beyond the verge of his ethereal domain, and crush its frail being in seizing it with a material grasp!" (916).

Hawthorne balks at sculptors who employ assistants to translate their clay models into finished marble:

> In no other art, surely, does genius find such effective instruments, and so happily relieve itself of the drudgery of actual performance; doing wonderfully nice things, by the hands of other people, when, it may be suspected, they could not always be done by the sculptor's own. And how much of the admiration which our artists get for their buttons and button-holes, their shoe-ties, their neckcloths – and these, at our present epoch of taste, make a large share of the renown – would be abated, if we were generally aware that the sculptor can claim no credit for such pretty performances, as immortalized in marble! They are not his work, but that of some nameless machine in human shape. (115)

As Hawthorne well knew, photographers were in no shortage of "such effective instruments," if only one would admit their medium into the ranks of the arts. The camera relieves the artist from the labor of execution, as Hawthorne himself observes in *The House of Seven Gables* when the daguerreotypist Holgrave announces his plan to "misuse Heaven's blessed sunshine by tracing out human features, through its agency" (46). The sun performs the labor of inscription, assuming the function of the artist's hand. The modern sculptor, according to Hawthorne, is able to create his works "with a word" and "without the necessity of his touching the work with his own finger" (115). Similarly, the admission of professional copyists into the production of original artworks replaces the sculptor's hand with "some nameless machine in human shape," as Hawthorne puts it, creating a circumstance within the fine arts that proves as much a challenge to their authenticity as the external pressure of technical media such as photography.

Hawthorne's invective falters when he sets his mind to distinguishing what sculptors do "in these days" from the practice of their classical predecessors. "In Italy," he writes, "there is a class of men whose merely mechanical skill is perhaps more exquisite than was possessed by the ancient artificers who wrought out the designs of Praxiteles, or, very possibly, by Praxiteles himself" (115). The general drift of the passage distinguishes between the imagination of Praxiteles and the "merely mechanical skill" of these modern technicians, but Hawthorne's mention of " the ancient artificers who wrought out the designs of Praxiteles" undermines the idea that the assistants have somehow made the difference. His point becomes one of degree, that the role of these assistants has become more impersonal.

The sympathetic style of Hilda's copies requires the contrast of a purely mechanical process: "there are artists, as we have said, who spend their lives in painting the works, or perhaps one single work of one illustrious painter, over and over again; thus, they convert

themselves into Guido Machines or Raphaelic machines" (59). Coleridge too weighs in on the prospect of Raphaelic machines, albeit without the benefit of Hawthorne's memorable phrase: "The formation of a copy is not solved by the mere pre-existence of the original; the copyist of Raphael's Transfiguration must repeat more or less perfectly the process of Raphael. It would be easy to explain a thought from the image on the retina, and that from the geometry of light, if this very light did not represent the very same difficulty" (335). For Coleridge, the formation of copies must be troubled and protracted in thought to disprove the idea that consciousness exists only as an effect. Coleridge emphasizes upon the nuanced labor of artistic copyists to show that even their mechanical task requires the knowledge of craft, but he does so to prevent the copy from becoming the type of all thought. Raphael's Transfiguration may have suggested itself to Coleridge because the possessed boy in the painting's lower half displays the quality of automatism that haunts his account of consciousness in *Biographia Literaria*, but also because the composition turns on the relation of the material world with the ideal. Coleridge wrote these words before the invention of a working photographic process, before a machine could repeat the process of Raphael without the benefit of any knowledge or experience. The conceptual safeguard of process loses its power when "the geometry of light" may be recorded without the intermediary of human consciousness. When the humanizing presence of a learned craft ceases to regulate the relationship between images and the significances they are thought to contain, then aesthetics must contend more seriously with Coleridge's passing fantasy that retinal images might behave as objectified thought.

Hilda's copies distinguish between outer form and its inner impulse, a distinction that plays out in a Coleridgean attention to process: "After minute examination of her works, the most skillful artists declared that she had been led to her results by following precisely the same processes, step by step, through which the original painter had trodden to the development of his idea" (59). In Hawthorne's phrasing, there is sufficient ambiguity to imagine that these steps pertain to reflection rather than execution, a sentimental procedure rather than an inscriptive one. For these reasons, the narrator describes Hilda as "a finer instrument, a more exquisitely crafted piece of mechanism, by the help of which the spirit of some great departed Painter now first achieved his ideal, centuries after his own earthly hand, that other tool, had turned to dust" (59). While the removal of sculptor's hand shows the mechanization of Kenyon's art, the disintegration of the painter's hand perfects the inspiration captured upon his canvas.

Hawthorne enjoyed unfinished work in part because it demands that the spectator complete the effect, but predominantly because of "his belief that no work ever hit exactly the mark for which the true artist aimed."[23] Unfinished works behave nearly like the language of accommodation; in their state of imperfection, these works adventitiously avoid the pretense of total truth, yet they have the power to evoke more than they show. Hawthorne's view of copyists works along the same lines. Copies demonstrate sympathy with the spirit of the original while bypassing the inert quiddity of its embodiment in a particular form.

Degrees of Execution

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[23] Rita K. Gollin, John L. Idol, and Sterling K. Eisiminger, *Prophetic Pictures : Nathaniel Hawthorne's Knowledge and Uses of the Visual Arts*, Contributions in American Studies, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), pg. 36.

When Miriam pays her visit to Kenyon, the descriptive tour of the sculptor's studio doubles as a guide to the process of composition. The narrator catalogues the contents of Kenyon's workspace starting with sketches before moving to clay models, plaster moulds, and finished marbles. This introduction to the sculptor's craft emphasizes that original marbles are hardly the first iteration of the sculptor's design, which passes through several media before emerging in its finished form. In this regard, finished works of art are not far removed from copies, in that the idea is what Hawthorne privileges. Miriam finds "hastily scrawled sketches of nude figures on the white-wash of the wall. These last are probably the sculptor's earliest glimpses of ideas that may hereafter be solidified into imperishable stone, or perhaps may remain as impalpable as a dream" (114). The addition of "probably" marks the uncertainty surrounding the origins of the artist's ideas, but also the possibility that our narrator (equal parts ironist and delicate man of feeling) has sanctified vandalism as an exercise in design. Not every nude on a wall ends up in marble. Hawthorne plays up the difference between the "imperishable" and the "impalpable," leaving the work of art no middle-ground between the inhuman and the imaginary. The novel's thwarted sexuality may have a great deal to do with its preoccupation with ideals and idols, both to the exclusion of warm bodies.

The aesthetic of the sketch subordinates the particulars of visual form to the sentiments that the work of art conveys to its sympathetic viewers, an inner form that is often more accessible in sketches and copies than in the finished work. Hawthorne states as much when his characters discover a bundle of old sketches, possibly the work of Old Masters: "Thus, by the spell of a creased, soiled, and discoloured scrap of paper, you were, enabled to steal close to an Old Master, and watch him in the very effervescence of his genius" (137). The medium is not the message, but simply a mess. Hawthorne has subjected these sketches to untold punishment, distressing the material support of art to the point of disintegration in order to idealize inspiration all the more. The nearly disposable character of these sketches points toward the transitory quality of inspiration, in that these hasty products represent "the first glimpse of an idea that might vanish in the twinkling of an eye," a formulation repeated almost identically from the scene in Kenyon's studio (137).

In *Modern Painters*, John Ruskin struggles with the same problem as he acknowledges that sketches carry an expressive force that vanishes from completed designs. "[Ideas of Power] are the simple perception of the mental or bodily powers exerted in the production of any work of art."[24] Ideas of power, Ruskin elaborates, "are almost always associated with, or dependent upon, some of the higher ideas of truth, beauty, or relation, *rendered with decision or velocity*" (31, emphasis added). This conception places technical knowledge quite literally at the artist's fingertips: "That power which delights us in the chalk sketch of a great painter is not like that of the writing-master, mere dexterity of hand. It is the accuracy and certainty of the knowledge, rendered evident by its rapid and fearless expression, which is the real source of pleasure" (32). Ruskin also clarifies that "the least sensation of power is received from the most perfect work," because "the impression is much greater from a partial success attained with slight effort, than from perfect success attained with greater proportional effort" (33). For this reason, sketches and incomplete work convey the impression of power more vividly than finished works of art.

Hawthorne turns to the concept of power as he elaborates the aesthetics of the sketch. These sketches possess a vivid impression of the artist's power that is lacking in the finished work, but only by replacing visual form with an imagined scene of composition:

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[24] Ruskin, *Modern Painters: Vol. 1*, 1, 12.

It was delightful to believe in their authenticity, at all events; for these things make the spectator more vividly sensible of a great painter's power, than the final glow and perfected art of the most consummate picture that may have been elaborated from them. There is an effluence of divinity in the first sketch; and there, if anywhere, you find the pure light of inspiration, which the subsequent toil of the artist serves to bring out in stronger lustre, indeed, but likewise adulterates it with what belongs to an inferior mood. (138).

While the authenticity of masterpieces seems well assured, the authenticity of sketches requires belief. The artist becomes the interpreter of inspirations rather than their originator while the spectator strives to participate in the mood of a piece at the risk of substituting purely personal feelings for sympathetic echoes of the original artist's sensations. The eccentric origin of sympathetic feeling confuses the status of authorship. Imperfect designs are simultaneously more intimate and more anonymous than finished pieces, offering a glimpse of the first inspiration that is distinct precisely because it has not yet been assimilated into the artist's personality.

Miriam's sketch of Jael appears "dashed off with remarkable power, and showed a touch or two that were actually lifelike and deathlike; as if Miriam had been standing by, when Jael gave the first stroke of her murderous hammer – or as if she herself were Jael, and felt irresistibly impelled to make her bloody confession, in this guise" (43). The impression of speed underlies the indexical charge that transforms this sketch from a remote dramatization to an eyewitness account to a confession, a procedure that will reverse during the murder scene as shock transforms Miriam from an immediate participant into a detached observer. The narrator does not fail to hint that these vengeful female figures establish the type of Miriam's own mysterious guilt (and, it turns out, her future crime in disposing of the Model). The "first stroke" in the portrait shares the deformative effect of the artist's final touch; the effect of this sketch, we are told, is altered by "a certain wayward quirk of the pencil, which at once converted the heroine into a vulgar murderess" (43). The metaphorical substitution of Jael's hammer-and-chisel for Miriam's pencil assures the indexical relation of the killing blow with the artist's finishing touch, with the side-effect of making the sketch into a virtual sculpture. The pencil's "wayward quirk" also evacuates agency both from the picture's creation and the murder it portrays. Was the murder another wayward quirk?

The application of final touches registers the slackening of the original inspiration, the difficulty of sustaining an effect. This pattern continues in Miriam's sketch of Judith and Holofernes: "Here, too, beginning with a passionate and fiery conception of the subject, in all earnestness, she had given the last touches in utter scorn, as it were, of the feeling which at first took such powerful possession of her hand" (43). The pattern of seduction and betrayal plays out in the biblical narrative as well as its graphic execution. The feeling that earns Miriam's revulsion seems to be an the emotional signature of the providential and typological loop in which she finds herself, the feeling of being taken up in a plot, of acting upon emotion that does not originate in the self. Hilda, by contrast, seems to thrive on this kind of ventriloquism: "If Guido had not wrought through me, my pains would have been thrown away" (##).

The possession of the hand recurs when Kenyon reveals a sculpture from memory of Hilda's hand: "Touching those lovely fingers – had the jealous sculpture allowed you to touch – you could hardly believe that a virgin warmth would not steal from them into your heart" (120). This sculpture's charm takes the form of imagined touch, an effect that is at once enhanced and

foreclosed by the interjected reminder that this contact will never be permitted. The sculptor experiences a variation on this effect, in that the creation of the replica acts as a substitute for the possession of its original, another sort of imagined contact: "The sculptor sighed, as he put away the treasure of Hilda's marble hand into the ivory coffer, and thought how slight was the probability that he should ever feel, responsive to his own, the tender clasp of the original" (122). In this subplot, the marital metaphor of the hand is in full force.

In an analysis inspired by Geoffrey Batchen's concept of proto-photography, Andy Smith argues that "Fancy's Showbox" (1837) "deserves study as a literary site of proto-photographic desire because it employs hyper-accurate picture records, because it addresses the question of how to fix unstable phenomena, and because it raises the sophisticated issue of attaching written captions to images in order to clarify or direct meaning and context."[25] Smith convincingly links this pre-photographic sketch to the conceptual issues central to the early theory of photography, arguing that Hawthorne contributed to the cultural, discursive invention of photography even though he played no part in the practical history of the medium. Smith accounts for the photographic resonances of this short pieces, its anticipation of both the Daguerreotype and the Kinetoscope, but in doing so he tends to flatten the differences of medium and form that impose different degrees of vividness and fixity on the materials of fancy.

In "Fancy's Showbox," Hawthorne asks whether contemplated sins leave an enduring mark upon the soul. The focal character, a generic Mr. Smith, receives a visit from the allegorical personifications of Fancy, Memory, and Conscience. The figure of Fancy, writes Hawthorne, "had assumed the garb and aspect of an itinerant showman, with a box of pictures on her back" (451). Memory appears as a clerk, book in hand, while Conscience robes herself and wields a dagger. In the showbox, Mr. Smith witnesses painted scenes from his past life, altered to show the consequences of crimes he imagined without enacting. The story follows an repeated pattern: Fancy displays a scene of sin in the showbox, Mr. Smith indignantly proclaims his innocence, Memory consults her book to discover the record of guilty thoughts, and finally Conscience stabs Mr. Smith in the heart, but without impairing him for the next iteration. After the repetition of this routine has leveled Mr. Smith's defenses, Hawthorne relents: "In truth, there is no such thing in man's nature, as a settled and full resolve, either for good or evil, except at the very moment of execution. Let us hope, therefore, that all the dreadful consequences of sin will not be incurred, unless the act have set its seal upon the thought" (455). This hope would be especially urgent for a gothic stylist, a professional fancier of sin praised in print for his "power of blackness."[26]

The reflections at the end of this sketch do not arise intuitively from the main action, nor do the material details of the allegory play into its conception of sin. The pageantry of the showbox lends the imagined scenes of sin more permanence than they would possess as a simple dream sequence, prompting the narrator to conjecture that all of these images "appeared to have been painted by some malicious artist, on purpose to vex Mr. Smith" (452). Hawthorne distances his reader from these imagined paintings: "We can sketch merely the outlines of two or three, out of the many pictures, which, at the pulling of a string, successively peopled the box with the semblances of living scenes" (451). The gesture of turning his language into the equivalent of a sketched outline separates Hawthorne's own artistic labor from the work of the "malicious artist," who has not only represented Smith's imaginary crimes but rendered them in lifelike

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[25] Smith, "Sensitive Emulsions," 48.

[26] Hawthorne and his Mosses

detail. Hawthorne cautiously restrains the vividness of his execution as he floats the idea that imagined sins have real spiritual consequences. The layered framing of this sketch gives the reader a series of paintings within an allegorical masque within a daydream within a moral illustration. Hawthorne secures the suggestible atmosphere of dream through his handling of light. Mr. Smith meets his allegorical houseguests in a room where "crimson curtains muffled the glare of sunshine, and created a rich obscurity" and sees them "through the brilliant medium of his glass of old Madeira" (451). The necessity for suggestive half-light continues in the painted scenes of the showbox: "One was a moonlight picture; in the background, a lowly dwelling; and in front, partly shadowed by a tree, yet besprinkled with flakes of radiance, two youthful figures, male and female" (451). The tale's redundant framing detracts from its immersive gothic atmosphere, yet the pageantry of the showbox also lends the imagined scenes of sin more permanence than they would possess as a simple dream sequence. The narrator conjectures that all of these images "appeared to have been painted by some malicious artist, on purpose to vex Mr. Smith," a conclusion that depends on the labor committed to these pictures (452). Hawthorne distances his reader from these imagined paintings: "We can sketch merely the outlines of two or three, out of the many pictures, which, at the pulling of a string, successively peopled the box with the semblances of living scenes" (451). The gesture of turning his language into the equivalent of a sketched outline separates Hawthorne's own artistic labor from the work of the showbox's "malicious artist." Hawthorne cautiously restrains the vividness of his execution as he floats the idea that imagined sins have real spiritual consequences.

Hawthorne extends his premise to include the scenarios of literary fiction: "A scheme of guilt, till it be put in execution, greatly resembles a train of incidents in a projected tale" (454). This analogy would be more comforting if Hawthorne had not specified "a *projected* tale." This troublesome adjective halts the analogy short of the desired consolation that fiction has the same moral status as idle thought. Instead, the passage suggests that the "scheme of guilt" and "projected tale" are alike because neither has been executed, which raises the possibility that a completed tale might achieve the character of crime. Hawthorne continues:

> The latter [a projected tale], in order to produce a sense of reality in the reader's mind, must be conceived with such proportionate strength by the author as to seem, in the glow of fancy, more like truth, past, present, or to come, than purely fiction. The prospective sinner, on the other hand, weaves his plot of crime, but seldom or never feels a perfect certainty that it will be executed. There is a dreaminess diffused about his thoughts; in a dream, as it were, he strikes the death-blow into his victim's heart, and starts to find an indelible blood-stain on his hand. Thus a novel-writer, or a dramatist, in creating a villain of romance, and fitting him with evil deeds, and the villain of actual life, in projecting the crimes that will be perpetrated, may almost meet each other, half-way been reality and fancy. (454)

Almost. Hawthorne cycles through genres with apparent indifference, placing his "villain of romance" in a novel or drama or tale at various points in the passage, although in his prefaces he will insist on the differences between novels and romances, and elsewhere between the long form and the short. This loose reference to prose genres shows that the point here is a more general point about the fancy, but as a result of this generality the degrees and types of execution that interest Hawthorne elsewhere become confused. This halfway point, though, is where he

situates his aesthetic ideal. Through the operation of this extended analogy, the moral casuistry of the piece merges with the range of aesthetic distinctions that are raised and dropped in the course of the allegory, the varying degrees of vividness that correspond with gradations of medium and detail.

The aesthetic precaution of halting ekphrasis at a sketch, for instance, may be nothing more than a courtesy to delicate readers (or a practical concession to the diminishing returns of elaborate pictorial description). But this restrained representation also carries a hint of superstition; it implies that a more complete rendering might become depraved by virtue of the imaginative depth it demands. "Some of the pictures," writes Hawthorne, "had been painted with so doubtful a touch, and in colors so faint and pale, that the subjects could barely be conjectured. A dull, semi-transparent mist had been thrown over the surface of the canvas, into which the figures seemed to vanish, while the eye sought most earnestly to fix them" (453). For the artist, the execution of imaginary scenes may require a degree of involvement and decision that approaches the moral fixity of embodied action. For the sympathetic reader, the experience may be as vivid.

"Fancy's Show Box" sketches out the ideas and metaphors that appear in a more elaborated form in "Ethan Brand," in which the motif of the showbox makes another appearance. In this later sketch, Hawthorne's hesitance to protract the representation of sin does not take the form of sketch-like imagery, but instead implied or back-grounded plot. He subtitles the sketch "A Chapter from an Abortive Romance," with the implication that the completed narrative would trace Ethan Brand's long pursuit of the Unpardonable Sin. The imaginative participation of Ethan Brand's intellectual quest would potentially corrupt the faculties of the artist and perhaps the reader. While Hawthorne elsewhere entertains the commonplace view that fine art ennobles the spectator, he repeatedly flirts with the inverse view that a wicked work of art will involve the reader in its fancied crimes. Hawthorne's poetics of sympathy has its logical end-point in the conceit of moral contagion through art.

Seizing Impressions: Optics as Reported Speech

Hawthorne describes Hilda in a way that aligns her presence with the narrative voice: "even her silent sympathy was so powerful that it drew your own along with it, endowing you with a second sight that enabled you to see excellencies with almost the depth and delicacy of her own perceptions" (62). This description recalls the "sociable silence" that Herman Melville experienced (and filled) in Hawthorne's taciturn company, but more so than that Hilda's quiet influence provides an idealized counterpoint to *The Marble Faun*'s discursive narrator, whose expatiations frequently leave the world of art opaque. Hilda's companions in the museum halls, we are informed, "saw the art-treasures of Rome, under her guidance, as they had never seen them before," even though she does not "dissertate" in scholarly language (62). The narrator shares Hilda's pose of sensitive amateurism during the novel's many descriptions of artworks, but no narrator enjoys the complete luxury of "silent sympathy," except insofar as the narrative voice vanishes into the perceptions it relates. To put it another way, the vicarious perception available through the sympathetic "second sight" of Hilda's guiding presence resembles the effects of free indirect discourse, a technique that pulls the impartial observer into the thoughts and perceptions of characters. It is also a technique that does not find its way into Hawthorne's regular formal repertoire, at least not in the form of reported speech or thought.

Because Hawthorne lacks the systematic grasp of free indirect discourse displayed by Jane Austen or Henry James, critics of the early twentieth century regarded his technique as an

imperfect prototype.[27] This backwards reading of literary history assumes that Hawthorne failed to master free indirect discourse instead of honing a style with different aims and strengths. Whether this limitation reveals the deficiency of Hawthorne's imagination or the decorum of his intellect is unknowable, but also irrelevant for the texts themselves, in which every stylistic tendency has the force of principle, whether or not it springs from one. The narration of *The Marble Faun* transmits the thoughts of characters through authorial commentary and dramatic speeches, but also submerges them in the rendering of shared perceptions.

Hawthorne achieves a similar ambiguity between exposition and experience during the many passages in which the narrative voice engages in conjecture, foregrounding the many possible readings within a single scene.[28] The conclusion of "Young Goodman Brown" pivots on a conjectural passage: "Had Goodman Brown fallen asleep in the forest, and only dreamed a wild dream of a witch meeting? / Be it so, if you will. But alas! it was a dream of evil omen for young Goodman Brown" (288). The narrator affects indifference toward this question of verisimilitude, implying that the objective truth of Goodman Brown's experience has little bearing upon its moral effect, but this moment still throws the reader back on earlier details, such as the ribbon that provides the first strong evidence of supernatural incursion: "But *something* fluttered lightly down through the air, and caught on the branch of a tree. The young man seized it, and *beheld* a pink ribbon" (283, emphasis added). The falling object turns from "something" into "a pink ribbon" when sight and touch converge upon it to produce a charged impression of reality.

Hawthorne's The verb – "beheld" – negates this moment of visceral certainty, even as the act of beholding associatively refers back to holding and touch. Parallel syntax separates the senses of touch and vision: "The young man seized it, *and* beheld a pink ribbon." Whatever Goodman Brown may subsequently behold, he seizes only "it," a blank pronoun with "something" as its equally empty antecedent. This phrasing allows for the scenario that Goodman Brown has excitably grasped at a falling leaf, mistaking it for the ribbon that his paranoid mindset anticipates and demands. The verbal style of this passage upholds verisimilitude by way of litigious wit; the wording simulates Goodman Brown's delusional experience while preserving plausible deniability for the narrator, who does not take part in the hallucination.[29] Goodman Brown's discovery of the vexatious ribbon amounts to a moment of free indirect discourse, albeit centered on the susceptible faculties of perception rather than the intellectual powers of speech or thought. Hawthorne achieves the oscillation between objective

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[27] The generation of modernist critics who balked on principle at any direct intrusion of the narrator's voice to comment or interpret provided the occasion for Wayne Booth's corrective theories on the range of narratorial rhetoric, a system in which authors such as Poe and Hawthorne would not be read "primarily as sincere forerunners of the moderns" (26). Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

[28] For the topic of conjectural narration see Elaine Tuttle Hansen, "Ambiguity and the Narrator in the Scarlet Letter," *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 5, no. 3 (1975).

[29] F.O. Matthiessen finds the ribbon problematic for the way that it confuses the tale's embodied world with the protagonist's allegorical fancies: "the literal insistence on the damaging pink ribbon obtrudes the labels of a confining allegory, and short-circuits the range of association" (284). In other words, the ribbon crosses between fact and fancy, object and figure, without an explicit transition: "We are bothered by the ribbon because it is an abstraction pretending to be something else" (285). See Matthiessen, *American Renaissance : Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman.*

description and subjective impressions by means of what Seymour Chatman calls "free indirect perception," a type of description that mimics a character's momentary sensory experience without reporting their conscious thoughts as a narrated monologue.[30] The indistinctness of "something" and the persistent ambiguity of the ribbon both link the passage to Goodman Brown's agitated mind.

For Hawthorne, every shared thought must receive a visual correlative, whether in the form of an enduring art object or a momentary optical effect. The ideas and sentiments embodied in art objects are more intimately expressed in temporary configurations of light and perspective. In this way, Hawthorne struggles with the difference between impressions and things. The qualities of life and movement that give momentary perceptions the force of truth also strain the author's abstemious attempt to express private insight in a way that permits a shared experience. The combination of providential signs with skeptical perspectivalism creates a constant crisis of verification, one that accounts for the major features of Hawthorne's narrative style.

The Marble Faun frequently raises the problem of art's duration. The pure inspirations that ought to drive the fine arts prove distressingly evanescent, while the sculpted images of notable modern men will outlast the fame of the subjects by generations. Still, Hawthorne hesitates to create a subjective touch that is not either conveyed in dialogue or actualized in a visual sign. Bill Brown points to the passages in Henry James that "describe thinking itself as a kind of thing."[31] Citing "the basic liberties of *style indirect libre* (the liberty, for instance, of describing a character's thoughts in a style he does not possess)," Brown suggests that the mental objects of *The Golden Bowl* may not represent the images unfolding within the mind of an individual character but rather "that thinking's own figure," an authorial conceit that allows thought to assume its own uncanny autonomy (165).

The moment when Goodman Brown snatches Faith's pink ribbon from the air finds its match in *The Marble Faun* as Hawthorne attempts to describe the etherealized presence of his heroine Miriam: "She resembled one of those images of light, which conjurors evoke and cause to shine before us, in apparent tangibility, only an arm's length beyond our grasp; we make a step in advance, expecting to seize the illusion, but find it still precisely so far out of our reach" (21). Unlike the excitable Goodman Brown, the self-conscious narrator of *The Marble Faun* perceives the conjuring trick and distances the reader from the illusion through his simile, a figure that acknowledges the "arm's length" between language and its imagined objects. In the case of "Young Goodman Brown," the hero's Mephistophelian walking companion fits the role of the conjuror, but the story's phantasmagoric sleight-of-hand occupies another layer of abstraction, both psychological and aesthetic. The story's tricks of light owe part of their power to the suggestible mind of the hero, whose naïve saturation with the figments of Bunyan turns the world to allegory wherever he turns, but part to the authorial consciousness that has arranged the storms and glooms just so. The figure of the conjuror in *The Marble Faun*'s simile occupies a similar range of ambiguities, in that it begins as a psychological effect and points outward toward cosmic forces, whether benign or malevolent. Does this simile describe a diabolical temptation to capture and possess ideal form as an object or does it serve as a divine reminder that the image will constantly recede?   Further, what does it mean that this desire to seize the conjuror's

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[30] Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell university Press, 1978), 204.

[31] Brown, *A Sense of Things : The Object Matter of American Literature*, 162.

hologram so closely resembles the works of photographers, who routinely seize images composed of light?

The Magnetic Chain

Several critics have analyzed the way that sympathy mediates Hawthorne's engagement with the arts and with history.[32] In this view, Hawthorne's final romance amounts to a plea for greater sympathy in the face of the historical and moral estrangement of modern life. Readings of *The Marble Faun* that focus on sympathy tend to treat it as the solution to the novel's ethical and aesthetic conundrums while underemphasizing the ambiguous possibilities housed in the 18th century theorization of sympathy by thinkers such as David Hume and Adam Smith. The most succinct account of sympathy in *The Marble Faun* comes from a critic whose focus lies elsewhere, in Hawthorne's account of monumental form. Without so much as mentioning sympathy, Robert H. Byer arrives at an accurate description of how the mechanisms of sympathy work unconsciously through the arts:

> In the context of this drama of recognition, the numerous canonical works of art in the novel are insistently represented as operating on the characters not by the delineation and clarification of inherent and enduring values, with which they come to identify, but by a kind of circulation or contagion of their desires through the activity of beholding. This, in turn, creates among the characters a suffusing sense of moral complicity and ambiguity, and for the reader an intensifying, dramatically significant complication of the characters' outlines – an obscuring of the sharp delineation of their differences from one another and of the terms by which they aim to differentiate themselves from one another.[33]

The description here of "a kind of circulation or contagion" fits with the definitions of sympathy that Hawthorne's generation gleaned from Smith and Hume. Notably, Smith theorizes sympathy in roughly economic terms as a process of rationalized circulation while Hume theorizes sympathy as a form of contagion.

This difference between deliberate identification and unconscious compulsion forms one of Hawthorne's lasting preoccupations, stretching back to the theorization of sympathy in his tales and sketches. During the climax of "Ethan Brand," for instance, the narrator comments that Ethan's search for the Unpardonable Sin has caused him to regard humanity in empirical rather than ethical terms:

> He had lost hold of the magnetic chain of humanity. He was no longer a brother-man, opening the chambers or the dungeons of our common nature by the key of holy sympathy, which gave him a right to share in all its secrets; he was now a cold observer, looking on mankind as the subject of his experiment, and, at

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[32] Gordon Hutner, *Secrets and Sympathy : Forms of Disclosure in Hawthorne's Novels* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988); John Michael, "History and Romance, Sympathy and Uncertainty: The Moral Stones in Hawthorne's *Marble Faun*," *PMLA* 103, no. 2 (1988).
[33] Robert H. Byer, "Words, Monuments, Beholders: Visual Arts in *the Marble Faun*," in *American Iconology : New Approaches to Nineteenth-Century Art and Literature*, ed. David C. Miller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 173.

length, converting man and woman to be his puppets, and pulling the wires that moved them to such degrees of crime as were demanded for his study (1084).

In other passages, Hawthorne uses both magnetism and wires (or threads) as nearly interchangeable metaphors for the operation of sympathy. In *The Marble Faun,* for instance, Hawthorne makes much of the notion that all women seem to knit and sew: "A vast deal of human sympathy runs along this electric line, stretching from the throne to the wicker chair of the humblest seamstress, and keeping high and low in a species of communion with their kindred beings" (Ch. 5). In the case of "Ethan Brand," though, these two figures serve nearly opposite functions. The "magnetic chain" binds humanity together by affinity, while the "wires" replace mutual attraction with external force. The contrast between the "brother-man" and the "cold observer" reveals an ethical tension within Hawthorne's idea of authorship. The image of the sinner-as-puppeteer resonates with the position of the romance-writer, whose moral illustrations and experiments would seem to depend upon the manipulation of his characters, unless the sympathetic imagination gives them a sufficient sense of integrity and autonomy. The design of *The Marble Faun* requires Hawthorne to move both Miriam and Donatello to crime (although they seem to be moved to the act by each other as well), yet the author's notion of sympathy requires him not to abandon them as the spotless Hilda does.

Hawthorne frequently returns sympathy to its root meaning as a material likeness or attraction such as magnetism, a force that binds like with like according to physical principles. Under this conception, sympathy loses some of its humanizing force, becoming less a conscious exercise of emotions than an automatic response that overturns the sovereignty of the individual. The "chain of humanity" makes an appearance in the moments after the Model's death, when Miriam and Donatello realize the connection forged by their crime: "So intimate, in those first moments, was the union, that is seemed as if their new sympathy annihilated all other ties, and that they were released from the chain of humanity; a new sphere, a special law, had been created for them alone" (174).

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