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Literature of Diminishment:  
American Regionalism and the Writing of Nature

By

Juliana Hui-xin Chow

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requirements for the degree of

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University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:  
Professor Dorothy Hale, Chair  
Professor Anne-Lise François  
Professor Sophie Volpp

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## Abstract

Literature of Diminishment: American Regionalism and the Writing of Nature

by

Juliana Hui-xin Chow

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Professor Dorothy Hale, Chair

*Literature of Diminishment* redefines regionalism as a philosophical approach that prefers a partial view of oneself and of others, whether human or nonhuman, rather than the comprehensive view pursued by nineteenth-century science. I show how American regionalist writings from the 1820s to 1910s adapt scientific techniques of observation to the aesthetics of the regionalist sketch. Their "sketchy" view of Nature highlights the deficiencies of knowing and nonetheless opens out to a view of biological processes and succession in which life cedes to life through its casualties. Regionalist literature is, then, less a literature of particular cultural or geographical regions as it is a literature whose principles of diminishment might insist on the roughness and limits of a regional setting. The archive of works I draw upon extends from environmental literature—the nature writings of John James Audubon, Henry David Thoreau, and Celia Thaxter—to less conventionally regionalist texts of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries such as works by Emily Dickinson, Herman Melville, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Gertrude Stein.

In regionalist formulations, diminishment is a mode of seeing that relies on imprecise and partial specifications rather than strict definitions. Understanding art and science as approaches that both connote ways of seeing and being in the world, I show how writers like Thoreau, Dickinson, Melville, Thaxter, and Sarah Orne Jewett experiment with partial ways of seeing through concomitantly aesthetic and scientific uses of views, optics, and visual technology. Setting the frame with Thoreau's vista from the eroding shores of Cape Cod, I consider how these writers' engagement with natural history's empirical methods attends to their own perceptual diminishment, and also, critically, to the diminishment of their object of study—Nature, or, more generally, life. The final chapters examine the practice and politics of seeing human races as "species," that is, as part of nature, through what I consider "snapshots" of black workers. Du Bois's and Stein's literary-photographic studies view and review the racist natural history that pictures African-Americans, as Du Bois writes, "somewhere between men and cattle." Regionalism, I argue, instead affords the succession of life through diminishment, rather than a reduction of life to units of data.

For my parents Stephen and Grace Chow,  
my sister Melinda Alankar,  
&  
Christopher Patrick Miller

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Finally, with the deepest gratitude, this dissertation is dedicated to my family.

## Preface

*Nature has her russet hues as well as green— Indeed our eye splits on every object, and we can as well take one path as the other— If I consider its history it is old—if its destiny it is new— I may see a part of an object or the whole. I will not be imposed on and think Nature is old, because the season is advanced. I will study the botany of the mosses and fungi on the decayed—and remember that decayed wood is not old, but has just begun to be what it is. I need not think of the pine almond or the acorn and sapling when I meet the fallen pine or oak—more than of the generations of pines and oaks which have fed the young tree.*

*The new blade of the corn—the third leaf of the melon—these are not green but gray with time, but sere in respect of time.<sup>1</sup>*

- Thoreau, *Journal* (March 19, 1842)

"Our eye splits on every object": The gaze of natural history, as Thoreau notes, breaks apart upon its object. Nature's hues as red and green brings optics to bear upon the temporal and biological frame of the woods: not only seasonal fluctuations of trees but also the succession of plant species, the individual sapling's green spring and fall red *and* the generations that have fed it, that will grow from it. What is seen as "hues" of color are also the hues of time's movement, of history and of decay, the way red lingers after green, and green after red. Natural history is not merely observations of nature, but observations of a nature in "respect of time," so that the work of describing the specificities of life is also a problem of describing the succession of life over time.

At the same time, the eye that splits into red and green is like the many rays refracted by droplets of water to form a rainbow. A rainbow or an iridescent mist as Thoreau's figural representation of vision may not be apparent until one considers the spectrum of colors proffered in this description—russet, green, gray—and the refracting of rays of light suggested by the eye's divergent paths. The hues offer a clue only to surface more than a decade later in another journal entry from August 7, 1852:

We see the rain bow apparently when we are on the edge of the rain, just as the sun is setting. If we are too deep in the rain, then it will appear dim. Sometimes it is so near that I see a portion of its arch this side of the woods in the horizon tinging them. Sometimes we are completely within it—enveloped by it—and experience the realization of the child's [*sic*] wish. The obvious colors are red & green. Why green? It is astonishing how brilliant the red may be. What is the difference between that red & the ordinary red of the evening sky? Who does not feel that here is a phenomenon which Natural philosophy alone is inadequate to explain? The use of the rain-bow, who has described it. (*J* 5: 287-288)

The green and red of the woods at twilight, or of autumnal leaves, are both the hues of a natural phenomenon, that is, of Nature itself, and the hues of a perception or feeling of Nature that breaks into various bands of color. Green and red are the shades of strikingly complementary, that is, opposite, colors in eighteenth and nineteenth-century color theory based on the absorption of light by paint pigments. "Local color" was considered the natural or true color of an object without outside influence and without admixture of other pigments; of course, most colors in

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<sup>1</sup> Thoreau, *Journal* 1: 381-382.



paintings are not "local" but blended and painted in relation to other colors.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the shadow of a green object would be painted with russet tints for a fuller, more luminescent effect. Or the evening red casts green shadows in the woods. For Thoreau, the rainbow's "tinging" of the woods has the complementary optical effect of shadows where red tinging green produces a more "brilliant" red than the "ordinary" or "local" red of dusk. While the rainbow has been encoded as a spiritual sign in both Christian and transcendentalist symbology, Thoreau's fascination with its optics continues beyond common reception of its miraculous manifestation in answer to "wish."<sup>3</sup>

What I wish to draw out is how the scientific analysis of vision and biological succession counterpoises and undergirds Thoreau's aesthetics of natural history observation and description in his writings. Even as he finds natural philosophy inadequate, and utilitarian knowledge irrelevant, he still employs popular scientific concepts of optics and biology to describe or puzzle over phenomena. After all, natural philosophy was still trying to sort out the relations between colors, light, and the eye, and the origin and succession of species. Optics, for instance, may not be adequate to describe a rainbow or biology the emergence of a blade of corn, unless they can somehow describe how each thing tinges and envelopes everything around it—the brilliance of the rainbow's red and of spring's green is not that each is its own color, its own new life, but that they are in relation to one another. And yet Thoreau's recourse is to the contingent optics that make a rainbow happen: the low angle of light from a setting sun, the shower of rain droplets that cast back out iridescent points of refracting light, and the optical effects of complementary colors and afterimages. His recourse is to track not only the pine almond and acorn, but also the species that harbor and complement those trees, as he would later also do for his 1860 lecture on "The Succession of Forest Trees" to Middlesex County farmers. His self-countermanding tendency requires a seemingly perverse vision that is able to see the gray in the green, the sapling in the fallen wood.

The splitting of the eye and its forking path is precisely a vision that hits upon an obstacle, a vision that undergoes stress and shatters into various hues upon its object. Against an Enlightenment science of pure and accurate observation, his technique of the eye is also a "diminished" seeing that is unable to shoot directly into and penetrate its object. In this sense, Thoreau's vision acknowledges the impossibility of pinpointing unadulterated "local color," of any seeing that is not under duress and fallible. The environmental conditions of the object render it only possible to see it indirectly, the gaze slant and split, seeing not objectively or perfectly, but through fracture. Further, the objects that his vision splits upon are particularly those that signal disintegration itself—the russet of dry leaves, fungi growing on rotten wood, the

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2 For a discussion of "local color" in nineteenth-century color theory and its relation to local color fiction, see Nicholas Gaskill's dissertation *Vibrant Environments: The Feel of Color from the White Whale to the Red Wheelbarrow*.

3 Similarly, in *Thoreau's Morning Work*, H. Daniel Peck analogizes Thoreau's painterly style to the luminists for the spiritual light that pervades his detailed description of natural objects and his composition of relations and correspondences between those objects. He considers Thoreau's fascination with the rainbow and other forms of atmospheric illumination consonant with a transcendentalist invocation of spirit through Nature's signs. However, he argues that Thoreau's difference from Emerson was his preference for "dwell[ing] on the concrete, particular forms of the natural world—those forms, with which he contrasts the rainbow, proceeding from the 'common course of nature'" (53). While the rainbow remains a transcendentalist and abstract sign to Thoreau, Peck argues that he still sought visual symmetries between the details of natural objects and a spiritual cosmos. He opposes Thoreau's sense of cosmic structure to a partial, scientific sense of the world. Yet I will argue that Thoreau was as much, and perhaps more and more, interested in the part as the whole. See especially Peck 49-66.

withering of plant matter. The revision of the decayed and sere as lively is also one that tends toward objects that fall apart instead of becoming whole. The blade of corn and the leaf of the melon are a part that sheds with time rather than a whole fruit that ripens and continues as seed to new plant; the dim rainbow or a fragment of the arch is a blur or portion that does not come clear nor full circle.<sup>4</sup> The emphasis of Thoreau's study is upon the Nature—and vision—of life's succession through diminishment and decay.

I take Thoreau as indexing a constellation of literary and scientific work around the questions of biological life cycles and species succession that haunt his diminished seeing of Nature's russet hues as well as green. The slow shift of the sciences toward understanding flaw, casualty, and deterioration as part of their objects of study—that is, *diminishment* as part of organisms and evolution—goes hand-in-hand with a concomitant strain of understanding diminishment as conditioning observation itself. How do techniques of observation change our understanding of the motions from life to death and vice versa? How does the eye splitting upon its object change how that object is understood, related to, and known? How does diminishment *see* Nature? The very nature and succession of life, or what is taken to be that nature, is at stake in these aesthetic and scientific experiments of observation. At the basis of these questions is Thoreau's query: "Who does not feel that here is a phenomenon which Natural philosophy alone is inadequate to explain?" That is, what is the status of knowledge if it is inadequate and partial? How do we characterize a sense of natural phenomena and process that is incommensurate with science and yet still depends upon that science? What is the epistemic shift that Thoreau's writings mark even if they are working against the grain of the greater body of nineteenth-century natural philosophy?

*Literature of Diminishment: American Regionalism and the Writing of Nature* defines a mode of long nineteenth-century American literature that experiments, as Thoreau's writings do, with techniques of observation premised upon diminished seeing and diminished objects. These techniques engage with the popular science exploring the newest theories of "seeing" in optics and of life cycles and species succession in the biological sciences, and also with novel and recreational applications of that science in technology. The basis of science in empirical observation opened out to technological enhancements of vision or of the recording of vision, as well as devices that advantageously exploited optical effects in the form of philosophical toys. From the natural history illustration of John James Audubon to the animal locomotion studies of Edward Muybridge, from Charles Darwin's theory of evolution to Henri Bergson's creative evolution, and from the magic lantern to the photograph, these scientific as well as technological ways of seeing Nature inform the literary sketches of writers who, like Thoreau, are writing a form of natural history.

Natural history description depends very much on empirical observation, so it will come as no surprise that many works of natural history description were called sketches, a name that signals its highly visual content and aspirations. Originally associated with a picturesque tourism that framed, sketched, and painted the landscape, sketches assumed an aesthetic relation to Nature. Yet not only picturesque tourists, but also works by scientists, nature and travel writers, and local-color fiction writers were titled or translated as sketches.<sup>5</sup> "Sketch" signifies a

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4 Branka Arsić's forthcoming *Bird Relics: Grief and Vitalism in Thoreau* includes a discussion of Thoreau's interest in decaying leaves within the vitalist dialogue of nineteenth-century botany.

5 In a journal entry from January 27, 1852, Thoreau refers to his writings more generally as "sketches" that he undertakes to put into various publishable forms like the essay: "I do not know but thoughts written down thus in a journal might be printed in the same form with greater advantage—than if the related ones were brought

common interest in observation that crosses disciplines—and also merges disciplines. Literature of diminishment must be understood as participating in the scientific dialogues regarding sight and the Nature and life studied. Its techniques of representing and describing Nature are, in other words, techniques of observation at once scientific and aesthetic.

However, the writers of this mode are not merely interested in the science and art of observation, but also work with the very form and aesthetic of the "sketch"—as flimsy, brief, and incomplete—to represent the diminishment apparent in and through seeing. This is why Emily Dickinson, through her tenuous sensing of other species, and Gertrude Stein, through her breaking of lives into serial descriptions, find a place in this project. Furthermore, they combine this aesthetic diminishment with a scientific engagement with techniques of seeing—as may be seen in Dickinson's speculation on the definition of other species and in Stein's interest in incremental mechanisms of recording motion. While I have chosen to concentrate this project on the intersection of ways of seeing and ideas of succession in the works of Thoreau, Herman Melville, Sarah Orne Jewett, Dickinson, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Stein, the idea of sketch that I work with more broadly encompasses the writers whose aesthetics—and science—exemplify the "sketchiness" of sketch.

The literary sketch has long been associated with "local color" and understood to be the genre of travelers and naturalists whose claim of realism is at the same time leavened by apologies for their sketch's soft crayon blur and roughness. If "local color" meant the true, selfsame color of an object, and nineteenth-century local color sketches manifest that insistence upon representative authenticity, then it is important to distinguish the sketches that concern this project from the "local color" ones. Kristie Hamilton argues that the nineteenth-century "tendency to claim knowledge by participation became associated with the process of sketching in general" (25). Susan Fenimore Cooper, whose *Rural Hours* (1850) reports natural history observations and ruminations in her home Cooperstown, New York, may be considered a sketch writer whose lamentations of fast disappearing birds, trees, and plants exhibit her keen awareness of day-to-day environmental degradation. As with Thoreau, the scientific study of nature informs her work *and* she is critically aware of the way aesthetics, especially the picturesque, shape American natural history. While Cooper's vision certainly depicts diminishment, she dramatizes and predicts her tragic vision with a conclusiveness in contradistinction with the apprehensiveness and incompleteness accorded to life that organizes the philosophical ways of seeing and being in the works included in *Literature of Diminishment*.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, the picaresque or episodic style of more traditional writers of local-color fiction like Caroline Kirkland and Mark Twain appears "rough" enough, but their roughness is in the name of authentic

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together into separate essays. They are now allied to life—& are seen by the reader not to be far fetched— It is more simple—less artful— I feel that in the other case I should have no proper frame for my sketches. Mere facts & names & dates communicate more than we suspect— Whether the flower looks better in the nosegay— than in the meadow where it grew—& we had to wet our feet to get it! Is the scholastic air any advantage?" (*J* 4: 296). Interestingly, the rumination also destabilizes the relation of part to whole, or what arrangement of parts is more whole.

- 6 Rochelle Johnson, in *Passions for Nature*, describes *Rural Hours* as a natural history of diminishment, yet this is a diminishment observed in the object and a diminishment composing the technique of observation without a sense of diminishment as succession. Instead, Cooper's natural history is a tragedy: "...Cooper records nature's own history, she incorporates the literary history of nature, and, finally, she describes losses experienced by the natural world throughout time—in particular, losses of species and earlier landscapes. This last use of history is one we might call a historical record of a diminished place....[*Rural Hours*] invites readers to consider the tragedy represented by these transformations" (29).

representation, of claiming—tongue-in-cheek, and often critically—a vibrantly "local" local color. Local color fiction, as a literature of authenticity, connotes a realism of distinctive locations, times, and cultures and a relation to knowledge as territorial or claimable.

Through literature of diminishment, I draw out the thread of a reverse tendency with respect to knowledge in sketch. The sketch as a literary mode of diminishment resonates not with "local color," but with critical discourse on local color sketches as *regionalist* texts. Regionalism has been a historically feminized genre due to its perceived minor status, style, and subject. It has been described as nostalgically representing anachronistic, provincial ways of life for a modernizing, industrial America, and is also the most popular literature written primarily by women and published in widely circulating magazines like *Atlantic Monthly*, *Putnam's*, or *Scribner's* during the nineteenth century. William Dean Howells, the late nineteenth-century proponent of realist novels and editor of the *Atlantic*, complained of the "narrow limits of a tale or sketch" (238-239) despite acclaiming the short stories of many women regionalists including Jewett, Constance Fenimore Woolson, and Lillie Chace Wyman. The quaint regionalist sketch may be an appropriate designation for a mode of writing that expresses a *diminished* knowledge as opposed to comprehensive and unifying systems of knowledge. Though this project tracks an engagement with natural history through optics and species succession, regionalist sketches may find other expressions of engagement with science that relate to an impoverishment of means such as James McCune Smith's uneducated black workers in "The Heads of Colored People" (1852-1854) and Mary Austin's sense of simple stoicism in *The Land of Little Rain* (1903). Regionalism, as this project will show, may be considered a mode with a relation to knowledge different from other forms of realism. Where the realist novel might attempt an omniscient and cohesive epistemic grasp of its fictional world and characters, regionalism's description is contingent upon obscurities and partialities, that is, contingent upon encountering and splitting upon its objects.

In order to establish the context of nineteenth-century natural history and writing for regionalist sketches, the Introduction to this dissertation charts the cultural and scientific practices of observation and the eye in American writings on Nature from Louis Agassiz to Ralph Waldo Emerson. Agassiz's and Emerson's conceptions of Nature remain consonant with a Christian worldview of all forms of life bound together by divine intention. Given the dominance of natural theology and its themes of unity and design in nineteenth-century natural history, where, then, might we pick out the thread of a natural history of diminishment rather than of providence or progress? I trace the nascency of the regionalist sketch to J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* (1783) where Farmer James's agricultural management, understood against his interlocutor's gentlemanly scientific expertise, presents an intersection of the sketch aesthetic with the disintegrative collapse of the colonial pastoral and the rationality that buttressed it. Pulling this sense of break and discontinuity through to Thoreau's natural history sketches, I draw out the critical relevance of nineteenth-century approaches to the conditions for Nature and life under the terms of wide-scale anthropogenic environmental degradation and species extinctions that seem outside the purview of regionalism.

Recognizing diminishment, as I will show, has much to do with recognizing humans as part of natural history—as its observer and author and also one of its actants. Chapter 1, "Naked Nature: Audubon, Thoreau, and the Deformation of Natural History," begins with the work of John James Audubon as a natural history artist and writer whose aesthetic, yet violent rendering of the birds of America betrays its Enlightenment ideals of accurate and plain observation by

introducing human adulteration. The neoclassical nude exemplifies this tension between a pure observation and a vulgar one for a nineteenth-century American audience governed by Christian morals. Is Nature, presented or figured as exposed to view, an innocent and properly aestheticized virtuous nude or a postlapsarian sinful nakedness? Audubon's drawings of "*nature as it existed*" (Audubon 754; emphasis original) tread a blurred line between pure and adulterated vision when it represents a directly determinative and erotic relationship between artist and subject, man and bird. Through Audubon's conflation of direct and adulterated seeing, we may see how Thoreau's experiments with natural history observation to see and describe Nature also conceives Nature as naked, but organizes a different aim of vision and different structure of relation between entities.

In *Cape Cod* (1865), Thoreau achieves the paradoxical formulation of combining plain scientific seeing with aesthetic adulteration by exposing observation to the elements. The eye splits, in other words, due to environmental factors that manipulate or break its aim. As with the optical illusion of the rainbow, at once aesthetic and scientific, his environmental optics of mirages and optical effects in *Cape Cod* depict observation itself as refracted by contingent conditions of air, water, weather, and the physiological eye: sight—and life—by casualty. Further, Thoreau's diminished view returns again and again to the corpses of shipwreck victims, the manifest yet incidental victims of such contingent stormy conditions. In this view of the shipwrecked, subjects and objects are related to one another within a more diffuse circuit of relations from ship to shore to corpse to waves that relinquishes direct moral responsibility for "victims." Diminishment registers the reversal of life to death and the decomposition of the body as part of that circuit, as the russet and gray are part of a leaf's green.

The diminishment of naked Nature and exposed vision in regionalist sketches signals an epistemic turn to conceiving the conditions of life and of knowledge not as a state of imperfection or error but as merely mutable. I argue that the works in Chapter 2, "Grotesquery: Organized Decays in Melville, Thaxter, and Jewett," struggle to reconcile this turn by mimicking optical technology used to exhibit natural history specimens and scenes. Organizing their sketches as narrative juxtapositions and overlays of organic material like the "dissolving views" in magic lanterns shows, the authors deliberately unsettle the equation that what we see directly translates into knowledge at face-value. Instead, what we see in one view flickers into ambiguous relation with another view, and the optical effects give rise to haunting imbrications that obscure conventional determinations of virtue and sin, beauty and abnormality. Testing the moral and aesthetic conventions of viewing the landscape, Herman Melville's fictive travel narrative on the Galapagos Islands, "The Encantadas" (1854), takes up optical deceptions and devices to switch between picturesque scenes of harmony and grotesque scenes of savagery. Under the guise of travel writing, Melville's sketches present an aporetic indeterminacy in their flickering views of Nature and human nature. Celia Thaxter explicitly carries on Melville's theme in her *Among the Isles of Shoals* (1873) to present the picturesque and grotesque sides of life on the islands by blurring and drifting from one scene to another.

As with Thoreau's environmental optics, the dissolving view appears to diminish life by exposing its moral and physical dissolutions, and yet that very dissolution is also the optical mechanism by which the sketches operate. Jewett most explicitly takes up the questions of veracity and virtue in the erring nature of both people and plants, especially in her portrayal of "poor Joanna," a Hester-Prynne figure in *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896). Through visual and diegetic overlays, Jewett combines the picturesque and grotesque to form a regionalist aesthetic that allows for variable forms of life or "strayaways," as well as a circulation of shared

resources among these lives that builds upon Thoreau's circuit of relations. No longer jarring against one another as incompatible scenes and lives, succession and the corruption merge as overlapping figures and processes in Jewett's Dunnet Landing folk. Reviewing Melville's and Thaxter's dissolving views as gesturing toward this overlap illuminates how the indeterminate nature and life imagined by these sketches match their techniques of dissolution. People and plants stray; people and plants decay. Indeterminacy becomes the mechanism for successive diminishment.

If Chapter 2 registers the fault lines erupting in an episteme that evaluates decay or dissolution negatively, Chapter 3 explores the new episteme, which Jewett's *Pointed Firs* introduced, that considers the succession of life by way of discontinuity and break. Darwin's theory of evolution punctuates this longer shift in the sciences from conceiving nature as ideally designed essences and types to specialized studies of life itself as changing and unstable. These discussions cohere in the fraught mid-century concept of species, from the Latin *specere* "to look," which indicates how what is recognized as "life," or a viable life form, is contingent upon ways of seeing. The debates over the definition of "species" informs, as I argue in "'Because I see—New Englandly—': Emily Dickinson's Regional Specificity," how Dickinson establishes the diminished seeing of nature as empirically *and* poetically specific. Through her half-blinded and windowed views of other species, she speculates upon the succession of species. Dwelling especially on her view of a pine tree outside her window, I show how her lines of sight follow Charles Darwin's genealogical lines, lines that ramify—that diverge, that continue or terminate—as species find their way from one province to another, from one branch to another.

This sense of life and the scientific-literary "species" of seeing culminates in nineteenth-century concepts of seeing *human* species as a part of nature in a wider category of *life*, which Darwin's theory was so pivotal in establishing. Such a shift sparked scientific discussions of the status of Africans within or without the human family. Chapter 4, "Life as Labor: Regional and Racial Subsistence from Frederick Douglass to W.E.B. Du Bois," begins, then, with Frederick Douglass and his claim that picture-making is a distinctly human capacity of self-reflection in order to counter a natural history that appropriates picture-making from its objects, namely, from African-Americans. I argue that Du Bois undertakes a modification of Douglass's picture theory in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). His scientific-literary practice of double-consciousness reflects upon self-diminishment through the racist natural history that sees African-Americans, as Du Bois writes, "somewhere between men and cattle" (S 62). Significantly, I place Du Bois's photographic experimentation to represent the black farmer in dialogue with the work of A. Radclyffe Dugmore, whose photography illustrated Du Bois's essay "The Negro as He Really is" (1901) and who thought of himself as a bird photographer in the tradition of Audubon. Through the doubled and redoubled view offered by documentary science, I examine how Du Bois employs the techniques of early photography in his figuration of the Southern black subsistence farmer to question the anthropometric sciences that measured and standardized different human and animal types.

As Du Bois's focus on the black peasantry evinces, the problem of scientific seeing involves not only the standardization of life but also of labor. Wouldn't the optical technology that breaks sight into parts and its object into parts be complicit with conditioning and deadening life into mechanical labor? How can optics reversibly work against its own processes of mechanization and seriality? The final chapter "Vitality: Gertrude Stein's Work Again" explores Stein's engagement with serial production in *Three Lives* to consider how assembly line and service work might maintain viable and successive lives. Where Du Bois's figures remain half-

statistic and half-person, I argue that Stein's descriptions in the repetitive and serial style of photographic locomotion studies by Edward Muybridge imbue her subjects with a motion—a vitality—that modulates their abject labors into a nonproductive productivity. Contrasting Henri Bergson's conceptions of a vitalist force that carries the human species forward and upward, Stein's incremental and piecemeal series emphasizes a cinematographic vitality of diminishment that depends on breaking experience and processes down into small gestures and frames. While Du Bois's and Stein's literary experiments of picturing and sketching do not ultimately "uplift" their laborers, they do, however, allow for a life of diminishment, rather than a reduction of life to an object of knowledge, a statistic, a unit of labor-power, a commodity. Their regionalism makes diminishment a way of apprehending and transforming life, even with life more and more caught up in mechanistic and totalizing systems at the turn of the century. Through diminishment, life cedes to life by breaks and falls.

## Introduction

### *"Missing All": Observation, Sketch, Episteme*

The Missing All—prevented Me  
From missing minor Things.  
If nothing larger than a World's  
Departure from a Hinge—  
Or Sun's extinction, be observed—  
'Twas not so large that I  
Could lift my Forehead from my work  
For Curiosity.<sup>1</sup>

- Emily Dickinson

In "Missing All," one misses the uncircumferenced sweep of a panorama that extends and engulfs with open-jawed all. And if one never knew such boundlessness, one misses, then, the *dream* of all, the delirious and divine dream of comprehensive expanse. Emily Dickinson writes of such losses, "The Missing All—prevented Me / From missing minor Things." To miss the all could encompass the loss of everything, as if to have lost a grand and beautiful estate would numb all feeling and sensation so that to lose anything more, the more rounded and rubbed off on a corner would mean nothing. So one could read this declaration along Emersonian lines of experience.<sup>2</sup> But the line does not concatenate, does not end with aphoristic flourish and build chain by chain to the next impulse, but stays suspended in thought. The lines continue on the same strain, pulling and teasing out this lack or omission. Though this poem might read as a straightforward declaration of undistracted devotion to one's work, it also offers an adumbrated description of what underlies that attention.

Read along the lines of drawn-out thought, we have a perspective that does not have to encompass everything, but rather sees in detail what it *does* see at hand. That is, it does not attend to the large and the grand, but to small and piecemeal work: "If nothing larger than a World's / Departure from a Hinge— / Or the Sun's Extinction, be observed— / 'Twas not so large that I / Could lift my Forehead from my work / For Curiosity." We understand Dickinson to eschew the "all" as "minor Things" that cannot distract her from her work. By excluding everything else, she sees, instead, only what is in her room, indoors, at her desk. This diminished view of life is neither deficient nor exceptional; as groundbreaking and disastrous as the external events seem, there is still her work to carefully observe. It is not a view of the world in its round magnificence, nonchalantly shrugging off anything that does not adhere to its broad curvature, but a cropped and angled view of the world, where there is so little to see, and yet that little indeed constitutes one's relations to world and work.

These circumstances, however, suggest a wider planetary magnitude underlying Dickinson's attention to what is narrowly seen. Each of the figures—the world's departure and the sun's extinction—recall the axial rotation of the earth or the curvature of its surface as the view of something sinks incontrovertibly into the horizon line, as well as a temporal decline toward evanescence perhaps diurnal, perhaps periodic according to some other planetary phenomena. At the very least Dickinson's allusions refer to the span of existence on this world

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1 From Emily Dickinson, *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas Johnson (Poem #985).

2 Sharon Cameron provides this reading of the poem's speaker as "impersonal" in *Lyric Time*, see 171, which would follow her line of thought to the later essay on Emerson in *Impersonality*.



and to the sensation of its proximity and its departure that coincide with the concerns of anthropogenic environmental degradations, which begin with the industrial revolution shaped by Enlightenment motives and constructions of ratiocination and subjectivity that continues to this day.<sup>3</sup> On one hand, we may account for environmental issues like climate change, resource depletion, and species extinction according to the agency and responsibility accorded to us by our own judgment; on the other, the submerged immensity of this phenomenon—of not only the Sun's extinction, but one's own species extinction—is too abstract, too terrifying, too excessive of our experience, to grasp and to know. Dickinson's observance is undergirded, then, by the sense that extinctions *are* occurring at the frequency of everyday, minor events.

Further, the pendulous swing to "Curiosity" signals the epistemological import of this attention, of how to discern the impressions, alarms, and residua of the world. The poem's curiosity is caught up in the inertial conventions of observation and yet insists on a caesura in that momentum. In other words, the missing of All allows Dickinson's poetics to dwell and settle into its attendance to work within and against the overwhelming logic of omniscience that sustains the anxieties concerning knowledge in both scientific and literary practices of the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> Her attention is bound by a domestic, but not unworldly circumference—an economics of the *oikos*, the ecological—for what she chooses to assess are those things tied to the receding world, delimited by the comings and goings into her room and marked by the daily run of sun and shadow as it swings across floors and walls. What is smaller than the world and the sun's extinction is what Dickinson's poetic eye *does* see, what *does* appeal to an attention both withheld from and obtained within "Curiosity." Perhaps this "piecework" hasn't cosmic proportion, but it has earthly ratios one can measure and ascertain at hand to compare and contrast with what is farther from view. This strain of curiosity is, however, a part of the epistemic weave; it, too, looks to see, not necessarily to know, but to regard, consider, question. The final uplifting drum of "For Curiosity" belies any reading that would dismiss the poem's fidelity to empirical observation, for curiosity traditionally denotes a delicate and meticulous attention to details, as well as a scientifically-minded scrutiny.<sup>5</sup> In the end, like many of Dickinson's binaries, the oppositions of the All and the minor, the World and her work, collapse into ironic relation with one another. Her diminished view has, ultimately, the greater capacity to apprehend extinction as a partial, but at least palpable loss.

Dickinson's poem illuminates a philosophy of diminishment—an approach particularly attentive toward partial things, which forms an ecological relation to the world that may be

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3 In Dipesh Chakrabarty's estimation, the Anthropocene's restructuring of history as a natural history enfolded with human history is different from a simpler idea of human-nature interaction because it envisions the human as "a force of nature in the geological sense" (Chakrabarty 207). And yet, the idea that Man may move mountains and rivers is not new either. Human manipulation of nature through the application of physical laws is a form of science or engineering or any system of practice that assumes human subjectivity over its object. As Chakrabarty himself points out, Enlightenment reasoning and its understanding of subjectivity underlies the assumption that environmental problems must be addressed by human expertise. Commenting on contemporary scientists' appraisal of climate change, he notes how "[t]hey see knowledge and reason [as] providing humans not only a way out of this present crisis but a way of keeping us out of harm's way in the future....But the knowledge in question is the knowledge of humans as a species, a species dependent on other species for its own existence, a part of the general history of life" (Chakrabarty 219).

4 Audrey Jaffe's *Vanishing Points*, for example, discusses the connections between techniques of scientific objectivity and literary realism, particularly the use of the omniscient narrator, in the Victorian production of knowledge.

5 Susan Scott Parrish, in *American Curiosity*, provides an extended treatment of "curiosity" as it relates to feminine participation in scientific pursuits of colonial America. See especially 59-62 and 174-185.

considered *regionalist* rather than global or worldly. This mode manifests in the epistemic "loopholes," so to speak, of a nineteenth-century natural history more conventionally concerned with the accumulation and promulgation of knowledge. Diminishment observes carefully what *can* be seen through the minute scope and distorted lens of regionalism. Rather than a system of accountability that assigns values to environmental degradation as if it occurred in discrete units affecting discrete parties, this way of seeing affords an ecology that accepts uncertain and approximate relations with, or rather holds a place for, entities only partially and minutely perceived, whether human or nonhuman.

The literature like Dickinson's poetry that engages with scientific practices and retreats to a point of view of profound diminishment constitutes the archive of this philosophy, this way of seeing in which, as Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison write, "epistemology and ethos are intertwined...a way of being as well as a way of knowing" (4). Though Daston and Galison are concerned with charting the more familiar narrative of scientific objectivity and what they call its "epistemic virtues" (6), *Literature of Diminishment* does the work of the *glaneuse* who follows behind the greater harvest for the overlooked and discarded left to rot in the fields. These gleanings describe a kind of knowledge, or rather nonknowledge, of remainders taken here and there, the careful survey that yields a miscellaneous and partial impression, the obscure illumination wrought from what is leftover and unfit yet still sustenance. The literature of diminishment attends to this sense of epistemological limits and deficiencies, and *its* virtues, as well as forms of diminishment or decomposition, that relate to natural history methods of observing and representing natural processes that register deformation, variegation, and specificity rather than standards, design, system, or unity. This mode of diminishment marks an alternate way of seeing and relating to the world—not to its catastrophic departure and its heliotropic orbit, but to the departures and orbits of those smaller entities that make up the world—against and alongside both Enlightenment-descended and romantic sciences and arts. It is a way of seeing and knowing thoroughly constituted by but also diminished by the grounds upon which it depends, because those grounds—whether called world, nature, region, territory, neighborhood, home, soil, earth, grass, birds, orchard, apples, or frost—are seen as always departing, deforming, diminishing.

### *Observation: The Eye, the Eyeball, and Loopholes*

Observation remains the primary emphasis and metaphor of epistemological practice in the nineteenth century, with the eye, or the eye of the mind, the instrument of its techniques. Vision has the double connotation of both empirical perception and modern subjectivity in Enlightenment and Romantic sciences, and the techniques and instruments of the observer do not merely reveal what one is able to see but indicate the epistemic mode and paradigm of what is conceived as the object of study and the capacity of the researcher.<sup>6</sup> Following from an eighteenth-century Enlightenment science of organizing and establishing the mechanics of matter both organic and inorganic, American natural history in the nineteenth-century bears the influences of both Cartesian rationality and its romantic counterorganization of a wider holism.

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6 On scientific paradigms and epistemes, see Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, which critiqued the discipline of the history of science itself, and Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things*, as well as a work that borrows deeply from Foucault's work, Jonathan Crary's *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*.

Enlightenment science's division between the investigating self and the world empirically observed allowed for an entire metrics and systematization of that world as received by and analyzed by the mind. This methodology excelled at an extensive atomization and abstraction of phenomena into various elements, factors, and formulae in mathematical language, but its objective explanations of cause-and-effect on everything from the origin of life to its evolution also incurred critique. Romantic sciences responded to Enlightenment practices with an understanding of a fuller, or more holistic, experience constituted not only by mechanics, but also values of aesthetics, spirit, or organismic vitality.

American science was perplexed with both Enlightenment and romantic ways of knowing that formed a general epistemic mode driven toward the comprehension of Nature. Asa Gray called this impulse the "the delirious yet divine desire to know" (112), capturing the passions and often sacral significance attributed to the search for knowledge, as well as the dream of totality and completion that such knowledge could eventually culminate in. To know is delirium and divinity, because to know so much and so entirely would be more than human. The critique woven into this structure of knowledge is that perhaps this knowledge is untenable and excessive, however tempting it is. That apprehensive sense of retreat from knowledge paradoxically enfolded into the "desire to know" is the philosophical mode that *Literature of Diminishment* seeks to illuminate in ways of seeing and forms of diminishment that exist alongside the more recognized modes of knowledge exemplified by prominent figures of the scientific and intellectual milieu of nineteenth-century America.

There, the radicalism of Enlightenment reason was tempered and subsumed by natural theology, the most acceptable and popular blending of modern reason with Christianity. Earlier versions of natural theology, like that of William Paley, envisioned the mechanical workings of nature, its general laws and principles, as prescribed by God. In nineteenth-century America, Louis Agassiz represented the foremost scientific authority on natural history and natural theology, advocating and exemplifying a devotion to empirical observation as a way to perceive God's plan. In his "Essay on Classification" (1859), he lays out the epistemic mode that supports the taxonomic sciences, asking:

Is this order the result of the exertions of human skill and ingenuity; or is it inherent in the objects themselves, so that the intelligent student of Natural History is led unconsciously, by the study of the animal kingdom itself, to these conclusions; the great divisions under which he arranges animals being indeed but the headings to the chapters of the great book which he is reading? To me it appears indisputable, that this order and arrangement of our studies are based upon the natural, primitive relations of animal life,—those systems, to which we have given the names of the great leaders of our science who first proposed them being in truth but translations into human language of the thoughts of the Creator. (9)

For Agassiz, the rationalizing prowess of the human mind to organize biological life into artificial classificatory system bespoke a too secular and empty mechanistic mode of thought. He vaunted, instead, a natural theology where the distinctions and specifications of the natural world were in fact premeditations of the Creator; that is, each natural entity manifests the signs and traces of a divine plan.

Differing from Paley, Agassiz read the Book of Nature not as a perfect and divine revelation of natural law and system where form follows function, but as an index to divine thought. To study nature was not to discover a ready-made mechanism, even if it was a divine mechanism, but to observe and distinguish carefully in order to follow the obscure turns and twists of the Creator's work. Giving the example of a vestigial organ that remains despite its lack

of function in a species, Agassiz analogizes it to the artistic flourishes of a building that betray the stylistic intent of its architect:

The organ remains, not for the performance of a function, but with reference to a plan, and might almost remind us of what we often see in human structures, when, for instance, in architecture the same external combinations are retained for the sake of symmetry and harmony of proportion, even when they have no practical object. (12)

In other words, the organ exhibits the vestiges of a design that does not necessarily follow mechanical form and function. It refers, instead, to the intent of an enigmatic Creator whose object is not based on "practicality," but on sacred intentions that are inexorably executed. Agassiz's most fitting example of a vestigial organ as reference to divine vestiges, is the "eye" that remains on certain species of blind fish:

Does not the existence of a rudimentary eye discovered by Dr. J. Wyman in the blind fish show, on the contrary, that these animals, like all others, were created, with all their peculiarities, by the fiat of the Almighty, and that this rudiment of eyes was left them as a remembrance of the general plan of structure of the great type to which they belong? (20)

The eye, made so much of by Enlightenment science for the intricate mechanisms that allow light and optics to produce sight, comes to stand as an example of divine significance for sight—and observation—itsself. All things run according to a divine plan that is only legible if one observes carefully.

The hallmark of Agassiz's method, which would have a lasting influence on modern science and the pedagogy of nature study, is this emphasis on observation, especially microcosmic observation.<sup>7</sup> At the beginning of *Essay on Classification*, Agassiz draws upon the American lobster to show how minute observation of one specimen telescopes out to show the entire structure and relations of the natural and cosmic system of which the specimen is a synecdochic representative. Discussing how to organize a taxonomy, he asks his reader to consider the lobster:

Suppose that the innumerable articulated animals, which are counted by tens of thousands, nay, perhaps by hundreds of thousands, had never made their appearance upon the surface of our globe, with one single exception: suppose, for instance, that our Lobster (*Homarus americanus*) were the only representative of that extraordinarily diversified type, —how should we introduce that species of animal into our systems? Simply as a genus with one species, by the side of all the other classes with their orders, families, etc., or as a family containing only one genus with one species, or as a class with one order and one genus, or as a class with one family and one genus? □ And should we acknowledge, by the side of Vertebrata, Mollusca, and Radiata, another type, Articulata, on account of the existence of that one Lobster, or would it be natural to call it by a single name, simply as a species, in contradistinction to all other animals? (5)

Agassiz had a reputation for insisting on close examination of one species. When asked by the Board of Education in Boston to give lectures on teaching natural history, he collected hundreds of grasshoppers in order to put one into the hands of each of his audience members. For his students at Harvard, Agassiz often pulled out the preserved specimen of some species and left a student to puzzle over it and arrive at taxonomic distinctions. He performs the same experiment

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7 See Laura Dassow Walls on Agassiz's influence, especially traced out in Ezra Pound and Henry David Thoreau, in "Textbooks and Texts from the Brooks: Inventing Scientific Authority in America," and Robin Peel on his contributions to science education in nineteenth-century New England, especially in relation to Emily Dickinson, in *Emily Dickinson and the Hill of Science* (see 326-327).

of isolation here by presenting the lobster in the hypothetical laboratory situation of having no other of its type—the Articulata—available. For Agassiz, the specific features of a single American lobster, with respect to form, structure, and organ development and system, allow it to be distinguished in species, genus, family, order, class, and type; and also to be distinguished in its relations to the world based on the proportions and ornamentation of its parts. Intense microscopic observation of one species that would allow one to make conclusions on its appropriate taxonomic placement in the grand scheme of things: "...we might arrive at this distinction by a careful investigation of that single Articulate, as well as by the study of all of them; and we might recognize its type and ascertain its class-characters as fully as if the type embraced several classes, and these classes thousands of species" (6). One could have hundreds of varieties of lobsters to study, or even all classes of Articulata, but the study of one lobster—one Articulata—would allow the full articulation of a specimen's taxonomic features and the extrapolation of an entire taxonomic tree—and a divine plan—of a type.

Agassiz's fame, however, is part of a larger popular interest in natural knowledge during his lifetime. The reform culture and innovations of mass communication of the 1820s and 30s also gave rise to an enormous proliferation of means for self-education that included various print mediums, speaker platforms, and institutions such as the penny newspaper, inexpensive books, magazines, and encyclopedias, public and subscription libraries, the lyceum, the mechanics institute, and the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge.<sup>8</sup> The final three institutions, in fact, focused especially on the natural and mechanical sciences as a foundation for practical self-improvement whether as a means of a trade or craft or as general education, and were closely related to one another. The English Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge was in part founded by Henry Brougham, who presented knowledge as offering gratification along the lines of a Kantian pure and disinterested pleasure.<sup>9</sup> Self-education in the doctrines of natural sciences, according to Brougham's theory, elevated the self to the level of ratiocination associated with the aesthetic judgement regardless of class and upbringing. Thus, self-improvement is available to any man who applies himself to learning practical knowledge. A Boston Society was founded in 1829, and a national American Society was founded soon after in 1836. Besides actively publishing book series like "A Library of Useful Knowledge" and pamphlets like the *Penny Encyclopedia*, the movement's pervasive influence on British and American culture can also be found in popular rhetoric concerning the diffusion of knowledge in all types of literature from the lyceum founder Josiah Holbrook's catalogue of scientific apparatuses to children's books whose didacticism fused together morality and science.

The Society was perhaps so successful in gaining adherents in the general momentum of reformist culture that Thoreau complained of the mass production and cheapening of knowledge. In his essay "Walking," he suggests that ignorance is more "beautiful," implicitly countering Brougham's aesthetics of knowledge:

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8 For a history of the "popular diffusion of knowledge" interspersed among other themes, see Merle Curti's *The Growth of American Thought*. Curti's general approach in this survey, which structures his sections, mark how Enlightenment influences play out in different categories of American life—progressive movements in religion, politics, and science, as well as conservative reactions and regional formations. He correlates the self-culture movement of the era between Jackson and Lincoln, for examples, with democratic politics: "Their desire to 'know,' to share more fully in the life of the mind, reflected an awareness of their growing power, their potentialities. The movement for popularizing knowledge was also stimulated by their own leaders, be democratically minded intellectuals who deprecated the separation of theory and practice, knowledge and action, and, finally, by enthusiastic reformers who believed that the truth, if widely disseminated, would set man free" (336).

9 See Brougham's "A Dissertation on the Objects, Advantages and Pleasures of Science."

We have heard of a Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge. It is said that Knowledge is power; and the like. Methinks there is equal need of a Society for the Diffusion of Useful Ignorance, what we will call Beautiful Knowledge, a knowledge useful in a higher sense; for what is most of our boasted so-called knowledge but a conceit that we know something, which robs us of the advantage of our actual ignorance? What we call knowledge is often our positive ignorance; ignorance our negative knowledge. By long years of patient industry and reading of the newspapers, — for what are the libraries of science but files of newspapers? — a man accumulates a myriad facts, lays them up in his memory, and then when in some spring of his life he saunters abroad into the great Fields of thought, he as it were goes to grass like a horse, and leaves all his harness behind in the stable. I would say to the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, sometimes — Go to grass. You have eaten hay long enough. The Spring has come with its green crop. The very cows are driven to their country pastures before the end of May; though I have heard of one unnatural farmer who kept his cow in the barn and fed her on hay all the year round. So, frequently the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge treats its cattle. (*W* 282)

In other words, the accumulation of knowledge is so blindly taken up in droves, people simply doing as they are directed, that scientific learning becomes synonymous with storage and stagnancy without any actual application or thinking with that knowledge. Instead, Thoreau's exhortation "Go to grass" calls his readers to go outside and consume what is readily available from Spring, from the great Fields outdoors, from Nature, rather than the dried and bundled hay of old tomes and textbooks. The idiom of going to grass and putting a horse out to pasture also counters the utilitarian emphasis of practical learning by alluding to both a grazing that yields no productive labor and a field that goes wild with weeds. Yet Thoreau's complaint against following rules and his support for wandering in ignorance highlights a sense of curiosity at the cusp of unknowing and knowing that also spurs the popular movement for the diffusion of knowledge as well. If, for Brougham, you feel gratified from knowledge, it is, however, because "you feel a curiosity to learn all about them, because they are new and unknown to you" (139) that spurs you toward making inquiries and getting answers. And in the pocket book *A Description and History of Vegetable Substances* from "The Library of Entertaining Knowledge," the author admits "The limits of this work necessarily preclude the insertion of much information that might be useful and amusing; but we have endeavoured to select from the great mass of materials which the subject affords, such as might best gratify the curiosity of the reader, and excite that habit of observation which is the first step towards real knowledge" (206). Though Thoreau and the "diffusers of knowledge" may disagree about the uses of knowledge (or of ignorance and idleness), they agreed upon curiosity and attentiveness as a higher sense.

Curiosity, from *cura* 'careful', is associated with that delirium for knowledge, but like Gray's implicit caution in describing science as such, it also marks that border of positive ignorance and negative knowledge. Science might, instead, be described as not knowledge practices but curiosity practices. In Agassiz's own words, the lesson on seeing, by having the specimen in hand, was to "to appreciate what it was to see, and see carefully" (*S* 93). Like seventeenth-century scientific texts that saw a principle of *multum in parvo* in God's creations, Agassiz's scientific method participated and continued in a tradition of scientific curiosity, of meticulous scrutiny of the infinitely delicate natural phenomenae in order to read expressions of God's corresponding care.<sup>10</sup> Robert Hooke's *Micrographia; or, Some Physiological Descriptions*

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10 *Multum in parvo*, maximus in minimus, much in little. See, for example, Parrish 59 and Susan Stewart 40.

*of Minute Bodies Made by Magnifying Glasses, with Observations and Inquiries There Upon* (1665), a whimsical seventeenth-century journal of notes on various small and seemingly random facets of life that Hooke, as the curator of experiments for the Royal Society, chose to focus his glass upon, popularized the use of the microscope. Scientific curiosity became, in fact, very much associated with a feminine intricacy and care, and it became appropriate for ladies to be devoted to fashionable kinds of curiosity that aligned scientific practice with feminine artifice. Natural history texts, for example, encouraged women naturalists in a limited range of "delicate" fieldwork from the collection of seashells for their ornamental quality to botanical study perhaps for its traditional floral association with women.<sup>11</sup> The popular denouement of Hooke's *Micrographia* may be seen in mid-nineteenth century publications on microscopic wonders for a general audience including women and children such as Agnes Catlow's *Drops of Water: Their Marvelous and Beautiful Inhabitants Displayed by the Microscope* (1851) or Rev. Josiah Wythe's *Curiosities of the Microscope, or Illustrations of the Minute Parts of Creation: adapted to the capacity of the young* (1852).

Seeing minutely, however, opened out to the cosmos. The convergence of the feminine, the miniature, and the intricate represents a method of transcendent seeing that Susan Stewart has described as "the daydream of the microscope: the daydream of life inside life, of significance multiplied infinitely *within* significance" (54). For Stewart, the miniature is a figure, a projection, or a product of the way that the eye attends to the world by miniaturizing, compressing, enclosing, idealizing, and fixing its objects. It assumes a transcendent and multiplicative minute vision that sees the world as one sees a snow globe, a still swirling globe of a picturesque village in which every detail of shingles, wreath, painted glow of light within each house betokens the life within. For Agassiz, this microscopic vision reveals infinite details of divine significance, but also extends outward to delineate the lines and branches of the cosmos, as a snowflake may be read as a fractal mapping of water's course as ice. This is related to what Stewart might call a type of cosmic thinking. She describes the Renaissance view that saw man's corporeal body as a little universe as "microcosmic thinking" (128). However, Agassiz's cosmic thinking operates according to synecdoche where a part becomes representative of the whole, so he extrapolates the entire breadth of God's designs via a single Articulate.

Though departing from Christian theology, transcendental natural history also embraced a cosmic scientific vision. Ralph Waldo Emerson's romantic transcendentalism eschewed the traditional Christian God for a unifying and encompassing Universal Being, and invested natural history with this all-pervasive spiritual evaluation and organization. His transparent eyeball would collect the disparate elements of scenery around him, and harmonize them with a perspective that "integrates every mass of objects" (E 13). Like Descartes' cornea of *l'oeil de boeuf* set into the aperture of a camera obscura, which serves as an analogy for how the eye works, the transparent eyeball is a mechanism or model for vision, that is, for a way of seeing that assumes certain capacities of the eye and its relation to the world.<sup>12</sup> Fusing the objectivity of

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11 See Parrish 174-185.

12 Crary's *Techniques of the Observer* presents Descartes' description of the camera obscura as an example of how classical science understood vision within a paradigm that conceived the mind as an individuated and interiorized space into which it received impressions of the external world through the eye: "If at the core of Descartes' method was the need to escape the uncertainties of mere human vision and the confusion of the senses, the camera obscura is congruent with his quest to found human knowledge on a purely objective view of the world. The aperture of the camera obscura corresponds to a single, mathematically definable point, from which the world can be logically deduced by a progressive accumulation and combination of signs. It is a device embodying man's position between God and the world. Founded on the laws of nature (optics) but extrapolated

classical science and the ego of the Romantic individual, Emerson's eyeball is disembodied and fully transparent, radiating and participating in a Plotinian light that is at once a reason that orders what it sees and a pure omniscience that yet sees everything without obstacle or blindspot—a human seeing that is a divine seeing. As Emerson writes in his essay *Nature*, "We must trust in the perfection of creation so far as to believe that whatever curiosity the order of things has awakened in our minds, the order of things can satisfy" (*E* 7). The scope of *Nature* is at once philosophical and scientific in its concern with the mind's curiosity and the order of things, and also transcendental in its sensitivity and transparent acceptance of "the perfection of creation" as thoroughly imbued in all things. Emerson's feat is that he does not need a miniature to aid the manipulations of the mind's eye, but that his vision may leap overhead on its own, may look upon all the features of landscape around him with a similar microscopic view, that is, a similar attentiveness to the organization and arrangement of natural phenomena that trusts its impulse as a correspondence and melding with a greater, cosmic plan.

Cosmic comes from the Greek *kosmos*, meaning both the order of things, but also ornament or adornment. Involved in this etymology, then, the world is already a philosophy of either a unified whole or order, or as a miscellaneous proliferation of flourishes; hence, cosmic or whole-world-thinking is at once dialectically enveloped in its opposite thinking of trivia and minutiae that skitters away rather than comes together—meticulous thinking, rather than microcosmic thinking. The ornamental and diminutive cosmos may indicate a product of the mind's eye that observes minutely in order to bring details together into centripetal relation with one another, as a snowstorm in a glass globe. The methods and commentaries of Agassiz, Emerson, and Stewart with their varying degrees of cosmological commitments, whether theological, transcendental, or folkloric, all exhibit this transcendental or cosmic view and its way of miniaturizing objects.

But the diminutive may also indicate another way of seeing, a way of seeing that Dickinson suspends within "Curiosity," and which senses the world departing, the sun's extinction, at the borders of her less orchestral and more marginal vision. Her overcareful attention to her work, the intense gaze of her downturned face, this is a view of the pinhole, or rather loophole, an epistemic loophole of retreat in the weave of Enlightenment and Romantic scientific practices that project and dream the dream of the microscope. Although also a minute seeing, this form of curiosity does not figure itself as a miniature so much as a diminishment; rather than compressing and enclosing the All into something small, diminishment's enclosure does not dream of being more than merely a part of a part, an accessory, a decoration. Its partial view is its delicacy, its seeming weakness and its preferential partiality; it cannot hold or immobilize its object in tableau, but is the view of the days that casts their intermittent chiaroscuro in slow tread across the walls of a room, from daybreak to eventide. I track this view not only in Dickinson, but also in other nineteenth-century writers who revise the ways of seeing represented by Agassiz and Emerson and for whom observation is a formal experiment both scientific and literary such as Henry David Thoreau, Herman Melville, Sarah Orne Jewett, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Gertrude Stein. This view forms an epistemic loophole that produces an alternate natural history of the world, or rather, no longer of the world, but the receding world, the world seen through that partial view, the world in parts, a puzzle, puzzling, in pieces, hemispheres, zones, regions. Diminishment is, then, this view that draws into itself, a retreating

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to a plane outside nature, the camera obscura provides a vantage point onto the world analogous to the eye of God" (48).



and drawing of lines of sight and of borders however temporary and shifting and partial they might be.

Natural histories manifest, not nature itself, but a philosophy of how to see nature and life. In their methods of minute observation they dream, in the miniaturizing and microcosmic and synecdochic version, of extension and systematic coverage, of correspondence, of perfection, and of completeness. As Lorraine Daston notes, observation since the eighteenth century had become an "epistemic category," that is, "a key learned practice and...a fundamental form of knowledge" (E 81). Observation is understood to produce scientific knowledge, in which to see is to know, or rather to see and to repeat that seeing reliably, is then to posit and know a fact. In an alternate version of observation, however, seeing is diminishing, rather than miniaturizing, regional and partial rather than microcosmic; natural histories do not dream, but live each day, day by day, of retreat and diurnal decomposition, and of muted and expiring endurance.

This turn to the study of vision's flaws, its immanent and phenomenological quirks, rather than the instantiation of optical laws, could be seen as part of a disciplinary reorganization described by Michel Foucault of the sciences in the nineteenth century around the study of *life*, subjective and interior, and the instantiation of a modern subjectivity. Classical natural history is, as he writes, "the nomination of the visible" (132), while modern sciences cut into a deeper identification beyond surface differences to conceive of life itself. The long transformation of the sciences, which catalyzes with Darwin's theory of evolution and its inclusion of the human species in this evolution, shifts from conceiving nature as fixed essences, fundamental laws, or teleological design to nature as itself changing and unstable. This history of a modern subjectivity via the sciences also runs parallel with the history of "mechanical objectivity," which Daston and Galison describe as the mode of science that began to register the imperfections, irregularities, and discontinuities of nature rather than idealizing a fixed, continuous nature. Yet the uneven intimations of this change even include Hooke, who among the minutiae of his observations, also commented upon fossils and their indication of bygone organisms and natural forms.<sup>13</sup> As Foucault writes, "The discontinuity of living forms made it possible to conceive of a great temporal current for which the continuity of structure and characters, despite superficial analogies, could not provide a basis...it became possible to replace natural history with a 'history' of nature" (275). It is this epistemic shift, primarily during the nineteenth century, that offers the fuzzy bounds of the 1820s through to the beginning of the twentieth century for this study of literary versions and adaptations of natural history. Yet this history of nature, this modern natural history, is not simply one in which nature shifts and flows, but is also laced into the human as a constituent of nature and thus into the shifts of human nature and human ways of seeing that slide from taxonomic comprehension to other forms and paradigms of seeing that inquire into the deficiencies and deformations of sight itself.

In tracing forms of diminishment in nineteenth-century ways of seeing, I am not attempting to lay out a genealogy of modern science as it manifests in literary experiments of vision nor pursuing a barometry of the greater milieu and its concepts of seeing and relating to nature. Diminishment is both a counterpart of and a loophole in the epistemic comprehensiveness of the nineteenth-century; it is the epistemic retreat and circumference that delineates a latent philosophical mode that is the penumbral shadow of a greater eclipse, the

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13 See, for example, Paolo Rossi's account of natural history in *The Dark Abyss of Time: The History of the Earth and the History of Nations from Hooke to Vico*. As with Kuhn, this transformation shouldn't be seen as a progressive development toward the modern sciences, but a shift in paradigm.

notes lit up by a brighter sun, the dust lingering in volcanic eruptions. It is neither typical nor exemplary of its moment; but the "gleanings—or what time has not reaped"<sup>14</sup> that remain pertinent to *our* times and our apprehension of departures and extinctions from a position of impoverished and immanent circumstances of knowledge.

*Sketch: America, Nature, and Description*

In nineteenth-century America, observation and description of the natural world finds literary expression in many forms, which Laurence Buell has catalogued extensively, from literary almanacs to natural histories to travel narratives. Yet even in performing this exercise of genre taxonomy, Buell notes that the "fundamental aspect of the instability of form thematized and evinced by the environmental writing we have surveyed is its rudimentary and uncertain grasp of appropriate forms for rendering an environmental plenum" (*E* 421). Perhaps there are no appropriate forms for such a rendering, only different ways in which one might render the visible environment. Or the forms are themselves negotiating their philosophical assumptions and conventions of observation. Buell's statement assumes, for example, a standard of a subject who is able to or should survey and of a world that is available and full of sights. The parameters of environmental description are, in Buell's words, "a dual accountability to matter and to discursive mentation" (*E* 92). This description has both a denotative and technical capacity to materialize the object of attention and a connotative capacity to gloss that object. These rules of availability and accountability seem to require their own established literary form and to suggest a narrative of literary forms that attempt and fail to meet the expectations of such a plenum.

Yet it is those very forms of observation with "uncertain grasp" that interest me—those that exemplify the view from the epistemic loophole of diminishment. These include writings that borrow from the scientific methods of natural history and ethnography while reflecting their distortions, as well as those that allude to the visual tradition of travel and regional "sketches" and its diminished abilities to fully represent its subject. Natural history description depends upon empirical observation, that is, a seeing that might be thought of as pure or objective, a seeing that sees Nature as nakedly as possible. It will come as no surprise, then, that many works of natural history description may be called sketches, a name that signals its highly visual content and aspirations. Not only could Thoreau's essays be thought of as sketches, but also works by Louis Agassiz, Alexander von Humboldt, and other scientists, as well as travel writers, picturesque tourists, and local-color fiction writers. The "sketch" denomination signifies a common interest in observation that crosses disciplines—and also merges disciplines—so that the "sketch" is at once scientific and aesthetic.

I want to make a distinction, though, between sketches in general and the *regionalist* sketch. We might think of the regionalist sketch as truly taking up the aesthetics of the sketch form—rough, flimsy, indefinite. I have chosen, then, to illuminate a narrow intersection of literature in American regionalism and nature writing for their reflexive narrowness and quaint circumspection concerning nature, especially with regard to practices of observation and representation. These works show the formal extensions and permutations of diminishment as an aesthetic, a science, and an ecological philosophy.

American regionalism is most often associated with local color stories of the mid-nineteenth through early-twentieth century that animate the different sections and peoples of an

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<sup>14</sup> Thoreau, *Journal* 1, first heading.

adolescent nation. This sectional and minor literature is usually framed as a way to reimagine national unity or to resist unity and canon formation.<sup>15</sup> Criticism on regionalism has centered on its recognizable features, much as one looks at topographical or biotic features that make up a geography. Early surveys of local color fiction attempted to taxonomize the genre while contemporary critics have de-constituted the genre into its features so that regionalism is no longer regionalism, but dialect writing, a scale of production, women's writing, and "touristic" access in national reading culture to a nostalgic past or in the international literary market to contemporary aestheticism.<sup>16</sup>

Yet regionalism is not always local color fiction, and its relation to other genres of travel and nature writing, and sketches, suggests that other underlying common threads may be the basis of identifiable, but perhaps inconsistent genre features like local settings, dialect, and thematic tropes. Buell classifies a certain subset of local color fiction as literary bioregionalism because of their focus on local natural history, which he places alongside other genres of environmental literature that include, in his estimate, literary almanacs, homiletic naturism, the picturesque, natural history writing, and the travel narrative—categories which are not often mutually distinct. Perhaps what organizes environmental writing is not so much these genre distinctions as underlying modalities or epistemic orientations, so that what appears to be an "uncertain grasp of appropriate forms" is in fact different kinds of relations to nature and knowledge.

For Agassiz, a regionalist natural history would not measure up to his vision of translating a comprehensive, premeditated divine plan because, as a *sketch*, it does not purport to represent a greater whole. The regionalist sketch is a rough, incomplete drawing, a partial drawing that is merely a part and not a whole. Agassiz writes in his *Essay* that "isolated and disconnected facts are of little consequence in the contemplation of the whole plan of creation; and that, without a consideration of all the facts furnished by the study of the habits of animals, by their anatomy, their embryology, and the history of the past ages of our globe, we shall never arrive at the knowledge of the natural system of animals" (14). As the example of the American lobster shows, this "contemplation of the whole plan of creation" is available through minute, synecdochic study of one species, but only in relation to incessant research on natural systems of the world. To study one species carefully assumes the study of every species carefully until the entire Book of Nature might be translated from divine thought into human knowledge. This contrasts the travel narratives written by naturalists whose anecdotal, if minute, descriptions and conjectures offer a partial view of the "whole plan" because their purview remains limited to the meandering vistas of their travels. Thus, travel sketches perform a scientific scrutiny of natural phenomena, but one organized around itineraries, personal observations and emotions, and encounters that, if they acknowledge their own deficiencies of incompleteness and particularity, may be understood as regionalist.

Observing the American landscape, however, has more often been read in terms of an appropriative and certain, rather than uncertain, grasp. America's foundational relations to nature

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15 On the former, see Amy Kaplan's "Nation, Region, and Empire" in *The Columbia History of the American Novel*; on the latter, see Louis Renza's *A White Heron* and *the Question of Minor Literature*.

16 Gavin Jones' *Strange Talk* is a thorough examination of regionalist literature as dialect writing; Hsuan Hsu's *Geography and the Production of Space in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* offers a historical-materialist approach to regionalism; Judith Fetterley argues for a feminist distinction of women's regionalist writing in contrast to masculine local-color writing in "'Not in the Least American': Nineteenth-Century Literary Regionalism"; Richard Brodhead's *Cultures of Letters* and Brad Evans' *Before Cultures* contextualize regionalist literature within a cosmopolitan marketplace.

have been commonly corresponded to epistemological practices through the coagulation of spiritual destiny and material confirmation in settlement and national expansion. Surveying the territory, turning marshes into farm land and pasture, collecting, classifying, and exploiting natural resources—these were literal productions of American knowledge and raw materials, as well as of symbologies of national identity based upon the wilderness, virgin land, or agrarian labor.<sup>17</sup> To annex and accumulate the land and its wealth presupposed empirical, measurable claims, and the territorial nature of the eye, in which to see is to possess, has buttressed numerous arguments concerning imperial and colonial nation-making projects. It is no surprise that William Bartram recounts in his *Travels* (1791) how Indians joining the expedition party he accompanied censured the survey compass used by the whites as incorrectly charting the course, decrying that "the little wicked instrument was a liar" (57). Mapping the land has been synonymous with stealing it.<sup>18</sup>

At the same time, another thread runs alongside these plots, a kind of incoherent, unplotted strand that has, in literary criticism, been a diminutive seam—where American nature is not so available, but rather only partially visible, obscured, or else threatening and dependent upon one's diminishing capacities of sight. The very writers that critics might point to as representing the incarnations of America's territorial symbology are also ones that might express this shadow thought because in those paradoxical moments of immanent transcendence, the material ideal of America and nature, are also those moments of nature where nature may be seen less transparently and more obscurely.

J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* (1783) has often been taken to illustrate the generative forces of becoming the ideal American agrarian farmer, being in America and making America by literally transforming and working the land. As a representation which weights the moral virtues of Nantucket fisherman against the sins of Charleston plantation owners, the utopian agrarian center of Philadelphia with the savagery of frontier wilderness, *Letters* seems to offer a portrait of the American colonies in strange tension with one another reminiscent of the harmonious balancing scale between high and low classes in the pastoral. Yet these letters work more as a dial through which Crèvecoeur samples the everyday agrarian settings of colonial America, from yeomanry and seafaring to plantation slavery, that is increasingly trammelled with the static of its passage. Taken as a whole, the pastoral balance of the text flies apart as with a widening gyre as the letters and their moral compass crisscross the colonies before giving notice of retreat with the coming Revolutionary War.

As an early version of a natural history sketch that performs its own failure, the pastoral and episodic form of Crèvecoeur's text serves as a philosophical and literary frame out of which come the nineteenth-century texts that constitute the archive of this study. The pastoral's ideal of Nature as harmonious and of a somehow prior Golden Age has made it a thematic element or echo in writings concerning nature in general. The classical tradition has been defined by its lowly closeness to a natural innocence and beneficence, often through shepherds and their melodies, and its complacent attunement to what William Empson calls "a beautiful relation between the rich and the poor" (11). In the *Letters*, the protagonist Farmer James's celebrations

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17 See Myra Jehlen, *American Incarnation*; Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land*, for various critical narratives of American national formation based on its relation to the land. Kristie Hamilton's *America's Sketchbook* also relies on this critical framework, which like Smith's account, ties together empiricism and realism in the representation and formation of America.

18 See also Patrick Chura's *Thoreau, the Land Surveyor* for an account of American surveying practices and its cultural connotations, as well as how Thoreau engaged with the discipline.

of rural life provide such an ironic melding of the plentiful fruits of his simple life as a direct contrast with the intellectual cosmopolitanism of his European interlocutor F.B. His letters become a measure of contrast and correspondence between himself and F.B. who has, in the estimation of Farmer James's wife, "never in his life done a single day's work, no, not even felled a tree? who hath expended the Lord knows how many years studying stars, geometry, stones, and flies, and in reading folio books" (12). Describing his day in Letter II, Farmer James displays agrarian continuity with Nature through his observations of the creatures around him:

In the evening, when I return home through my low grounds, I am astonished at the myriads of insects which I perceive dancing in the beams of the setting sun. I was before scarcely acquainted with their existence; they are so small that it is difficult to distinguish them: they are carefully improving this short evening space, not daring to expose themselves to the blaze of our meridian sun....I never see my trees drop their leaves and their fruit in the autumn, and bud again the spring, without wonder. The sagacity of these animals, which have long been the tenants of my farm, astonish me: some of them seem to surpass even men in memory and sagacity. What then is this instinct which we so debase, and of which we are taught to entertain so diminutive an idea? (28)

Where F.B. is a representative gentleman of eclectic interests who views the New World from afar in the fastness of his study or else with the itinerant gaze of a visitor collecting specimen for his curiosity cabinet, Farmer James is the man working daily in the field and seeing everything with a steadfast and practical eye. His perspective is of such an agrarian nature that he cannot but look at his environment without imagining it as "improving" upon itself, ripening and fruiting before his eyes, coming into unfurled and full being. He thus improves the land with his writing, making it a pastoral utopia where the farmer initiates and arbitrates growth. Like an ecological God, he observes and intervenes upon the feeding patterns of kingbirds and bees, governs his cattle, and warns off crows according to what he considers as natural and moral laws, explaining, "The law is to us precisely what I am in my barn yard, a bridle and a check to prevent the strong and greedy from oppressing the timid and weak" (30), and concluding, "Thus, by superior knowledge, I govern all my cattle as wise men are obliged to govern fools and the ignorant. A variety of other thoughts crowd on my mind at that peculiar instant, but they all vanish by the time I return home" (31). Farmer James' life establishes the stage and drama of a harmonious, agricultural balance based upon a hierarchical arbitration in which he is able to maintain order via knowledge. If, at first, he praises his animals for their intelligence in order to sustain a natural and amicable cohabitation; he also asserts his superior rationalization over their lives.

Yet this "sham" of knowledge is so easily dissolved. Thoughts crowd in his mind and vanish, as they do for the persona of Letter XII "Distresses of a Frontier Man," who is also beset with buzzing anxieties that boil and vanish. Faced with the impending war in this final letter, Crèvecoeur's persona scrambles at his wit's ends to escape being caught between loyalists and revolutionaries: "—Thus impiously I roam, I fly from one erratic thought to another, and my mind, irritated by these acrimonious reflections, is ready sometimes to lead me to dangerous extremes of violence" (198). By ending with Farmer John's resolution to join an Indian village and "revert into a state approaching nearer to that of nature" (199), the *Letters* end in, on one hand, the dissolution of human nature without moral regard and the rupture of a humanist tradition, which recalls the violence and gross negligence of the frontiersmen or slaveowners earlier visited, but on the other, in a different kind of dissolution into a nature, a paradise regained beyond the peripheries. The play that Crèvecoeur constructs here has a Shakespearean theater structure like *Midsummer Night's Dream* and its pastoral order restored—except here, the

multiple letters, while holding each other in tension, also turn from harmonious balance by its chronological movement toward dispersal. The pastoral middle ground and harmony of Pennsylvania, pulled both North to Nantucket and South to Charleston, eventually moves west into the frontier dissolution into nature. Farmer James's repeated allusions to the incapacity of his mind to hold its thoughts still, of thoughts that bubble and dissipate, returns us again and again to the failure of the rationality that governs his pastoral framework. As with Empson who states that "in pastoral you take a limited life and pretend it is the full and normal one" (114), Crèvecoeur's text registers the buzzing discrepancy between pastoral simplicity and the complex circumstances and injustices that enable it.

Yet Crèvecoeur's critique, then, of the Enlightenment reason and natural rights that buoy up revolutionary strife also reveals a particular, if momentary, orientation to knowledge and to nature that resonates with literature of diminishment. When Farmer James evokes the natural instinct which encompasses the ephemerality of the insects, the seasonal decline and growth of his trees, the animal cognizance of his livestock, as well as his own agricultural practices, he counters the theory of degeneracy from Buffon that saw the natural productions of the New World as inferior to the Old, "which we are taught to entertain so diminutive an idea." As Crèvecoeur highlights, American nature has been given the same diminutive status as Farmer John's own rural occupation, yet in this moment of wonder and astonishment for transitory life, diminutiveness is not something to denigrate or even to revise into something better, but is its own kind of care and cognizance—insects that are aware of the sun's heat and emerge in the waning evening light, animals that are as much tenants and inhabitants of the land as the farmer. This diminutive attention to detail and to proximate life—before it becomes aggrandized into superior reason and arbitration—is what Dickinson also draws out in her careful attention.

Crèvecoeur's wonder, furthermore, exhibits a scientific curiosity that observes closely—the small, the microscopic, the characteristic—of the insects and animals around him. Although Farmer James apologizes for his lack of cultivation, his letters that will, as his minister tells him, "smell of the woods, and be a little wild" (13), the *Letters* betray their kinship with scientific practices and genres. Not only does the epistolary form participate in the culture of correspondence and exchange of specimen that characterizes the practices of learned communities stemming from the Enlightenment era such as the Royal Society, but it also demonstrates the particular position of American provinciality as a regional satellite of European centers of culture. Susan Scott Parrish has shown how European purveyors of information and American collectors of specimen during the colonial era developed hierarchical relationships around the transportation and processing of natural knowledge. While the British were considered metropolitan experts, the colonials took the role of pastoral, closer-to-nature observers and collectors, who were discouraged from doing their own scientific experiments or classifications, yet plied and complimented for their extensive specimen collections, in which developed a homosocial relationship between British and American correspondents. In his own address to F.B., Farmer James thus poses himself as a child of Nature:

I flatter myself, therefore, that you'll receive my letters as conceived, not according to scientific rules, to which I am a perfect stranger, but agreeable to the spontaneous impressions which each subject may inspire. This is the only line I am able to follow: the line which nature has herself traced for me. (23)

Although he derides his lack of formal learning, what he implicitly offers is conceived as more natural or authentic in its spontaneity and directness. Yet, as the epistolary frame shows, and as Crèvecoeur's own pursuits as a surveyor and a collector of botanical specimen suggest, Farmer

James's performance is very much a part of the scientific milieu of his day even as he departs from it in his American settings and writings.

In tracing the lines of nature into his lines of writing, Farmer James's observations and descriptions are *sketches* that offer partial and rough views of America, especially of American nature, as its formal premise. His intermittent views of Pennsylvania, Nantucket, and Charleston, as well as of snakes, birds, and bees, portray a regionalist and naturalist scope of vision. As he says of his letter on Nantucket, "I want not to record the annals of the island of Nantucket....My simple wish is, to trace them throughout their progressive steps..." (85), and later, "From this first sketch, I hope that my partiality to this island will be justified...What has happened here has and will happen every where else" (87). The sketch is the genre of travelers and naturalists and observers of all kinds who often preface or apologize for their form with reference to its sketchy nature as "jottings," "pencilings," "inklings," and "dashes" upon the page. Alongside the epistemic motivations carried over from the eighteenth century and highlighted by Gray's "delirious yet divine desire to know," the literary genre of sketches so popular in the nineteenth century may be seen as an accomplice for an American regional production of knowledge and culture. As Kristie Hamilton argues of the converging practices of observation and literary sketching, "...this tendency to claim knowledge by participation became associated with the process of sketching in general, making the sketch, over the course of the nineteenth century, a trace of the shift from a romantic to a realist aesthetic" (24-25). Though Farmer James seems to pronounce his regional view as synecdochic of America and its territorial sovereignty, its dissipation into the spray of waves crashing upon the shore corresponds with a sense of illusory claims. Looking out from Nantucket, he records, instead, how his "mind suggested a thousand vague reflections, pleasing in the hour of their spontaneous birth, but now half forgotten, and all indistinct" (148). Converse to the claim to knowledge is the retreat from knowledge that the sketch itself intimates in its gossamer lines, which, as Crèvecoeur shows, are like nature—not fixed and static, but ephemeral and gauzy, difficult to grasp and represent. If the more documentary or natural historical nature of the sketch is one of its defining features, it is also makes the sketch—or any literary observation that "sketches" and presents its view as something less than a whole picture—a crucial aesthetic of the literature of diminishment.

Crèvecoeur's *Letters* marks, then, the beginning of distinctions between the pastoral and the regional, and between realism and the regional, for he registers the ways in which the pastoral falls apart and realism becomes vulnerable to erosions of the very nature it attempts to depict. And underlying these distinctions is the modulation of Enlightenment ratiocination and knowledge into a way of seeing nature that retreats from omniscience, objectivity, and possession. Thus *Literature of Diminishment* is also about how regionalism as a mode, rather than as a genre or type, organizes literary forms under a way of being-in-the-world attuned to an epistemic understanding of knowledge not as accurate and graspable but as flimsy and tenuous. A literary mode is, borrowing from Fredric Jameson, the ideological essence of a genre. Within the regionalist genre of local-color sketches, it is those texts that emanate the diminishment of regionalism that concern this study. Although local color has most often been described as a realism representing provincial peripheries or distinct national sections, such a designation misses its radically diminished epistemic grasp. Where the realist novel exemplifies a mode that imagines a cohesive extension over the world with its omniscient narration, detail, and round character subjectivities, regionalism's relation to natural knowledge through diminishing views and partial sketches makes it uniquely suited to demurring from the socio-empirical ordering of things—an episteme that questions Enlightenment epistemology and proposes an ecological relation instead.

As a mode of diminishment, regionalism is a form that uniquely poses the conditions of possibility of a world of attenuated epistemic relations interpolated within a world of rationalized and realized epistemic relations; regionalism is a contrapuntal epistemic structure that produces itself as an object of study according to the realist epistemic structure. That is, it takes up the very techniques of nineteenth-century natural history not for the accumulation of natural knowledge, but for that negative space leftover after the fruit has been plucked—how the branch held its pendulous ripening, the nest of grass that cushioned its fall and molded itself around its weight, and the fruits abandoned as too ripe or too immature, misshapen or blemished were its sunny companions once. That is, nineteenth-century science and realism share a common mode of selection (ratiocination) based on perceived accuracy in its observation, so that knowledge is producible and graspable, and indeed, harvestable in such a way that it has fed a socioempirical order that recognizes "facts," "data," and "information" as the only reliable registers of reality, that is, of the world perceived as a certain "reality" of epistemological laws of classification, causality, commodity, and accountability. Whereas regionalism is its co-temporary, or perhaps always slightly belated, modal counterpart in which observations are obscure and unfit for standardization and sale as "knowledge," and yet this is the very condition that I argue opens out to a way of seeing the world that tentatively accepts a relation of companionable or mutual existence.

Jameson's critique of romance as a nineteenth-century mode also responding to Enlightenment ratiocination sheds some light on the ideological stakes of this distinction. If romance expresses a modulation of older epistemologies circulating around the sacred or magical within a new epistemology of reason, it presents "nature" as the enclave of that realm of spirit. Drawing upon Northrop Frye's understanding the historical criticism of literary modes, Jameson understands romance as "a protopolitical response to a historical dilemma" (157) that arises from the epistemic or cosmologic collision and overlap of the magical and the rational. In other words, in romance, the world as a realm of unrationalizable incident becomes encapsulated in the "nature" of a rational world:

...romance is that form in which the world-ness of world reveals itself. For romance, then, both uses of the term are appropriate, for romance as a literary form is that event in which world in the technical sense of the transcendental horizon of my experience becomes precisely visible as something like an innerworldly object in its own right, taking on the shape of world in the popular sense of nature, landscape, and so forth. And in its turn, the precondition of such a revelation is itself historical in character: for there must, as in medieval times, be something like a nature left as a mysterious and alien border around the still precarious and minute human activities of village and field, for the structure of world-ness to find an adequate vehicle through which it can manifest its existence. So Frye is surely not wrong to evoke the intimate connection between romance as a mode, and the "natural" imagery of earthly paradise or waste land, of the bower of bliss or the enchanted wood; what is misleading is that he should suggest that this "nature" is in any way itself a "natural" phenomenon. (142)

In other words, by drawing its separation from the world of rational reality, Romance's innerworld of homes and wilderness cut from another fabric of an altogether different map, marks the imaginative structure of world-ness and its accompanying nature. Although I, like Jameson, have found it helpful to conceive of this "world-ness" as an epistemic paradigm that lends it to this study of literature's engagement with natural historical methods, I also understand "world" to denote something more amorphous than a way or structure of *knowing*, precisely because regionalism revises and diminishes this "world-ness." We may want to think of "world"



or "episteme" as also, borrowing from Raymond Williams, a structure of *feeling*, or, even more generally, *experience*.

In regionalism, this imagining of the world, or the worlding of world, reveals itself to be a vulnerable enterprise beset with the eroding nature of the world and the subject. If "world" and "nature" implies a certain epistemic structure, regionalism's world is one that does not quite meet the requirements of a world thought out, flush and real. Its world appears, according to the standards of Enlightenment ratiocination, neither Romantic allegory of a world of its own nor realist plenitude mimetic of the actual world. Through its retreat from epistemic comprehensiveness, the regional world appears rather meager, thrown back on scarce resources where life ekes out a living. Its sketches are cursory and incomplete, descriptive yet drifting, while its subjects are often of those forgotten in the centralizing purview of cosmopolitan spectacle. Nature is part of the regionalist world not as "nature," not as an enchanted wood, but as the earth of one's toil and the intimate, yet never wholly familiar, companion of one's livelihood so that nature and the precincts of human activity are not so clearly nor easily divided.

In this sense of materiality and limitedness, regionalism bears a relation to the pastoral, whose portrayal of the simple and lowly life close to nature presents a position of complacent, yet ironic disempowerment. William Empson writes of the pastoral accommodation to scarcity:

...in pastoral you take a limited life and pretend it is the full and normal one, and a suggestion that one must do this with all life, because the normal life is itself limited, is easily put into the trick though not necessary to its power. Conversely, any expression of the idea that all life is limited may be regarded as only a trick of pastoral, perhaps chiefly intended to hold all our attention and sympathy for some limited life, though again this is not necessary to it either on grounds of truth or beauty; in fact the suggestion of pastoral may be only a protection for the idea which must at last be taken alone. (114-115)

For Empson, the pastoral acquiescence to the circumstances of life is both a formal feature of the text in its tendency to harmonize uneven conditions of high and low, as well as a feature of a readerly exemption from a response toward injustice or inequality because pastoral limitedness is taken to be representative of a universal human condition. Although regionalism, too, seems to present a limited life, there is no pretending that it is a full one, nor that it holds together, whether in harmony or tension, the simple and the complex, the low and the high. Regionalism's refusal of allegorical wholeness and its insistence on an "insufficient" realism through its relation to knowledge thus makes possible a material critique of environmental scarcity and unevenness based on the very epistemic assumptions of "scarcity" and "unevenness." In literature of diminishment, the "Missing all" is a lack or inadequacy that forms the very premise of work, the work that makes a world out of what is leftover or what is neither here nor there. The measurements that would indicate scarcity in a realist empiricism become in a regional empiricism a way to extend toward and relate to what is measured, to live with scarcity, whatever it may be. In such a world, there is no knowledge and no nature, but rather a working toward, a seeing of, a limning, a branching.

This is a mimesis, not of accumulation and abundance, but of scarcity, of exiguous minuteness and laborious cultivation; a mimesis, perhaps, more closely related to Edward Said's understanding of Erich Auerbach's method and orientation in *Mimesis* where, as Said writes, "the human mind studying literary representations of the historical world can only do as all authors do—from the limited perspective of their own time and their own work" (xxxii). To read contrapuntally, as Said does, is to read Auerbach's *Mimesis* both forwards and centrally as a history of Western political power and representation (through literary realism) and backwards and peripherally as a modern, fragmented sensibility of history in which selected excerpts from

literature yield memories and insights on the varied experiences of the historical. Both of these directions or melodies depend on structures of feeling (or structures of attitude and reference, habitus and an indexical relation to history) in a world shaped by imperialism and the nostalgic disillusionment of modernism where “the sheer distance of attractive territories summoned the projection of far-flung interests” (C 10). If, on one hand, this vantage point of the whole of secular human history appears strikingly international and nonregional, on the other, Said also holds to the perspective of “no vantage outside the actuality of relationships among cultures, among unequal imperial and non-imperial powers, among us and others; no one has the epistemological privilege of somehow judging, evaluating, and interpreting the world free from the encumbering interests and engagements of the ongoing relationship themselves” (C 55). In this sense, the regional, in dialectical relation to industrial modernity, comes to stand for one strain of a contrapuntal and relational resistance via its exemplification of epistemological incapacity.

This diminishment, as the philosophical orientation of literary regionalism, thus unconventionally brings together authors as varied as Henry David Thoreau, Emily Dickinson, Herman Melville, Celia Thaxter, Sarah Orne Jewett, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Gertrude Stein through the sketch aesthetics and empirics of their travel narratives, essays, poems, or local color stories. The regionalist sketch is not an exact genre of local-color short stories and the nature in these writings is not always the wild wood or impassive ocean. Through formal variation in their approach to what is considered nature, these authors experiment with natural history and literary techniques as a form of epistemology and ecological ethos. Taking up what Crèvecoeur leaves in pieces, they posit a way of seeing and being-in-the-world that *is* piecemeal.

### *Registers of Regionalist Mode: Ecocriticism, New Materialism, and Critical Regionalism*

"The scale on which his studies proceeded was so large as to require longevity, and we were the less prepared for his sudden disappearance."<sup>19</sup> – Ralph Waldo Emerson

Regionalism, as a mode of approach to nature and a literary genre so often associated with decline and nostalgia, may be understood to register the sense of casualty—the passing of others, the loss of a friend, a life, a species, rather than a fixation upon an object. In his elegy for Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson registers a profound disjuncture between the finitude of an individual life and the length and continuity that seems to constitute the study of natural history. Almost as if in answer to Emerson's plea to understand Thoreau's projects in natural history, contemporary studies on climate change are now able to make use of Thoreau's herbarium and records of the seasonal and temperature-sensitive fluctuations of plant leafings and flowerings, as well as bird migration, in order to compare them against contemporary measurements over a hundred years later. They have concluded that climate change has altered these phenological patterns of vegetable life in Concord.

Characteristic of such a study of a wide-scale phenomena like climate change, the data must extend diachronically over a length of time that exceeds the lifespan of a human observer and also synchronously across flowerings and leafings of numerous species in order to be established as actual "change." From 1851 - 1858, Thoreau recorded the first flowering dates of over 500 wildflower species in Concord, as well as the leafing dates of trees and shrubs, and from 1851 - 1854, he recorded the first springtime sightings of bird species. Beginning in 2003,

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19 From Emerson's "Thoreau," in Thoreau, *Walden, Civil Disobedience, and Other Writings*, 409.

biologists led by Richard Primack of Boston University began phenological surveys in Concord to obtain modern data of the first leafing and flowering dates, especially on 43 common species whose relative abundance had not appreciably changed. They found that plant species amenable to earlier warm temperatures have grown more abundant while those that flower with less sensitivity to changing temperatures have declined. And about a third of the species that Thoreau and other Concord botanists had recorded are no longer present in the vicinity and over a third that were once common are now rare. They also concluded, however, that there is no clear pattern of altered bird migration due to changes in spring temperature based on a data set of 22 species of passerines. Contrasting the serendipitous coincidence of Thoreau's environmental awareness with modern mensurations of environmental change, a recent report from Ray Angelo, of the Harvard Herbarium, claims that far fewer plant species than Primack's lab claim show actual decline that may be related to climate change, criticizing the methodology of Primack's lab and the reliability of the historical and contemporary data used. In a sense, the requirements of accurate and consistent data both synchronously across species and diachronically across the same observation locations appear unfulfilled due to gaps in data or imprecise knowledge of local ecology—that is, the potential of Thoreau's recordings to yield prescience for environmental change may be unrealizable.

In another sense, it may seem a folly to measure climate change by the changes in abundance and phenological patterns of a few plants and birds in Concord. In an era where the scale of human-induced environmental degradation encompasses the entire planet—from climate change to the alteration of the geological record now called the Anthropocene—the approaches and narratives of the environment have likewise turned to global, heterotopic, and sublime registers. Human extinction is both an imminent and rationalized end point on a rapidly warming and resource-depleted planet, and yet beyond human experience as it marks the end of human experience. In response, newly comparative methods in ecocriticism have turned more attention to the *global* relevance of environmental sustainability and justice in contrast to a traditionally Americanist ecocriticism, which drew upon American environmental history and writing for preservation of "the wild." For example, the preservationist rhetoric of American environmentalism continues in literary bioregionalist criticism that advocates reinhabiting the land through its understanding of a place-based or territorial ethical commitment to the local environment and to local, even nativist, identities.<sup>20</sup> Ursula Heise has critiqued bioregionalist approaches to emphasize instead how ethical commitments to place and identity are constituted by global networks and flows, hybridity and diaspora, that are in some ways better suited to addressing wide-scale environmental issues like climate change.<sup>21</sup>

Yet it is important to distinguish between different kinds of regionalisms. While certain forms of bioregionalism may reterritorialize the land, the critical regionalism that has arisen in architectural studies positions itself as a sensitivity to contingent, environmental conditions and a resistance against universal and standardized forms of building.<sup>22</sup> Regionalism is not a fixed

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20 Lynch et al's introduction to *The Bioregional Imagination: Literature, Ecology, and Place* provide a summary of bioregionalist tenets.

21 See Ursula Heise, *Sense of Place, Sense of Planet*.

22 For a general background on architectural regionalism, see Vincent Canizaro's *Architectural Regionalism*. However, Kenneth Frampton's "Toward a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance" remains a foundational manifesto for architectural regionalism. Regionalism, as I define it, is more related to Frampton's critical regionalism, which however is situated as a response to a particular kind of modern, universal architecture. However, the discipline of landscape architecture in American begins in the nineteenth-century with Andrew Jackson Downing and more formally with Frederick Law Olmstead, and the idea of the regional

adherence to certain guidelines and codes, but a principle of adaptability and counter-emergence within the environment against totalizing systems.

In the widening gyre of a planet where the reserves of glaciers, fossil fuels, and even social security are incommensurate with the withdrawals from it, and the strains upon one area spiral out ecologically to affect a multiplicity of other areas, the environment appears less the terrain of a singular area around an edifice or even of a region, and more that of the global and planetary requiring both intrahuman and international political interventions and a form of transcendental nonhuman or species-thinking commensurate with the scale of environmental problems. In the Concord study, part of the difficulty of ascertaining change in bird migration is precisely due to the fact that the birds migrate from distant locations and may respond to climate change in different ways unrelated to how species in Concord may be responding to climate change. Primack's lab further mentions the potential for phenological mismatches between birds, plants, and insects due to their varied responses to climate change though this was beyond the scope of their study. In other words, the chronicities, which may have coincided to form critical breeding environments, will have subtly shifted and must form new ecological alignments, and those species that are unable to adjust would decline. The complex calculations of ecological coincidence and ramification—sublime and yet rationalized—depend on an epistemology of continuity that traces cause and effect across thousands of years and of a unity and consistency of those effects across the entire earth and entire species.

Regardless of how or whether Thoreau's observations may provide the basis for longitudinal claims of the observed effects of climate change, I see the epistemic orientation of Thoreau's regionalist natural history as countering the assumptions of continuity and unity required by the natural histories of modern scientists, and also Emerson. In the development of the sciences over the course of the long nineteenth century, we may understand the period's cleaving to scientific empiricism as giving rise to, on one hand, the disciplinary, professional sciences and their observations as an epistemic category, according to repetitive and collective practices, but also, on the other hand, to the late nineteenth-century *philosophies* of science in Whiteheadian formulations of dynamic phenomena and the open-ended radical empiricism of William James. Thoreau's regionalist natural history, I will argue, follows an empirical approach that registers the obscurities of vision and contrasts the verifying observation practiced by professional scientists and, further, anticipates the penumbral shadow of the gaps and discontinuities of experience mentioned by James in his formulation of radical empiricism. In contrast to global or unifying forms of knowledge, it is *not* that the regionalist sketch registers deaths and extinctions more accurately or consistently—for it does not—but that it is still able to register these losses in conditions of deficiency and flaw—and somehow, more palpably.

Historians and critics have understood the long nineteenth-century period to be one permeated by scientific theories of continuity, determinism, and unity—e.g. the wave theory and accompanying concepts of the "field" through which such waves propagate, statistical aggregation, biopolitical organizations of population—coupled with concomitant impulses toward discontinuity and contingency—e.g. Darwin's theory of evolution via chance mutations, and the probabilities of error or outliers.<sup>23</sup> If the invention of the steam engine marks the

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planning with Lewis Mumford in the 1920's, a timeline that parallels punctuating eras of American literary regionalism as well.

23 Important works considering this duality of continuity and discontinuity in the nineteenth century include the work of Mark Seltzer on bodies and machines in a capitalist system, Maurice Lee on chance, Gillian Beer on Victorian science, and Mary Ann Doane concerning cinematic time. Despite the varying frames through which

beginning of the Anthropocene era, what I suggest, then, is that the very science that makes possible the steam engine—the laws of thermodynamics, the concepts of work, as Anson Rabinbach has shown, is a Janus-faced one, at once progressive and conservationist (the principle of conservation of energy which drives the invention of efficient transformations of heat into locomotive energy), and also deteriorative and discrete (the increasing disorder, or entropy, and decline of a closed system).<sup>24</sup>

We may, for example, look to William James for a translation of these themes of continuity and discontinuity in accounting for, not just the objects of experience, but experience itself. Explaining radical empiricism, James traces the structure of the universe to how experience "holds" it together:

The generalized conclusion is that therefore the parts of experience hold together from next to next by relations that are themselves parts of experience. The directly apprehended universe needs, in short, no extraneous trans-empirical connective support, but possesses in its own right a *concatenated* or *continuous* structure. (*W* 136)

Or, in a more colorful description from *A Pluralistic Universe* in which he contrasts radical empiricism against transcendental rationalism:

*Prima facie*, if you should liken the universe of absolute idealism to an aquarium, a crystal globe in which goldfish are swimming, you would have to compare the empiricist universe to something more like one of those dried human heads with which the Dyaks of Borneo deck their lodges. The skull forms a solid nucleus; but innumerable feathers, leaves, strings, beads, and loose appendices of every description float and dangle from it, terminating, it is true, in a nucleus of common perception, but for the most part out of sight and irrelevant and unimaginable to one another. This imperfect intimacy, this bare relation of *withness* between some parts of the sum total of experience and other parts, is the fact that ordinary empiricism over-emphasizes against rationalism....Radical empiricism, on the contrary, is fair to both the unity and the disconnection....and agrees that there appear to be actual forces at work which tend, as time goes on, to make the unity greater. (197)

His fascinating analogy associates empiricist discontinuity to a primitive practice of producing grotesque shrunken heads, which is James' way to highlight the utter foreignness to (or break from) a modern Western tendency of rationalizing parts into a continuous whole. James' interest is not in ontology, but in experience—or epistemology. And yet experience comes to influence how we perceive ontology, so that how we see things disconnectedly or connectedly comes to affect how we understand these things *as* discontinuous or unified. For James, "conjunctions and separations are, at all events, co-ordinate phenomena" (*P* 199).

I would like to (suggestively) connect James' sense of coordinate discontinuity and continuity to the moment in which we see a slight tear in the fabric of Emerson's own version of series in his essay "Experience" in which he laments the loss of his son:

Where do we find ourselves? In a series of which we do not know the extremes, and believe that it has none. We wake and find ourselves on a stair; there are stairs below us, which we seem to have ascended; there are stairs above us, many a one, which go upward and out of sight. (*E* 471)

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these critics read the period, they rely on an underlying epistemic basis drawn from statistical probability and thermodynamics.

24 See Anson Rabinbach's *The Human Motor*.

These stairs contrast Emerson's other transcendental figures of, say, the transparent eyeball or circles, in that they are much more incremental or concatenated, and lack certain expansiveness, merely extending out of sight. In other words, the experience of another's death, of fugitive life and that awful "lubricity of all objects," is somehow bound up in the swerve of transcendental natural history from its usual overwhelming rationalizing eye which integrates everything in its panoptic sweep toward, instead, a failure of that eye, where vision goes awry, tending centrifugally, smearing, blurring, with the wash of tears. And yet both Emerson (in his transcendentalism) and James (in his pragmatism) disavow that dissolution and strenuously rescue themselves to affirm some greater tendency toward unity. "In the woods," Emerson wrote earlier in *Nature*, "we return to faith and reason" (E 10).

The traces of the nineteenth century's structural or paradigmatic duality that leans, however, toward continuity and unity may be seen in New Materialism, which takes its cues and inspirations from current scientific trends, and how it thinks of matter, vitality, causality, and relationality.<sup>25</sup> Giving a brief history of the development from Cartesian dualism and Newtonian mechanics to quantum mechanics, relativity, chaos theory, and complexity theory; and in the life sciences from considering closed, discrete entities or systems to open, complex ones, Diana Coole and Samantha Frost explain in their "Introduction" to *New Materialisms* that "while scientific theories cannot simply be transported into philosophy, the tropes and rhythms they suggest can transform theoretical discourses....it is germane for new materialists to ask how these new conceptions of matter might reconfigure our models of society and the political" (13). Avowing this materialist relation between scientific theories and philosophy, we might then begin to examine the natural histories that make possible these ways of thinking. Thus, Karen Barad's posthumanist revision of epistemology as entanglement based on Niels Bohr's quantum physics may be understood to follow from the developments of philosophies of science like James's.<sup>26</sup> James, in his wider formulation of what constitutes *experience*, too, depends upon the nineteenth-century epistemes of Agassiz, Emerson, and Thoreau.

Rather than tracing how nineteenth-century *experience* lends itself to concepts of unity and continuity, I am, of course, concerned with tracing how that *regionalist* experience opens out to discontinuity and partiality, some features of which we might recognize as resurfacing as new materialist ontologies of unpredictability, contingency, openness, and becoming. An ontology of contingent or novel processes and events depends on a perception or a structure of feeling open to such an experience. Yet regionalism's sense of casualty offers a slight difference—a circumscription and sketchiness of view and a palpable registration of loss that may constitute a productive revision of critical materialism's inheritance of a rationality, reflexivity, and analysis that reinforces, even as it resists, theoretical congruencies and totalities.

Thoreau's difference—that is his death—might be marked in this way: In writing and thinking of his work as "sketches," Thoreau understood experience to be discontinuous and unsynthesizable into a unified whole—life as a set of discrete experiences that are circumscribed

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25 Kuhn's understanding of scientific revolutions as paradigm shifts is helpful here in understanding how we might historicize New Materialism within its milieu. His pivotal work has marked a division between scientific rationalists (also called constructivists) and scientific realists, in which the former appears more interested in epistemology and the latter in ontology, though both may be understood as providing different ways in which science moulds or intervenes in the world. See Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

26 Joan Richardson, for example, has recently pointed to an intellectual lineage that may connect James and Bohr, though further research would illuminate Bohr's specific engagements with James' *Principles of Psychology*. See Richardson, *Pragmatism and American Experience* and *A Natural History of Pragmatism*.

by bounds and limits. In a *Journal* entry from January 22, 1852, he marks this sense of break in his decision five years ago to leave Walden Pond:

But Why I changed—? Why I left the woods? I do not think I can tell. I have often wished myself back— I do know know any better how I ever came to go there—. Perhaps it is none of my business—even if it is your's. Perhaps I wanted a change— There was a little stagnation it may be—about 2 o'clock in the afternoon the world's axle—creaked as if it needed greasing—as if the oxen labored—& could hardly get their load over the ridge of the day— Perhaps if I lived there much longer I might live there forever — One would think twice before he accepted heaven on such terms— A ticket to Heaven must include tickets to Limbo—Purgatory—& Hell. Your ticket to the boxes admits you to the pit also. And if you take a cabin-passage you can smoke at least forward of the engine.— You have the liberty of the whole boat. But no I do not wish for a ticket to the boxes—nor to take a cabin passage. I will rather go before the mast & on the deck of the world. I have no desire to go "abaft the engine" (4: 275)

Sharon Cameron has written of the *Journal* as unquotable because of its randomness, its unsettling of perspectives, its incoherencies and inconsistencies, in which singular quotes taken as aphoristic summations (as we are often able to do with Emerson's writing) fail to capture the texture of the *Journal*. In Cameron's argument on Thoreau's long-term writing, "the wholeness of nature, and the wholeness of the *Journal* will come to be identical. / Yet Thoreau's idea of totality is...predicated not on connections but on the breaking of connections" (*W* 6). This moment in the *Journal* when Thoreau reflects on the breaking of a connection is interestingly surrounded by his own meditations on whether he makes wholes out of parts by extracting and revising from his journal entries to write *Walden* or whether the parts are more "whole" in the text of the journal itself.

This problem of part or whole remains unresolved, perhaps, though what I want to draw out of it is the sense of break and the instability of what is more "whole." Perhaps there is nothing more uncertain than taking a break in a series of disconnections to represent the whole. In figuring this break or change in the course of his life, Thoreau takes up the mixed metaphor of life as a theater or, more strongly, a steamboat passage that necessarily rides through different phases of Hell. To counter stagnation, in other words, Thoreau imagines death as that literally life-changing break, but he also seems to distinguish this passage as one that refuses the grand view of box-seat holders or first-class cabin passengers for the more arduous travails of second-class deck passengers left to shift for themselves: make their own bed, prepare their own meals, in whatever space they might find. One traveler's guide from 1834 quotes cautionary advice that deck passage is "economical, but ought not to be calculated upon by those who regard health or comfort."<sup>27</sup> For Thoreau, then, experience must be broken up into the parts of passage, the different stages or locations through which one passes, and further, he prefers an experience of each of these parts as one that registers one's exposure to the elements—inclement weather, harrying from the crew, debris and flames from boiler accidents, and so on. Boiler explosions were quite common in the nineteenth century with one mid-century observer declaring, "The history of steam navigation [...] is a history of wholesale murder and unintentional suicide."<sup>28</sup>

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27 In Baird, *View of the Valley of the Mississippi* 365.

28 In Sandukas, "Gently Down the Stream: How Exploding Steamboat Boilers in the 19th Century Ignited Federal Public Welfare Regulation." Thoreau's journal entry coincides with the year in which U.S. Congress reviewed laws governing steam boat boilers. Characterizing why boiler explosions would require such attention, Sandukas notes that "[t]hey were the first hazard in America that could kill on a massive scale, accounting for one-half of the 7,000 steamboat-related deaths before the Act of 1852 was passed and two-thirds of the total casualties" (9).

Thus, the steamboat and its boiler explosions become a fitting vehicle for a passage through life as stopping in Hell and opening oneself up to environmental vagaries.

Further, the epistemological orientation of Thoreau's steamboat disrupts an easy summation of consequence and success. If Heaven is the state of after-life for "the good," Thoreau has disrupted the linear, bifurcated trajectories imagined by those who would separate Heaven from Hell. Instead Hell, and some of its intermediary states, are on the passage to Heaven, and the moralized delineation of progress falls apart, but also the knowledge that there is a path of progress in which certain acts may lead to certain results, for it is not necessarily clear in Thoreau's sentence whether Hell comes after Heaven or vice versa—only that the passage through life goes through all of them. In this lack of order, and in the accidents and abrasions of exposure on the "deck of the world," Thoreau's steamboat physically and mechanically manifests the entropic tendency that the second law of thermodynamics suggests, as well as breakdowns of causality and mechanical progression that we may think of as subtending the Industrial Revolution. Thoreau's questions, "But Why I changed—? Why I left the woods? I do not think I can tell" opens out to this radical break and lack of knowledge. Experience, for a Thoreau who does not want the "liberty of the whole cabin," who is beginning to refuse totality and wholeness as he writes and writes in his *Journal*, is a propulsion through life by breaks and instabilities that do not, ultimately, even themselves out with the complacent providence of Emerson who writes: "The voyage of the best ship is a zigzag line of a hundred tacks. See the line from a sufficient distance, and it straightens itself to the average tendency" (*E* 266).<sup>29</sup>

For Cameron, the slim-bound volumes of Thoreau's *Journal* attest to an ideal totality (where "piecemeal observations in which man, not one with natural phenomena, unsuccessfully strains toward them") but also to a material and "disarming totality": "forty-seven manuscript volumes which add up to nothing if not a record of man's harmony with nature" (*W* 9). In my reading, they attest, instead, to a nature of "imperfect intimacy" and heterogeneous, discomfiting parts, *and* they attest to the loss and exposure of a finite and irreducible life. That what is disarming is not its completeness but its discreteness. Similarly, William James writes, "All our sensible experiences, as we get them immediately, do thus change by discrete pulses of perception, each of which keeps us saying 'more, more, more' or 'less, less, less,' as the definite increments or diminutions make themselves felt. The discreteness is still more obvious when, instead of old things changing, they cease, or when altogether new things come" (James *P* 231). Thus it is when Thoreau "ceases" that his discreteness is made more palpable; or that when we take up his records of plant leafings and flowerings, the files of his herbarium, the volumes of his *Journal*, that we are able to see both their incompleteness and discreteness. In returning to what I take to be a regionalist epistemology in Thoreau's sketches, I imagine a critical approach that

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Although this was less than the total fatalities at sea, Sandukas suggests that the occurrences on domestic waters made the accidents more visible and available to media attention. However, as we will see, Thoreau's attention to shipwreck casualties in *Cape Cod* suggests that the nineteenth-century audience was sensitive to the massive death tolls at sea as well.

29 The revised version of this passage in *Walden* is much more Emersonian and affirmative, railing against conformity and advocating a wider view that ends with lessons learned and anticipated success: "I left the woods for as good a reason I went there. Perhaps it seemed to me that I had several more lives to live, and could not spare any more time for that one....I did not wish to take a cabin passage, but rather to go before the mast and on the deck of the world, for there I could best see the moonlight amid the mountains. I do not wish to go below now. / I learned this, at least, by my experiment; that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with success unexpected in common hours" (Thoreau *W* 217).



does not attempt a panoramic view, that does not, in other words, follow an assumption of analytical or monologic comprehensiveness and integration, but falls back on a view of discontinuity and partiality.

We might, in other words, understand climate change, not through a global or nonhuman structure of thinking, but an experiential and regional one. Further, as a regionalist natural history that has fallen by the wayside of professional sciences, it registers, too, the costs of systemic thinking, where natural history itself is a casualty of an epistemic shift. It is this costly transformation, from Thoreau's natural history to the modern sciences of today, from finite and discrete lives and species to a monologic vitalism, that I think new materialism may not account for in its embrace of modern scientific realism or new ontologies of matter though it attends to the amassive casualties of *those* paradigms. In his essay on "The Idea of Natural-History," Theodor Adorno presciently critiques the reifying tendencies of both historical and ontological materialist approaches:

From the perspective of history, of historical criticism, ontology seems to be either a merely formal framework that has nothing to say about the content of history and can be arbitrarily set up around the concrete, or, in the Schelerian form of material ontology, it appears as the arbitrary production of absolutes out of inner-historical facts which, perhaps for ideological purposes, are raised to the level of eternal and universal values.

From the ontological point of view, the problem is just the reverse... (114)

In other words, ontological approaches to natural history risk identifying concepts of discontinuity, contingency, and openness as absolute, material facts; while historical or constructivist approaches may err on the side of deconstructing perceived facts. For Adorno, the task at hand is to think the terms in contradiction and to dialecticize them in tandem against one another. This is the task he demonstrates through the idea of "natural-history"<sup>30</sup> as that which understands history where it appears most historically determined as natural, and understands nature where it appears most elemental and primal as historical. Neither a mythology that reifies events or characters to the archaic original-historical nor a science that subsumes everything in nature to historicity, natural-history requires a "differential procedure" that "without anticipating it as a unity consists in firstly accepting these two problematical and indeterminate structures in their contradictoriness, as they occur in the language of philosophy" (Adorno 122). Similar to Said's reading from the center to the periphery and from the periphery to the center, Adorno's dialectical method requires that critical thought continue to unsettle itself at the precise moment at which it reaches concretization. In placing regionalism within this historical materialist perspective, I see it as posthumously setting the ground for a renewed and contrapuntal critical attention to materialist ecologies that attend to breaks and discontinuities in environmental experience and in the environment itself.

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30 Adorno's critique of natural history interestingly applies to the late nineteenth-century context as well. He situates the philosophical moment of his argument as one no longer contending with Platonic universals but still dependent on a transforming the empirical into absolutes through a rational or phenomenological subjectivity. This tendency results in a kind of mythos of ontology that Adorno associates with Heidegger. The American nineteenth century also contends with both an ontology that "actually interprets being" in its natural theology and a Kantian epistemology that accesses reality only at the remove of empiricism and ratiocination.

## Chapter 1

### *Naked Nature: Audubon, Thoreau, and the Deformation of Natural History*

In the fall of 1849, en route to Cape Cod, Henry David Thoreau stopped off at a beach in Cohasset, Massachusetts where a recent shipwreck left debris and bodies washed up on the shore. Among the crowds of Irish in search of or attending to kin, Thoreau also notes several hundred more spectators gathering at the beach, as well as sportsmen with their dogs and farmers with their wagons serving as undertakers. He returns more than once to the almost nonchalant and methodical practice of seashore scavengers at the scene of the wreck:

...there were men with carts busily collecting the sea-weed which the storm had cast up, and conveying it beyond the reach of the tide, though they were often obliged to separate fragments of clothing from it, and they might at any moment have found a human body under it. Drown who might, they did not forget that this weed was a valuable manure.

This shipwreck had not produced a visible vibration in the fabric of society. (9)

Carting off loads of the weedy crop of the sea, the men seem heartless in their disregard for shipwreck casualties. One writer of the 1850 *Elizabeth* wreck decried such scavenging practices, dramatizing how the broken vessel eventually made its way to the shore "almost within hand-reach of numbers who were too busy with their work of inhuman plunder to think of any plan for saving their perishing fellow creatures" (Giles 221). In Thoreau's description, such moral judgment is made uncertain, if not absent. The ambiguity of "drown who might" as transitive (someone drowns another) or intransitive (one drowns to death) is brought into question by the flipped subject-verb structure: do the apathetic "they" allow the drowning or do "they" simply attend to the drowning as bystanders? It's not clear what crime of neglect can be attached to these seashore scavengers. Instead, the salvage-value of weeds and cast-up cargo—and also of human remains and manuscripts—is very much on Thoreau's mind, especially as he turns them into the subject of his Cape Cod sketches. Seaweed manure was considered a valuable fertilizer and substitute for barnyard manure to enrich sandy soils. It was so commonly used in coastal farming that some farmers resorted to harvesting the weeds directly from rocks rather than waiting for storms to uproot them. In her book, *The Marine Botanist* (1853), Isabella Gifford mentions the detrimental repercussions of this harvesting upon sea creatures dependent on these seaweed groves.<sup>1</sup> Seaweed vomited up by the sea is yet valuable as a fertilizer; and a weed seemingly displaced from dry land is yet the home of many creatures. Likewise, a wrack of weeds and bodies has its productive literary deformations.

Thoreau's interest in the scavenging of seaweed and the salvaging of human remains evokes these wider constellating ecological relations and cyclical biological processes, and yet such relations and processes seem to fall flat with the report that the shipwreck produces no visible vibration. The tragedy of the seas should pull deep on one's heartstrings, and in the nineteenth-century the shipwrecked mother and child was a recognized trope of American

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1 Both Isabella Gifford and Alexander von Humboldt (in his *Cosmos*) reference the same quote from Charles Darwin's commentary on marine life associated with seaweeds in his *Structure and Distribution of Coral Reefs, being the first part of the geology of the voyage of the Beagle, under the command of Capt. Fitzroy, R.N. during the years 1832 to 1836*: "Our woods on shore do not harbour so many animals as the woody regions of the ocean, where the sea-weed groves, rooted to the shallows, or the Fuci, detached by waves and currents, supported by air-cells, and swimming free, unfold their delicate arms and branches.[...]if the immense sea-weeds of the Southern Ocean were removed by any cause, the whole Fauna of these seas would be changed" (in Gifford xxvi). Thoreau was familiar with Humboldt's *Cosmos* and Darwin's *Voyage of a Naturalist round the World*.

sentimental culture.<sup>2</sup> Yet what Thoreau's regionalist diminishment registers is not such a plunge but a kind of blandished diffusion of tension. The Cohasset shipwreck, the weather, the morphology of the coast, the men plying the shores—all these, and Thoreau—are knit together in an impassive mesh of tenuous relations.

There are multiple directions of cause-and-effect possible in such a shipwreck, and his description of the event charts a series of relations that tie together various formulas of consequence: the hard, sienitic Grampus Rock where the St. John struck and sank, or the hour of the violent storm that coincided with its arrival, as well as the responses that follow a wreck—the churning of printing presses to produce handbills announcing the event, the Irish taking trains to attend to the funerals of their dead, the obligations of nationality, family, and human sympathy, and the avarice of scavenging "wreckers," the matter-of-factness of seaside farmers, the ambivalence of a writer.

Yet to say exactly what caused the shipwreck, what its aftereffect is, what forms of responsibility are required is left to the waves; that is, the relations spread out multiply and dissipate. They seem less binding than they would in a clear case of murder; and the obligations and remonstrances due to or from victims, criminals, sailors, observers, and survivors are subsumed by what Thoreau considers the course of Nature: "I sympathized rather with the winds and waves, as if to toss and mangle these poor human bodies was the order of the day" (13). If Thoreau follows the wind and the waves, then he tosses and turns as a brusque caress that accords those bodies both care and casualty. It is less that the "fabric of society" suffers and feels nothing, but that it absorbs vibrations such that the shocks of a shipwreck dissolve into it but do not disappear. The causal relations of perpetrator and victim, crash and drown, harvest and profit, mollify and distribute into more casual though no less significant relations that allow for the otherwise incongruous seaweed scavengers to be alongside dead Irish immigrants.

That one must pick through fragments of clothing among kelp, and turn human bodies with the masses of seaweed, becomes then, not a horrifying disjuncture, but a matter of course. In describing the proximity of the farmers to the shipwreck victims, Thoreau's sketch ties a tenuous line between them—the farmers do not *not* acknowledge the victims, and indeed, they acknowledge the bodies and the environmental accidents that tangle miscellaneous detritus into seawrack by the fact that they *do* turn and sift through the wrack—gestures, we may call, inhumanly sincere. What they attest to are the mutual contingencies and natural processes that bring them to this same, if trivial place: for the storm that uprooted the weeds is the same that wrecked the ship and its passengers; and the seashore is their gathering place of *ungathering* and manure. Thus the sketch of "men with carts busily collecting the sea-weed" and the human bodies they turn over is made of the refractions and erosions of wind and wave, sand and sun, of an environmental optics of mutual diminishment.

Thoreau's *Cape Cod* depends on such oblique relations of responsibility and muted

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2 See Joy Kasson's *Marble Queens and Captives: Women in Nineteenth-Century American Sculpture* for a discussion of this trope based on her research on Edward Augustus Brackett's sculpture *Shipwrecked Mother and Child* (1850). Interestingly, although she points to many sources and similar contemporary images for the sculpture, she also concludes that something about the Brackett's choice of scene defied the pathos of sentimentality: "Although manifestly a sentimental contemplation of the pathos of death, on a deeper level *Shipwrecked Mother and Child* challenged its viewers' certainties about women's identity and the security of family. If Brackett had portrayed a dying mother in a bed reaching out to her baby, he would have stayed safely within the bounds of sentimental culture. But he put his victimized woman at risk of elemental forces, exposed and battered. Instead of sweetly sleeping, passively awaiting the angel of salvation, she has been tossed in the arms of the sea. This raises the question: is she a meek victim or a powerful, liminal being?" (139).

horror. Sharing the Enlightenment sensibility of empirical observation and subjectivity, Thoreau's view of Nature relinquishes the corollaries of clearcut human knowledge and responsibility for a wider but also more tenuous social and environmental fabric. The text's obsession with wrecks, bodies, and optical distortions expresses a mode of diminished but also more shared and diffused agency. This is a gossamer fabric of relations that depends upon not only the environmental optics of Cape Cod, but also its environmental economics of seaweed and wreckage; such that Cape Cod remains the circulating reference through which such vision and such a fabric and texture, that is, such a sketch, becomes possible. Referring to his writing as seaweed by alluding to and deforming a line from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "Seaweed," Thoreau claims, "*These* weeds were the symbols of those grotesque and fabulous thoughts which have not yet got into the sheltered coves of literature" (80). Thoreau's disfiguration of his nature writing as seaweed shut out from the literary canon shows how literary forms like his are ravaged by formalities and revisions and salvaged as a process of thinking even as it itself salvages material for its composition. These weeds seem to have an uncertain provenance as "fabulous," as well as a precarious status liable to exposure and destruction. Unsheltered and unapproved by the literary standards of his time that would idealize and preserve a text, Thoreau's writing is instead open to the transmogrifications of both the miscellaneous vagaries that twist and turn it into its grotesque shape and the future drifts of taste and practice that may later find viable matter in the remnants of his work. Unlike a text that is written for a certain time, for a certain use or appeal, *Cape Cod* is unmoored from such determinations and responsibilities, uncannily edited and published posthumously, and Thoreau's ruminations come to us through—by way of and obscured by—the very medium and waves of text, wreckage, and death. This is a biological decomposition, a salvage business, a moral transgression, and a literary composition.

Through the "grotesque and fabulous" lens of the natural history sketch, Thoreau's *Cape Cod* is a mixture of anecdote, fact, history, and description whose view is not, ultimately, on objective aspects of nature, but on deformations of nature that are biological *and* aesthetic. Although his essays are now considered classic examples of American natural history writing, the "decomposition" of his writing picks up from a history and genre of sketch-writing that diverges from more academic natural history texts. The sketch of what Thoreau calls "naked Nature" discloses deformations and distortions in how natural history writing shapes philosophical orientations and valuations of nature.

The nineteenth-century American moment is one in which the relentless instantiation of natural facts contributed to the separation between mixed forms of natural history and the professional disciplines of the modern sciences. It is, then, also the moment when both the attachment and detachment of "nature" to "fact" might still be understood as an uncertain enterprise that speaks to our own contemporary moment attempting to make sense of environmental change. Alongside the long trend toward making legible the works of nature, extending classificatory trees, and establishing natural laws, is the ephemera of Thoreau's regional natural history—essays, journals, commonplace books, herbaria, manuscripts revised, published and unpublished, drawings, surveys, lists, letters, notes, weeds. Regionalism, as I define it through Thoreau, describes a mode of approach, a way of seeing—scientifically, environmentally, and aesthetically—through the casualties of living form.

### *Sketching Nature: Natural Forms and Audubon's Nude*

Thoreau's formal experiments or tribulations in natural history writing follow from a pre-history of antebellum American nature, science, and travel writing, as well as regionalist

sketches. These mixed and indeterminate writings present varied views of nature that, in some cases, become attentive to their own shaping or seeing of nature. In returning us to the environmental text of natural history writing, I wish to show how such sketches already shift attention to methods of observation and engagement. With his collection of birds and his claim to the title of "American Woodsman," John James Audubon offers a conceptual background for nineteenth-century nature writing like Thoreau's. America's currency as producer of the "Book of Nature" ran high and enabled Audubon to advertise and obtain subscriptions for the publication of his *Birds of America* (1827-1838) with life-size drawings of bird species depicted *in situ* often in the midst of catching prey, pecking, and foraging. Much was at stake in his claim of "natural principles" informing his practice for perhaps what attracted subscribers in 1827 as much as the scientific accuracy and beauty of his drawings was his reputation as an American woodsman; that is, what appealed was the *Americanness* of his drawings. For Audubon and his subscribers, however, America was "regional" or "provincial" in relation to Europe; and while his specificity holds the intent of seeing nature, it also reveals an aporetic and violent piercing and cleaving—penetrating, separating, and sticking together—in seeing, a kind of indelible hurt that sutures together even as it wounds.

Audubon is the hinge that opens up cognizance of adulteration in the representation of naked Nature that is, at the same time, linked with the taint of mortality in a Nature no longer conceived of as eternal or perfect. Audubon's work remains bound to the conventions of pure seeing of a pure Nature, but approaches the edges where natural-theological veracity dictates the distinction between virtuous nakedness or nudity and the lewd or morbid. In his censure of more conventional ornithological representation, Audubon also marks an ongoing division in natural history as a branch of knowledge concerned with cataloguing natural objects according to a system or design or as an aestheticized illustration and embroidery of and around these natural objects in both visual and literary representation. His *Ornithological Biography, or an Account of the Habits of the Birds of the United States of America* (1831-1839), published as a companion text to the *Birds of America*, describes each bird species' habitat, distribution, habits, and characteristics, often with measurements. Each entry under the species' common and scientific name includes such ornithological information, as well as Audubon's own personal accounts and anecdotal tales of individual birds and encounters. As a whole, Audubon's work attempts an overt contribution to scientific knowledge according to its practices of observation and accuracy, as with Agassiz's method; but it also digresses immensely from its classificatory structure to illustrate and adorn the data with anecdotes and pictures—an aestheticization that borders upon theological conceptions of human indulgence or error in such flourishes. These "sketches," whether drawings or text, represent a relation to nature—humanized, aestheticized, sentimentalized, or otherwise. Natural history, in moments like this, comes to fully contain in itself the critical tension of its own name as a scientific concept of both the unremitting "nature" of data and the changing "history" of relations and developments, and as a natural-theological concept of both divine "nature" and sinful, human "history." Audubon's writings and drawings, opening up a sense of aesthetic distortion still clinging to scientific accuracy and virtue, anticipates the distortion and diminishment in Thoreau's natural history that I argue informs the philosophical and literary mode of American regionalism.

When Audubon "pioneered" his portfolios of the *Birds of America* he made much of his stylistic techniques for enlivening his drawings, inadvertently making him perhaps one of the first theorists of American natural history aesthetics after Thomas Jefferson. His strain of regionalist American natural history images might justifiably be called the natural history *sketch*,

in distinction from the still recognized scientific standard for images that utilize profiles and enlargements of specimens and parts. Criticizing representations made, as he put it, "*strickly ornithologically*, which means neither more or less that in Stiff unmeaning profiles, such as are found in all works published since the begaining of the present century [*sic*]" (759), Audubon instead drew the birds in "natural" positions—wading, dabbling, hunting, pecking, calling, roosting, perching, or flying—in scenic contexts (usually with prey) or with floral detail. Explaining the "*Natural principles*" that inform his practice, he writes:

The more I understood my Subjects the better I became able to represent them in what I hoped was a Natural position, the Bird once fixed with Wires or Squeres, and its Nature (as far as habits Went) previously Known to me, I Studied it Whilt thus placed as a "lay figure" before me, according to is Specificality, this lead me to Judge as it were before hand of its general form, of those of its bill, nostrils head, eye, legs or claws, as well as the Structure of its Wings and Tail—nay the very tongue was at times of importance to Me, and I thought that the More I understood of all these particulars, the better representations I Made of the Originals, Successfull or not, I leave for yourself to decide.— [*sic*] (763)

Rather than relying on taxidermic models that often overstuffed the birds and arranged them into unnatural positions, he painstakingly arranged his own models—of species observed often for days and over many occasions before being shot by himself—with wires to hold their pose as he worked on his drawings. Audubon's work is not merely that of an artist, but also of a naturalist who both draws upon his observations in the field of behaviors and habits and his minute observations of the specimen before him—dissecting the parts even to the tongue hidden within bill. The principle of his method is "Specificality," that the "particulars" will lead to a representation of the "general form," which is also a specificity pertaining to species that offers a taxonomic rendering of the subject so that the bird may be accurately differentiated from others. In other words, this more natural and often floral or scenic depiction was what he considered the most accurate and lively species representation of a dead individual specimen.

Audubon's aesthetic theory borrows from eighteenth-century natural history illustrations of American flora or fauna that were grounded in an Enlightenment ideal of objectivity or "correct" seeing. Notable examples from Mark Catesby's *Natural History of Carolina, Florida, and the Bahama Islands* (1729-1747) and William Bartram's miscellaneous drawings of American flora may be excluded from Audubon's censure of stiff ornithological profiles while still representing nature simply as it is. Their aesthetic renderings of specimen tend to mix an earlier eclectic style of curiosity cabinets with a strict scientific observation of surface. Michael Gaudio has linked the flatness of Catesby's drawings, their seeming to be pressed specimen on paper, as well as the more playful explorations of surface and depth in Bartram's and Charles Willson Peale's work, to Enlightenment emphasis on "ocular experience." Their art of natural history shows the surface as truth, following Sir Francis Bacon's new objectivity: "And all depends on keeping the eye steadily fixed upon the facts of nature and so receiving their images simply as they are. For God forbid that we should give out a dream of our own imagination for a pattern of the world" (quoted in Gaudio 55). Such a pure or innocent seeing, without the adulteration or delusions of other influences, perhaps led American naturalists to claim a closer, and thus truer, observation of the flora and fauna in the field rather than the distant, intellectual understanding of European naturalists who examined specimen already dissociated, dried, preserved, stuffed, or pressed.<sup>3</sup> The American natural historian's work of making legible—and

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3 See Parrish's *American Curiosity* for the hierarchical relationship and division of labor between American field

viable—the Book of Nature, such as their natural historical accounts and travel narratives, their museum and gardens, has often been understood in parallel to a national political project of establishing truths and practices of discernment upon which the nation would build itself.<sup>4</sup>

Yet Audubon's antebellum nineteenth-century moment has shifted away from nation-making republicanism to a nation-making of contradictory cosmopolitanism and provincialism, an America that sought its ties to Europe in order to define its differences from it. Audubon's own biographical migrations as a French-Caribbean, then French immigrant to America, match the transatlantic vicissitudes of American culture, but his scientific practices also demonstrate devotion to a certain conception of America. His curiosity, for example, attends to the common and provincial:

Pursuers of natural curiosities are extremely abundant in our age. New, quite unknown subjects are those the most sought for. The dried skin of an exotic specimen, of which the *colour* has not been described minutely, draws all attention, whilst the *habits* of that same specimen are scarcely inquired after, and those of individuals more interesting, being nearer and more easily obtained, are abandoned, and the pleasure, as well as the profit that might be derived from a complete study of their manners, and faculties, and worth, are set aside. I must acknowledge to you that that kind of curiosity has not animated me half so much as the desire of first knowing well all those commonly about me,—a task that in itself I discovered to be extremely difficult, but through which I found the means of at least drawing valuable deductions. (Audubon 755-56)

It is not that a regional naturalist shuns the exotic—certainly Audubon and other writers I will associate with regionalism in greater degrees draw inspiration from distant and wild sources—but that a regionalist is defined more by practice than object. The practice of a complete study, of observing thoroughly even subjects already known or seemingly uninteresting begins with "first knowing well all those commonly about." Practically speaking, if that task is as difficult as Audubon says it is, if it finds immensity already in the nearest and minutest or is perhaps undeterred by the lack of color or flair, it is no wonder that a regionalist remains regional. For Audubon who traveled extensively and adopted new homes, the kind of regionalism that encompasses his practice of specificity and particularity is a "regional" synonymous with the "natural"—and significantly, it is the natural of *America* where America is seen as regional and common rather than exotic or curious. Audubon's "natural" is, of course, beautiful; his folio drawings have an ornate and luxurious luster to them, and one cannot turn the pages of the *Birds of America* without the awe and discomfort of rifling through a work of art. Like Bartram before him, Audubon's actual work belies a form of aggrandizement, an entrepreneurial flair or lushness that advertises American natural resources, science, and aesthetics—not a sense of diminishment. Audubon's drawings and anecdotes *are* scenic and decorative views; but what Audubon's insistence on the "natural" reveals is a dedication to a direct and unadulterated view at least in theory. Though cannily distinguishing his aesthetics from other scientific illustrators, he continues to ground his work in an Enlightenment ideal of objectivity or "correct" seeing. Scientific observation valued such a seeing without the adulteration of distance or mediation; and natural history illustrations attempted to present that pure seeing.

Audubon strove to present a kind of direct, in-the-field view of the bird, to take his

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naturalists and their European correspondents.

4 Many critics read early American visual culture along these lines of Enlightenment reason in correspondence with republican nation-making, especially with regard to the work of the Peale's. Besides Gaudio, see also Wendy Bellion's *Citizen Spectator* and Laura Rigal's *The American Manufactory*.

viewers with him into the very midst of their presence. Yet his attempts to display his intimacy with nature also adventitiously open a view into a natural aesthetics of diminishment. If every one of Audubon's drawings promises the representation of natural life, their very liveliness relies on a closeness and naturalness that laminates life and death—"fresh killed" so that the very vigor and raw scent of the fresh is at every moment paired with an extinguishing stroke. A captive moment, Audubon's drawings represent an idea of naked nature that matches the heightened tensions at its moment of critical transformation, a kind of bareness associated with unconscious but also inevitable vulnerability. In the *Ornithological Biography*, he often entreats the reader to literally follow him into the marshes and forests of his fieldwork. In the description of the American Avocet, we are drawn in together:

...you and I will do our best to approach the sitting bird unseen by it. Although a person can advance but slowly when wading through mud and water knee-deep, it does not take much time to get over forty or fifty yards, and thus I was soon on the small island where the Avocet was comfortably seated on her nest. Softly and on all four I crawled toward the spot, panting with heat and anxiety. Now, Reader, I am actually within three feet of the unheeding creature, peeping at her through tall grasses. Lovely bird! how innocent, how unsuspecting, and yet how near to thine enemy, albeit he be an admirer of thy race! There she sits on her eggs, her head almost mournfully sunk among the plumage, and her eyes, unanimated by the sight of her mate, half closed, as if she dreamed of future scenes. (Audubon 500)

Here in the thick of mud and heat, the heady fumes and rush of stalking a prey, the natural history view shows how directness and admiration are also directly fatal and mired in contradictory aims and desires. Laminated in every view is the life and death of its subject; the closer one gets to its life is also its death. Audubon, completing his observations, shoots down five of the avocets. His practice requires this closeness—drawings, as he writes, "made after individuals fresh killed" and "with a closeness of *measurement*...[to] correspond with *nature* when brought into contact" (754). This closeness is both one of empirical accuracy in measurement and correspondence, but also an erotic closeness that compresses opposing extremities—*his* anxiety within three feet of *her* unheeding innocence; his panting and peeping over her vulnerable repose; life exposed to the point of death.

The intimacy of this natural history view shows how the logic of sympathetic appeal and response aligns, in fact, with the hunter's aim. In his sentimental appeals to the Reader, as well as his anthropomorphic rendering of the avocet as a mother, Audubon insists upon the moralizing rationality of sentimentality that claims an immediate sympathy for a threatened creature, though one relying upon an imagined common humanity. We are drawn into sympathy with her because we think we see and understand her plight. Yet that sentimental logic where emulating closeness results in sympathetic knowledge is the same that governs Audubon's prowess as a hunter-naturalist where his diligent shooting and gathering of dead birds and data fulfills a scientific logic that to closely observe and to capture—is to know. Closeness in feeling and measurement mires Audubon in contradictory aims and desires as both an admirer and enemy of birds. While his description registers its moral contradiction, it also boldly claims direct causality as its principle—between human sympathy and responsive action, and between his drawing and the bird's mortality.

Audubon's method also precludes deeper examination of these views *as* an ethical contradiction or dilemma.<sup>5</sup> This displaying yet sidestepping of consequences is also built into the

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5 See Annette Kolodny's *Lay of the Land*, for a reading that aligns Audubon's work with a masculine and brutal



structure of the *Ornithological Biography*, which intersperses the text of bird biographies with other episodes that divert attention. Audubon's "Delineations of American Scenery and Manners," for example, gives his natural historical observations of landscape and people. Not melancholic, but somehow cheerfully sorrowful, Audubon describes the decimation of American wilderness thus in his travels on the Ohio River:

When I think of these times, and call back to my mind the grandeur and beauty of those almost uninhabited shores; when I picture to myself the dense and lofty summits of the forest, that everywhere spread along the hills, and overhung the margins of the stream, unmolested by the axe of the settler; when I know how dearly purchased the safe navigation of that river has been by the blood of many worthy Virginians; when I see that no longer any Aborigines are to be found there, and that the vast herds of elks, deer and buffaloes which once pastured on these hills and in these valleys, making for themselves great roads to the several salt-springs, have ceased to exist; when I reflect that all this grand portions of our Union, instead of being in a state of nature, is now more or less covered with villages, farms, and towns, where the din of hammers and machinery is constantly heard; that the woods are fast disappearing under the axe by day, and the fire by night; that hundreds of steam-boats are gliding to and fro, over the whole length of the majestic river, forcing commerce to take root and to prosper at every spot; when I see the surplus population of Europe coming to assist in the destruction of the forest, and transplanting civilization into its darkest recesses;—when I remember that these extraordinary changes have all taken place in the short period of twenty years, I pause, wonder, and although I know all to be fact, can scarcely believe its reality. (522-23)

This long sentence whose expulsion of everything—sympathies for Virginians, but also Aborigines; for the Union, but also Nature—seems to drive forward settlement and destruction while decrying it. The difference between these pairings of civilization and wilderness finally become indeterminable as Audubon characterizes the cutting down of trees as the transplanting of new populations, all these caught up in the stream of a magnificent organic process of manifest Nature rather than manifest destiny. And in the last, shallow susurrations of its breath, Audubon's sentiment is strangely nonchalant, his wonder and amazement is without condemnation nor praise, or rather it is mixed with all these things. In his exuberance for his adopted country and the perishability of her natural wonders, Audubon both praises and laments, both sympathizes and executes mercilessly, and the schizophrenia of his writings lies in its unexamined enthusiasm for life *and* death, that informs natural history representations.

In a similar way, Audubon's bird drawings also register the coupling of life-and-death, cause-and-effect, in its spectacular rendering of prey—both in Audubon's hunt and, often, the hunt of the bird. As Christoph Irscher argues, Audubon's drawings show an *awareness* of the destruction behind their creation by their very artfulness and by their depiction so often in scenes of death or proximity to death; "Audubon's bird drawings represent, rather than present, images 'drawn,' withdrawn, 'from nature'" (*V* 1)<sup>6</sup>. There is an eye for the violent beauty of life "rendered

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manifest destiny. Audubon's treatment of his pet birds also serves to illustrate his sense of "non-issue." In one instance of a trumpeter swan kept as a pet but who made frequent escapes, he writes: "Pet birds, good Reader, no matter of what species they are, seldom pass their lives in accordance with the wishes of their possessors; in the course of a dark and rainy night, one of the servants having left the gate open, Trumpeter made his escape, and was never again heard of" (514). Just as he registers the cruelty of killing birds and the blood lost for the Union without pausing, Audubon also registers Trumpeter's captivity and escape (paralleling captivity and slave narratives) with a similarly superficial gesture.

6 Irscher traces this method of the violent rendering of natural history subjects from Audubon back to Catesby:

at the moment of kill" in Audubon's drawings that, as Elisa New puts it, depicts "that taut interval of locked attention and delicate response that makes the artist and hunter kin: both mortal framers of scarce time, both running the same temporal race that overtakes their subjects" (81). This sense of violent potentiality, of dispensable agency to kill or not kill that may puncture through sooner and sooner the slight tissue separating life from death, individuality from intimate penetration, this sense of power over another's temporality and one's own mortality so proximate, so eerily predicted in another's demise, is the thrill that vibrates in Audubon's erotics of the hunt, which are not with the lovely bird that he finds in her nest, but with the slight shiver of exhalation that escapes at last in the "fresh killed" or the finally overtaken tracts of wild frontier, each succumbing to the logic of the gun—point, aim, and shoot, and die—and of sentimentality.

This is the same cause-and-effect logic that marks concepts of the Anthropocene which foretell the accelerating pace of environmental change and species extinction as a temporal race set in motion by human contrivances and actions. The temporality of an artist-hunter, however, does not only run the course of the scarce and fleet time of mortality, but also hits the standstill of what Dickinson calls "a Loaded Gun"—"For I have the power to kill, / Without—the power to die." As with critical claims of human agency to think and act collectively to face environmental change, the artist-hunter is at once a figure of individual mortality and the ideal immortality of species survival. The deathlessness of the gun is a species thinking that biological and vitalist science would like to preserve along with its cold rationality, its technological prowess, that might somehow release the strung-up time to run again at a slower pace with a well-aimed shot. The paradoxical life and death and power of the artist-hunter's at once fleet and frozen art returns us to a nature that is again and again represented by this conjunction of natural history description and aesthetic representation in the captive moment. With Audubon's avocet, we see how the idea of capturing nature, of a mimesis that captivates and accounts for nature, is one that stalls its running course with a scheme of sentimental or sensual attachment and along with calculated management of logistics, numbers, and results. Audubon's natural history illustration and writings are both an aesthetics and a science, and it captures not only nature but a certain relation to and view of nature that depends upon an illusion of true accounts, the artist-hunter's unerring aim, and the connective, contaminating logic of cause-and-effect.

Audubon's works gesture toward a natural history that conceives of representing Nature as an authentic portrait, or better, a virtuous "nude." An instance where Audubon actually does draw a nude portrait offers this elucidation of natural history representation. In a letter to his wife, Audubon relates his experience in New Orleans meeting a woman who solicits him to draw her portrait based on his reputation as an artist-naturalist:

"have you ever Drawn a full figure" Yes "*Naked*" had I been shot with a 48 pounder through the Heart my articulating Powers could not have been more suddenly stopped. "well why do you not answer" I answered Yes....Said, "I want you to draw my Likeness and the whole of my form naked but as I think you cannot work now, leave your Port Folio and return in one hour be silent."

...She open<sup>d</sup> the door and I felt like a Bird that makes his escape from a strong Cage, filled with sweet Meats. (887)

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"Catesby's Flamingo nicely, if most probably without the artist's intention, points to a tendency in later natural history discourse, in which the desire to simulate, to present nature "as it really is" increasingly has to come to terms with a conflicting awareness that in order to "present" one needs to construct, to represent nature—to do violence to it, as we shall see, in a figurative and often in a literal sense" (V 1).

This is a letter left out of the nineteenth-century publications of his journals and other writings, but now included in the endnotes to the collection of Audubon's writings edited by Irmscher, which preserves the idiosyncrasies and detours of his writing style and thus also Audubon's intent in presenting nature. The details of Audubon's encounter with the woman could not be more intriguing, shrouded at it is in secrecy—by the woman's command that Audubon tell no one of the portrait, her name, or her residence, by publication history, by the nude drawing itself, which has not been located, and by the ways Audubon and Mrs. André (as he called her) chose to memorialize each other in their "souvenirs"—the woman by inscribing his name in the shadows of the drawing and Audubon by engraving hers on a hidden part of the gun she gave him as payment.

The eroticism of their encounter—her pronouncement of "Naked" and Audubon's trepidation of such "sweet Meats"—is quite apparent, but also notable is how the roles of painter and object, naturalist and bird, switch and eventually commingle indeterminately. Though it is clear that the woman's discreteness has to do with protecting her vulnerability—she must literally expose herself to a male gaze *and* face potential social repercussions—Audubon's narration puts himself in the position of vulnerability as the object of *her* gaze. *He* is the prey shot through the heart, *he* is the bird in a cage enticed by treats; while she has the power of speech and manipulation. Irmscher reads this encounter as "Audubon's *ars poetica*," a narrative that would represent his later encounters where the object of art—the woman in this case, and the birds and other specimens in his portfolio work—resists his control.<sup>7</sup> Audubon's and Mrs. André's engagement with one another, however, is not simply a reversal:

I finished my Drawing, or rather she did for when I returned every day I allways found the work much advanced, she touch<sup>d</sup> it she said not because she was fatigued of my company daily but because She felt happy in mingling her talents with mine in a piece She had had contemplation to have done... (Audubon 888)

In Audubon's view, the work was a joint production, not one in which he and she contributed patchwork-like to the drawing at different stages and sections, but where their talents intimately mixed together on paper. Do we take the eroticism of this work—as well as Audubon's own admission, "I could not well reconcile all the feelings that were necessary to draw well, without mingling with them some of a very different nature—" (887)—as a sign of Audubon's *adultery* or as the *unadulterated* and honest depiction of a woman? After all, this was in a letter to Lucy Audubon, his wife of twelve years past and twenty-five more years to come, and both explanations are possible. To respond to Irmscher, one cannot deny that every bird that Audubon drew was also a bird that he killed or at least positioned in its inert form. If the bird resists, it is not because it actually resists but because Audubon would like to believe that his drawing is as much drawn from Nature and by Nature as it is from and by himself, that Mrs. André's drawing is as much drawn by her as it is by him.

But perhaps overlooked is why Mrs. André chooses Audubon to draw her nude portrait in the first place. In their painting, nudity and nature overlap; it is as much an illustration of Audubon's *Birds of America* as it is a nude portrait. Almost as an afterthought, Audubon explains how she surveyed him both before and during the work:

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7 Irmscher, "Audubon the Writer": "In his story, Audubon fails at drawing the lady's portrait, especially when it turns out that she wants to be depicted in the nude. The lady finally takes the chalk from him and finishes the picture for him; as a reward, she gives him a gun, as if to restore, symbolically, his impaired masculinity. This clever short story is, in fact, almost a master narrative for Audubon's later encounters with birds in which the object—the bird, that is—more often than not resists his attempts to control it."

it is well that I should say that She had had heard of me in a circle a few days after I had taken the B.C. Likeness and of my collection of Birds....and that she ask<sup>d</sup> me to try my veracity—that she employed a servant to watch my ways and that for several nights this servant had remained very late to see if I absented from the Boat and that in fact She knew every Step I had taken since the day She had resolved on employing me....She praised the few drawings of Birds I shewed her the first day and assured me that She had no doubt I would be well recompensed for such a Collection— (889)

"Veracity" could denote character—the virtuousness of a person in terms of their fidelity to the truth, or perhaps their fidelity in general—as well as expertise in terms of the accuracy of a representation; and when Mrs. André tries or tests Audubon's "veracity" it is clear that both are at stake. She is concerned about his moral behavior and disclosures, and also ascertains his scientific abilities based on his previous drawing—of people, yes, but just as importantly, of birds. Of Audubon's drawings that she could have asked to see, Mrs. André only viewed his portfolio of birds though she could very well have asked to see portraits or even have him sketch her on the spot before she formally requested his services as he had done in other instances. It is precisely that "collection of birds" that affirms Audubon's veracity for her. When she poses for him the first time, she tells him, "...come, come, I am anxious to see the outline you will make, take time and be sure do not embellish any parts With your brilliant Imagination..." (Audubon 887). What she wants, in other words, is an unembellished, plain drawing of herself—a nude in the nude—and she chooses not a portrait-painter but a naturalist who specializes in drawing birds because it is the naturalist who views the object as it is and attempts to draw it as it is—"nature as it existed" (Audubon 754). At the same time, this accuracy meshes with Audubon's "specificity"—the differentiation of species that will differentiate Mrs. André from the birds, while also treating her as nature, or in the nude—but one that finds him viewing and re-viewing his experience as if he were a bird. Audubon wants to represent his "seeing" as specific and accurate. Whether he truly succeeds—whether their drawing of her has that veracity, whether Audubon's birds are natural—might be measured by whether we consider his encounter with Mrs. André adulterous or unadulterated. Audubon's "mingling" is both and obsessed with both. His natural history is naked Nature. It is a nudity that is both the transgressive adulteration *and* the veracious rendering of natural history.

### *The Nude: Description, Deshabille, and the Natural*

In his essay on nudity, Giorgio Agamben can offer no representation of the nude except that which presents only elusive or partial expressions. What is the nude but the asymptotic line toward which an endless striptease strips and strips but never reaches. What is the nude but some fleet moment of undress between the grace of a paradisiacal body and the transgression that knows its nakedness as privation; one moment an innocence that does not know its nakedness as anything other than clothing of God, to the next moment a stark nakedness that must be covered up. What is the nude but our first and most original, most bare, nature? What is nudity but *this*:

The matheme of nudity is, in this sense, simply this: *haecce!* there is nothing other than this. Yet it is precisely the disenchantment of beauty in the experience of nudity, this sublime but also miserable exhibition of appearance beyond all mystery and all meaning, that can somehow defuse the theological apparatus and allow us to see, beyond the prestige of grace and the chimeras of corrupt nature, a simple, inapparent human body. The deactivation of this apparatus retroactively operates, therefore, as much on nature as

on grace, as much on nudity as on clothing, liberating them from their theological signature. This simple dwelling of appearance in the absence of secrets is its special trembling—it is nudity that, like the choirboy's "white" voice, signifies nothing and, precisely for this reason, manages to penetrate us. (N 90)

The nude, as Agamben traces it, is deeply imbricated with and obscured by a Christian theological apparatus which associates together denudation, sin, and knowledge—Adam and Eve only become aware of their nakedness after tasting the fruit of knowledge—and on the flip side, Edenic nudity, purity, and innocence that glorifies God. Following one strain of titillation with the corrupt, Agamben points to sadism as the desire to capture its victim in a state of ungracefulness—that is, of naked corporeality. In the hands of the sadist, stripping becomes a controlled performance that exposes and coerces vulnerability but lacks the sheer freedom necessary for complete nakedness. On the other hand, following the strain of purity is the desultory idealism of fashion which Agamben calls "the profane heir of the theology of clothing, the mercantile secularization of the prelapsarian Edenic condition" (N 80) that even when it strips its models and mannequins bare is still wearing style. Neither sadism nor fashion, neither "chimeras of corrupt nature" nor "the prestige of grace"—and indeed, they seem to converge into one chimera—offer a view of the nude as a "simple, inapparent human body" that hides nothing and offers itself up for knowability without recrimination.

Instead, there is only "this"—a curmudgeonly substance of pure facticity—a kind of thing that Agamben leaves as an exclamation *haecce!* an expulsion of breath, which draws on the philosophical concept of haecceity but is yet not substantial. As a "simple dwelling of appearance" that signifies nothing and has no secrets, Agamben's *haecce!* resembles Adorno's semblance—the inner-historical essence that is second nature which alludes to and attends to the structure of, without being, first nature—that is, nudity. Fittingly, Agamben presents a natural history object as an exemplary nude of our times:

In truth, there is only baring, only the infinite gesticulations that remove clothing and grace from the body. Nudity in our culture ends up looking like the beautiful feminine nude that Clemente Susini created in wax for the Grand Duke of Tuscany's Museum of Natural History. One can remove the layers of this anatomical model one at a time, allowing first the abdominal and pectoral walls to appear, then the array of lungs and viscera still covered by the greater omentum, then the heart and the intestines, until finally, inside the womb, one can make out a small fetus. But no matter how much we open the wax model and scrutinize it with our gaze, the naked body of the beautiful, disemboweled woman remains obstinately unobtainable. Hence the impurity, almost the sacredness, that seems to inhere in this wax model. Like nature, nudity is impure because it is accessible only by the removal of clothes (grace). (N 79)

"Like nature." "Impure." "[T]he beautiful, disemboweled woman." Nudity is bare-nakedness; it is not nature, it is like nature, it is natural history. Here, the feminine nude is the too classical form of Venus Naturalis; an ideal figure that we recognize in ancient Greek statues and Italian Renaissance paintings, and in American neoclassical sculpture like Hiram Powers' *Eve Tempted*.<sup>8</sup> Powers' *Eve Tempted* displays a nineteenth-century fascination with that same moment of nudity and purity between the grace of the paradisiacal body and the sin of nakedness that Agamben

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8 See also Kenneth Clark's *The Nude*, which is a survey of the nude in art that revolves around the still ideal, but also considered natural form of the human body in the concept of the Venus Naturalis—a goddess given human shape, the unattainable celestial or sublime ideal brought down to its closest earthly and vulgar form in the feminine body with balance, weight, proportionality, rhythm, and unself-conscious sensuality.

fixates upon. The classic nude, its unblemished white marble whether an exemplary whole or excavated as broken statuary that evokes its prior wholeness, holds that moment of purity captive. And indeed, Powers' other famous statue *The Greek Slave* emblemizes that *captive* moment in a Greek woman captured by Turks even as it exposes her to the slave block. Her appeal is not, then, in her absolute purity but in the immanence or proximity of violation to chastity. Likewise, as beautiful and classic as her exterior shell is, Susini's wax model becomes a grotesque form of disembowelment and exposed organs that is, however, accurately molded and organized to fit perfectly into her for the purposes of examination and study. As with *Eve Tempted* and *The Greek Slave*, her recumbent body exhibits the tension between a beatified ideal aesthetic and scientific form and its potential or explicit violation.<sup>9</sup> She is a something like a preserved cadaver made of wax, but she is not dead and the expression on her face is one of either religious ecstasy or arousal.

Agamben's description, like Audubon's, is excavational and erotic—delving and dissecting deeper into a concavity that yields no end. The bareness promised by the waxen woman ends up a multiplying surface of folds and furrows that stymies the archaeological task. If we can put aside Agamben's impulse for penetration that remains deeply dependent on a sacred hermeneutics for a kind of engagement—a description—that glosses and glazes over, that allows its object of desire and veracity to be undesirable and imperfect; if we can let that object spread out as it is, what would we see? This woman, this natural history form. Not the vulnerable and entreating enigma of those white statues with their missing limbs, not the sacred figure, not the beautiful, not even the ugly, but the plainly gross deformation, the disabled human body. Gross in the entirety and plenary of grossness where there is nothing unobtainable because it is all there. Susini's Medical Venus is not merely for medical doctors but for everyone, for whoever should wish to peruse her body and come upon it in a space for public education. Her openness, however, remains molded and enclosed in the ideal form of the classic nude and the scientific model. And as Powers' classic nudes suggest, the nineteenth-century American nude dwells inescapably in that tension of the ideal, the erotic, and the natural historical.

The common intent in seeing "*this!*"—in seeing *nature*—that is demonstrated by the entangling of the nude and natural history representation perhaps finds its deepest expression in nineteenth-century American natural history aesthetics which, in a sense, capitalize on a national character of plainspoken woodsiness so typified and popularized by the Leatherstocking series of James Fenimore Cooper. In *The Environmental Imagination*, Lawrence Buell writes of the commitment in nature writing to accurate description or descriptive actuality, and the fruitful tension between facticity and aesthetics, which is an element in all writing, becomes a heightened double-bind for the genre. This "dual accountability to matter and to discursive mentation" (Buell 92) is on one hand beholden to a transparent objectivity that separates the world (that is, nature) from itself for viewing, and on the other an aesthetic stylization that both enhances ordinary perception and bridges language and the object-world. *The Environmental Imagination* offers a survey of nature-writing that "taxonomizes" its characteristics and "genealogizes" its literary kinships with almanacs, natural theology, the picturesque, natural history, and travel narratives, and its textbook-like plenum succeeds in mirroring Buell's fundamental divide between the text and the world, subject and object, self and nature. This emphasis on a gap between self and other entities in the environment has led to ecocritical

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9 Edgar Allan Poe's beautiful, dead women and the awareness of grave robbers and body-snatching in his short stories are another index of the nineteenth-century conjunction of ideal, moralized aesthetics and science, but in the Gothic mode.

approaches that might be understood to diverge into ones that requires a strict objectivity and others that choose to narrativize or theorize relational formations of ecology.<sup>10</sup>

And yet if the natural history that I have been discussing is not a mirror nor an opaque barrier between self and other, but a kind of lens, in that it is a semblance of the world, it has less to do with division or genre than with some fuzzy thing that is indivisible and also unbridgeable—a region—and a way of seeing that does not separate but glosses and blurs without losing distinction. Its diminishment renders an ecology of obscurity, a form of relations that is based on sketchy outlines and dissolving views. We might see regionalist local color as simply one more of the generic types Buell has laid out, and another expression of the classificatory impulse of knowledge production, but these "genres" and "types" are often hard to distinguish from one another. As Thoreau's writings will show, natural history in the nineteenth century is a motley form of scientific information, anecdote, and local color that emanate the potential to refuse knowledge for something else—a nonappropriative intimacy, a non-isolated and naked nature. How do we see "*this!*"—how do we see nudity?

### *Revising Transcendental Natural History, Revising Bodies*

In calling both Audubon's drawings and writings, as well as Thoreau's writings, "natural history sketches," I want to align their work with developments within natural history that differentiated it from the methods of modern science and merged it with the more anecdotal travel narrative that is closely related to later nineteenth-century regionalist local-color sketches. As Buell has noted, these genres of writing all constitute forms of environmental literature, that is, they attempt to represent and render the environment; and in the texts I've selected, they also go further than mimesis to critically emphasize a practice of seeing and relating to nature itself. In his own *Travels*, published in 1791 and influential on both sides of the Atlantic, William Bartram articulated the parameters and methods of an anecdotal natural history. Evaluating the work of previous natural historians on bird species, Bartram writes:

But these authors have done very little towards elucidating the subject of the migration of birds, or accounting for the annual appearance and disappearance, and vanishing of these beautiful and entertaining beings, who visit us at certain stated seasons. Catesby has said very little on this curious subject; but Edwards more, and perhaps all, or as much as could be said in truth, by the most able and ingenious, who had not the advantage and opportunity of ocular observation; which can only be acquired by travelling, and residing a whole year at least in the various climates from north to south, to the full extent of their peregrinations; or minutely examining the tracts and observations of curious and industrious travellers who have published their memoirs on this subject. There may perhaps be some persons who consider this enquiry not to be productive of any real benefit to mankind, and pronounce such attention to natural history

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10 Object-oriented ontology, a version of the former, attempts to relinquish the object to its otherness, to, in Timothy Morton's description of ecology without nature, "love the...mute, objectified quality of the object, its radical nonidentity. Nature is *not* a mirror of our mind" (186). Such an ontology imagines all objects as free and autonomous, much like a theoretical schematic of floating atoms or a utopian libertarian society, and its version of realism is the reality that is so real it cannot be represented at all, the idea that one can know of the ontological certainty of another being by virtue of it being available only in the negative, through what Graham Harman calls its "opacity." The latter approaches include Bruno Latour's scenographic sociology that tries to narrate the multiple and overlapping corresponding involvements between human and nonhuman actors or Karen Barad's entanglement of thought and world.

merely speculative, and only fit to amuse and entertain the idle virtuoso... (236)  
For Bartram, natural history requires a dedicated, but also liberal observation—lengthy, meticulous, broadly spanning, in the field *and* in the archives—and observation as he says can be considered both "ocular" and "speculative." Both of these words have their roots in vision; ocular denotes the eye and the visual sensorium of an empirical approach, while speculative also derives from looking, but suggests a derivation of that looking that is not altogether grounded in the sight seen, but also the mind's vision. What *also* makes such an observation both ocular and speculative is, of course, that the subject in view is one that appears and *disappears*, a migrating bird, an evanescence, or, to borrow from Emerson, "a beautiful estate—no more."<sup>11</sup>

Audubon's work remains within the purview of a pursuit in which knowledge appears obtainable and representable in a portfolio of birds; however, its attention to both empirical observation and *anecdote*, as well as its unsutured gaze at the life and *death* of its subjects, opens a loophole into another view that incorporates mortality into its sense of what is seen and known. Audubon's insistence on presenting the aliveness of his subjects, marks an aporetic gap between life and death, however close they may be. What would it look like to enter into that gap and render loss and casualty *as* life? I'll turn now to Thoreau to show how the natural history sketch becomes a *regionalist* sketch through its diminishing vision and the tenuous lines of sight that that affords.

In *Cape Cod*, drafted from journal entries on his occasional visits spanning from October 1849 to June 1857, Thoreau's descriptions of the shifting boundaries of the seashore present a natural history view where Nature, though perhaps still rapacious, is also eroding and elusive. A haphazard and posthumous compilation of natural history and local color, *Cape Cod* also recursively meditates upon Nature's nakedness by returning again and again to corpses washed onto the shores and the optical ebbs and flows that beset the eye in these littoral zones. Where Audubon's descriptive technique strives for the one-to-one correspondence of a direct line of sight that strikes the heart, Thoreau's natural history description, too, sees its object but as one multiply refracted; a description of diminishment.

Thoreau submitted five articles on Cape Cod to *Putnam's* in 1852. Finally published in three installments (which comprise the first four chapters of the book) in 1855, the Cape Cod articles fit into the magazine genre of travel writing and local color fiction, but unauthorized cuts to those pieces led Thoreau to withdraw the remainder of his text. After his death in 1862, his sister Sophia Thoreau and the poet Ellery Channing edited the Cape Cod magazine pieces, as well as further writing he had done after 1852, to posthumously publish the texts as *Cape Cod*. Although Thoreau could not oversee this publication, critics have understood the dispersed form of the text as appropriate to its content, whether as a memorial to death, as wreckage, or regional travel writing.<sup>12</sup> As nature writing, *Cape Cod* is both conventional in its magazine genre and

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11 We can think of "Experience" as the essay registering Emerson's sense of the world that refuses one's transcendentalism; since the loss of the beloved repudiates one own desire to memorialize; the mortality of others is the reminder that one's world is filled with other beings who reject and elude one's ability to compose them.

12 In general, Thoreau's writings published in magazines like *Putnam's* (on Cape Cod) and *Sartain's Union Magazine* (on Ktaadn) may be read as regionalist travel writing, and they have been written about as such by Lawrence Buell in *New England Literary Culture* and by William W. Stowe, "Doing History on Vacation: "Ktaadn" and The Country of the Pointed Firs," who interestingly compares Thoreau to Jewett as writers for a growing "vacation" culture but with different interests in their concept of history—a backwoods adventure narrative on cosmic and national history in Thoreau and village sketches on family history and genealogy ("racial history") in Jewett. See also Breitwieser, "Henry David Thoreau and the Wrecks on Cape Cod" in *National Melancholy for Cape Cod's* form as a memorial to death and decay, and Lowney, "Thoreau's Cape Cod:



extraordinary in the purview of natural history because it transforms its conventional form into a meditation and experiment on natural history's observational and descriptive powers.

In *Cape Cod*, Thoreau's observations of the scavenging and salvaging of natural resources and wrecked debris become the basis for a way of seeing. These relics and remains include, as I noted, the bodies of shipwrecked passengers. Of a girl from the *St. John*, which had departed from Galway, Ireland and wrecked on October 8th, 1849 just off Cohasset beach, Thoreau reports:

I saw many marble feet and matted heads as the cloths were raised, and one livid, swollen, and mangled body of a drowned girl,—who probably had intended to go out to service in some American family,—to which some rags still adhered, with a string, half concealed by the flesh, about its swollen neck; the coiled-up wreck of a human hulk, gashed by the rocks or fishes, so that the bone and muscle were exposed, but quite bloodless,—merely red and white,—with wide-open and staring eyes, yet lustreless, dead-lights. (C 7)

I want to dwell for a moment on the description of this body which identifies her as a girl and even ventures a digression into her biography, before relinquishing her to flesh; she is no longer human but a human "hulk," bloodless and hefty as stone, her staring eyes having the blank quality of marble statues. However, unlike Hiram Powers' sculptures and Agamben's Venus, she is presented here as enmeshed with the shore and battered by the sea that has tossed her up. She is an unideal, ravaged subject thoroughly violated by the very nature of which she is part. Further, the rags and tiny cord of string adhering to her body mark the dwindling claims of humanity that clothing accords. The search for bodies in *Cape Cod* is also the search for knowledge, of whereabouts and wherefores, and there is a way in which the description of the naked body pursues a thread of revelation, and of knowledge, that is stymied by unyielding and obdurate flesh. The naked body is a moment of exposure but also of obscurity. Unlike Audubon's avoset in which excessive closeness yields the sentimental similitude of her half-closed eyes, dreaming, Thoreau's corpse with her lustreless, open eyes does not allow the viewer to see himself in her eyes and forces the viewer, instead, to confront exposure and bareness.

Such a view, I would like to stress, depends on the environmental conditions that have mangled and swollen her body, and also other environmental conditions that affect vision itself. for which I turn to another description of a corpse to illustrate. During his July 1855 walk on the beach at Truro, Thoreau reminisces of an experience among the relics of another wreck from 1850:

Objects on the beach, whether men or inanimate things, look not only exceedingly grotesque, but much larger and more wonderful than they actually are...Once also it was my business to go in search of the relics of a human body, mangled by sharks, which had just been cast up, a week after a wreck....Close at hand they were simply some bones with a little flesh adhering to them, in fact, only a slight inequality in the sweep of the shore. There was nothing remarkable about them, and they were singularly inoffensive both to the senses and the imagination. But as I stood there they grew more and more imposing. They were alone with the beach and the sea, whose hollow roar seemed addressed to them, and I was impressed as if there was an understanding between them and the ocean which necessarily left me out, with my snivelling sympathies. (C 123-124)

Thoreau's business was to search for the remains and property of the Ossolis—Margaret Fuller, her husband the Marchese Ossoli, their son Angelo, and Fuller's manuscript on the Italian

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The Unsettling Art of the Wrecker," for *Cape Cod's* aesthetic and commercial form as wreckage.

Revolution. They had drowned returning to the United States from Italy when their ship the *Elizabeth* wrecked off the coast of Long Island on July 19, 1850. Although the child's body and articles of clothing belonging to the Ossolis were found, the bodies of Fuller and her husband, as well as the manuscript, were never recovered. The corpse Thoreau describes here was the last body found. As with Irish girl whose body leads only to a mangled knowledge of who she is, the attempt to recover Fuller's body fails to substantiate the *habeas corpus* of empirical claims since all that is found is the sketchy remains of flesh clinging to a few bones.

Thoreau's fascination with the relics cast onto the shores from shipwrecks pervades *Cape Cod* and the outstandingness of this description, culled from a location outside of Cape Cod and inserted into this piece, seems to fill in the absence of Fuller's corpse with the descriptions of other corpses in the text. And yet there is a sense that bodies such as this *do* show something else. The corpses in Thoreau's description grow large and alien—no longer recognizable as human persons, but only as human "hulk" and exposed flesh and bone. His interpolated description of the 1850 corpse depends in part on the optical effect of objects stranded on the smooth expanse of the beach which lacks other features to indicate proportion, and in part on the sheer deformation of the body stripped, torn open, and chewed away. This deformation is, of course, particular to the landscape Thoreau has chosen for his journey, and it is a deformation that is ultimately a kind of diminishment, a wearing away, that though it grows larger to the eye, is the enlarged view of something diminishing. The constant erosion of sand and lapping of waves that marks these settings is another expression of the diminishment of bodies and masses. As Naomi Miller notes, the distortions are both internal (to the eye) and external (as part of the environment), and in view of the *Elizabeth* corpse, "...the external distortion in this case serves to focus his internal perception, so that he is affected by the remains not because they are 'individual and private,' but because they are impersonal, majestic, and wholly in unity with the boundless ocean" (189). A further distortion is that of the fragment itself which alters the view of *Franklin* wreck with that of the *Elizabeth*, a distortion which marks that text as a whole as a patchwork, salvage job. For Miller, distortion becomes a focalizing technique of what she calls the "sauntering eye" that is able to look and not get caught up with looking so that the scene instead "reacts on the life of the seer" (189) who synthesizes everything—"It is a question of perspective shaping perception until one can see without looking, and thus view the unified whole instead of the measurable parts" (191).

However, as an optical effect, the view of the corpse does not necessarily depend on the viewer's transcendent seeing but on environmental participation. Searching for the corpse, he calls it a "mirage," writing, "I expected that I must look very narrowly to find so small an object, but the sandy beach, half a mile wide, and stretching farther than the eye could reach, was so perfectly smooth and bare, and the mirage toward the sea so magnifying, that when I was half a mile distant the insignificant sliver which marked the spot looked like a beached spar, and the relics were as conspicuous as if they lay in state on that sandy plain, or a generation had labored to pile up their cairn there" (C 123-4). The seemingly bare, limitless shore suggests a Nature impassive toward the meager artifices of humanity, whether they are the mere remnant of a body or of a civilization. Yet Thoreau's interest in this view as a mirage reflects a sense that Nature doesn't abandon or destroy the human as a body separate from it but *participates* in this image of the human, if by indirections and deflections. A mirage is a natural phenomenon that occurs when air temperature differences bend light rays so as to displace the image of an object, making it seem as if an object were higher or lower, reversed laterally, or even enlarged, as in this case, or shimmering. Mirages depend upon atmospheric anomalies and contingencies—calm waters,

reflective surfaces, location and altitude of view, strata of air pressure and temperature—that must be in synchrony for such an illusion to occur—similar, in other words, to the kinds of atmospheric coordinates that must coincide for stormy weather and shipwrecks. Thoreau's mirage, here, renders the human relics so eminently "conspicuous" as objects of deterioration and exposure to these contingencies. The environmental optics of *Cape Cod*, which take the fluctuations of elements as the windblown lens of its distortive effects, suggest, then, ecological refractions and relations structured by accident—contingencies that engender relations of vulnerability and casualty shared *across* the spectrum of viewers and viewed.

Thoreau's optics contrast the cause-and-effect linear diagram of vision in which light rays bounce from object to eye, that is, the kind of optics and one-sided vulnerability that Audubon's sketches relies upon with a shot aimed at its prey. As Karen Barad notes of how optics inform our sense of subject-object relations, the geometrical optics of simple angles assumes the objectivity of the image that bounces back from a mirror. It also assumes, then, an ontological separation of the subject and object. Because we see our reflection in a mirror, we think that vision works by bouncing off reflective surfaces, separating the "self" that is reflected from the "other" surface of the mirror, and further, we believe that what we see is exactly this "mirror effect," that we may see something in an undistorted, objective way. Barad proposes, instead, a "physical optics" of *diffraction* that takes the nature of light and lens into account, that is, an optics that refuses to reduce nature into simplified variables of light and geometrical angles. Her emphasis on technological apparati and circumstantial mediation proposes an account of phenomena as fully entangled intra-actions between subjects (viewers and viewed, humans and nonhumans):

Diffraction, understood using quantum physics, is not just a matter of interference, but of entanglement, an ethico-onto-epistemological matter. This difference is very important. It underlines the fact that knowing is a direct material engagement, a cutting together-apart, where cuts do violence but also open up and rework the agential conditions of possibility. There is not this knowing from a distance. Instead of there being a separation of subject and object, there is an entanglement of subject and object, which is called the "phenomenon." Objectivity, instead of being about offering an undistorted mirror image of the world, is about accountability to marks on bodies, and responsibility to the entanglements of which we are a part. (52)

For Barad, however, accountability and responsibility are not what we would normally think of them as a debit and credit system or an eye-for-an-eye justice, but rather a kind of open-ended and ongoing intra-action among all partakers. There is still a differentiation or "cut" between participants, but it is one that does not separate them into different spheres but holds them together in their differences. As her term, "ethico-onto-epistemological matter" indicates, Barad conceives of how we see, what we see, and the virtues derived from those standards of seeing as indelibly blotted together, such that any phenomenon is always an event or becoming of many ongoing relations. Through this description of optical phenomenon, she presents a sense of densely intermeshed environmental relations made visible through optics itself. And this is an approach she shares with new materialists like Bruno Latour who emphasizes the relationality between subjects and objects through what he calls a "scenography" of their networks of action.

But Barad and Latour's scenography assume a certain ease of making relations visible and legible, of making descriptions describe; and assume a transparency and plenitude of experience that they borrow from turn-of-the-century philosophers like William James. Thoreau's mirage-view, however, presents a diminished view of experience and ecology—a set of relations

between subjects that we are, indeed, hard-pressed to relate to—even to know—, so that ecological relations seem too slight or even too large to detect. Further, Thoreau's view, especially the last one, seems to leave himself out: "They were alone with the beach and the sea...and I was impressed as if there was an understanding...which necessarily left me out." In effect, he eschews his own "snivelling sympathies" in face of a far blander and boring sight—"nothing remarkable" and "singularly inoffensive," the desolate scene is entirely equanimous and sufficient. Its circuit of expression encompassing the beach, the sea, and the body has a sense of completion and prosaicness that rolls into the diurnal turns and shifts of the earth. At the same time, however, the scene also arranges itself differently, by density or stolid weight, the shifting of residue and sand. The description imbricates the remains into its background or foreground by the flattening of sedimented layers of relation between entities—"they grew more and more imposing," "I was impressed"—so that objects *and* viewers compact, wear down, and incorporate into their surroundings and each other with a geologic pressure. Those things that would appeal to aesthetic and pathetic sensibilities have not been accentuated; those that would mar them have not been glossed over. We see the naked "wreck of a human hulk" in all its grotesqueness; but it is a grotesque that does not stand out but also does not entirely disappear and fits into the sweep of the landscape, that ultimately impresses its viewer into its sweep as well.

The muted wonder of this perspective, its unwonderful or awful wonder, comes forth in Thoreau's account of what little he could find pertaining to Fuller. In his letter to Emerson from Fire Island Beach, Thoreau describes the particulars of her drowning based on reports from survivors of the wreck:

At flood tide, about half past three o'clock, when the ship broke up entirely, they came out of the forecabin, and Margaret sat with her back to the foremast, with her hands on her knees, her husband and child already drowned. A great wave came and washed her aft. The steward (?) had just before taken her child and started for shore. Both were drowned.<sup>13</sup> (in Sanborn)

No body; only these words. Thoreau's letter is brief and business-like; his report of Fuller's drowning retells her last moments without snuffles and without ornamentation. There is no aesthetic framing or illumination of the drowning. There is no oratorical praise of Fuller's courage in the last moments when her husband and child had already drowned and she sat alone waiting for her own end. The only sign of any grief or hiccup is in Thoreau's redundant announcement of Angelo's drowning; perhaps he compiled the story from two sources, two angles—each which strove to see Fuller sitting against the foremast after her husband and son had drowned, no, after the steward and her son had drowned. His letter to Emerson offers a description of what happened, a description from two angles as through the refractions of a prism.

This is a view of a woman alone with her sinking sense of despair transmuted into not humanity's triumph, but a composed decomposition, a telluric and gravitational tendency for falling apart. An 1861 retrospective on Fuller in *Harper's Magazine* declares that "[t]he word '*fragmentary*' seems best to characterize all that related to her," and goes on to decry the fragmentary nature of the posthumous biography which "should seem to deal with her living spirit as the pitiless waves did with her mortal frame" (Giles 222). Edited by Emerson, James Freeman Clarke, and William Henry Channing, Fuller's biography incorporated her own

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13 Letter XIII from Fire Island Beach, July 25, 1850 in F.B. Sanborn, "The Emerson-Thoreau Correspondence." The "(?)" is part of the transcription of Thoreau's manuscript.

memoirs, letters, and journal entries, as well as essays and poetry by others on Fuller rather than presenting her life in one cohesive narrative. Because her outspoken advocacy for women's rights and her personal love affair could lead to public detraction, the editors heavily censored and reworded her writings and focused on presenting and "recuperating" her personality rather than illustrating her critical and intellectual work. Although one could argue that any portrait would necessarily be inaccurate and fragmentary, and that any life necessarily and inevitably falls apart to the vagaries of opinion and history as Fuller's did, the *Harper's* comments are worth noting for their attention to how the circumstances of Fuller's death lent themselves to the decomposition of her public persona; that is, how wreckage and drowning shapes and deforms a human personality, especially a woman as the figure for the dehumanized human body.<sup>14</sup> Fuller's biographical and figural persona ties into and meshes with a nineteenth-century fascination with the woman stranded and exposed to littoral vagaries, which encompasses Thoreau's rendering of corpses washed up onto beaches in *Cape Cod*, as well as others through that moment as we will see later—Melville's Hunilla to Jewett's "Joanna."

In *Cape Cod*, Thoreau's natural history description of corpses points to an inhumanism. The circuit of relation between the human body and its landscape disregards, or more simply takes no notice of, a pathos and a humanist attempt to reclaim the body, the life, the voice. It has the kind of impersonality that Sharon Cameron describes as "not the negation of person, but rather a penetration through or falling outside of the boundary of the human particular" (*I ix*). And it is a kind of transcendentalism that disengages from an earlier Emerson's "I" and "transparent eyeball" for a more descriptive and documentary relation to nature instead of only an analogical or spiritual one. As Laura Dassow Walls has shown, Thoreau's natural science studies, beginning with his time at Walden and influenced most by Alexander von Humboldt and other scientists like Asa Gray and Charles Darwin, departed from Emerson's transcendentalism even while retaining his misgivings of professional sciences' normalized nomenclature and strictures.

In *Nature*, Emerson speaks of "natural history" as an aid for a "supernatural history: the use of the outer creation, to give us language for the beings and changes of the inward creation" (*E 20*). In such a history, man analogizes natural facts to spiritual ones; he stands as the beholder and center among all things, and it is his intellect and his perception of beauty that makes all of nature phenomenal. It is through words that such phenomenon come to be inwardly created and expressed, through language that Emerson calls "picturesque language" or the "vestment of the thought" (*E 23*). Emerson's picturesque transforms a scene into an illustration of moral nature, and his nature is:

...glorious with form, color, and motion, that every globe in the remotest heaven; every chemical change from the rudest crystal up to the laws of life; every change of vegetation from the first principle of growth in the eye of a leaf, to the tropical forest and antediluvian coal-mine; every animal function from the sponge up to Hercules, shall hint or thunder to man the laws of right or wrong, and echo the Ten Commandments. (*E 28*)

The "gloriousness" of Emerson's description is that it does not settle for what lies before him; this is no New England nature seen by finite eyes, but a nature both microscopic and panoramic, vegetal and mineral, paradisiacal and industrial, mortal and mythological. Such a view generally embraces Thoreau's, but it is a vague and abstract kinship. Where the centripetal force of Emerson's transparent eyeball organizes and integrates everything around a Universal Spirit of

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<sup>14</sup> Thoreau's description is a sharp contrast against the ideal nude sculpture, and points to a provenance for an American nude that lies neither in the neoclassical model nor the romantic fragment.

humanity into a pictorial whole, Thoreau's circuit of expression puts aside the human. Where Emerson's nature is metaphorical, where his crystals, woods, beasts, and sunsets are not real but spiritual, Thoreau's are no more real and no less metaphorical, but far more specific and far more material.

His natural history of Cape Cod industriously cites past historians' work mostly from *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society* (1802), but also Crantz's account of Greenland, Champlain's *Voyages*, Robert Beverley's *History of Virginia*, John Smith's "Description of New England," Dwight's *Travels in New England*, Captain Cook's *Journal*, and Williamson's *History of Maine*, among many others; and makes use of both common and scientific latin names for flora and fauna—here an impressive list from one chapter: giant clams (*Maetra solidissima*), small clams (*Mesodesma arctata* and *Mya arenaria*), *Astarte castanea*, Edible Mussel (*Mytilus edulis*), Scollop Shell (*Pecten concentricus*), Cockles (*Natica heros*), *Cancellaria Couthouyi*, Periwinkles (*Fusus decemcostatus*), Sea or Beach Fleas (*Amphipoda*), Horse-shoe Crab, or Saucepan Fish (*Limulus Polyphaemus*), Sea Chestnut or Egg (*Echinus granulatus*), Star-fishes or Five-fingers (*Asterias rubens*), Sun-fishes or Sea-jellies (*Aureliae*), Sea Rocket (*Cakile Americana*), Saltwort (*Salsola kali*), Sea Sandwort (*Honkenya peploides*), Sea Burdock (*Xanthium echinatum*), Sea-side Spurge (*Euphorbia polygonifolia*), Beach Grass (*Arundo*, *Psamma*, or *Calamagrostis*), Sea-side Golden-rod (*Solidago sempervirens*), and Beach Pea (*Lathyrus maritimus*) (see *Cape Cod* 125-28). His natural histories confine themselves to the location of his travels—the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, Walden Pond, Cape Cod, and so on—and follows their respective tributaries, bottoms, and coasts to both material and metaphysical ends. If the phenomenon of Emerson's transcendentalism are beautiful and full of pathos—"Nature always wears the colors of the spirit" (Emerson *E* 11)—those of Thoreau's transcendentalism are unpicturesque, neither beautiful nor ugly, they are a certain slant of neutrality or eroding pressure upon things. Thoreau's inclination for scientific names, which stud *Cape Cod* like hard bits of facticity, is only one element of that impassiveness. It is from that ground that Thoreau takes his entire view:

The sea-shore is a sort of neutral ground, a most advantageous point from which to contemplate this world. It is even a trivial place. The waves forever rolling to the land are too far-travelled and untamable to be familiar. Creeping along the endless beach amid the sun-squall and the foam, it occurs to us that we, too, are the product of sea-slime.

It is a wild, rank place, and there is no flattery in it. Strewn with crabs, horse-shoes, and razor-clams, and whatever the sea casts up, —a vast *morgue*, where famished dogs may range in packs, and crows come daily to glean the pittance which the tide leaves them. The carcasses of men and beasts together lie stately up upon its shelf, rotting and bleaching in the sun and waves, and each tide turns them in their beds, and tucks fresh sand under them. There is naked Nature, inhumanly sincere, wasting no thought on man, nibbling at the cliffy shore where gulls wheel amid the spray. (217-18)

Thoreau's natural history turns its subject—a region, a formation, a specimen, a process—into something that is not glorious or spectacular, but matter-of-factly "neutral." Rather than a broad panorama of nature, he draws attention to how an inconspicuous stretch of New England shore, affronted by an endless cast of waves, tosses up idiosyncrasies of creaturely debris. This seawrack flattens out into that original and final equanimity where humans and animals lie together and are treated alike by scavengers, waves, —and Thoreau himself. In the end, Thoreau is also part of this diffuse circuit; he stands upon this seashore and participates in its neutrality.

His "treatment" of the scene brushes not the tints of a picturesque spirit but the wash of "inhuman sincerity"—an instinctive or unbiased interest, indifferent but also attentive to its object, the way a dog—or a naturalist—sniffs at everything and goes from scent to scent in stride. The tide, which turns carcasses of men and beasts "in their beds, and tucks fresh sand under them," figures a human gesture and also a natural process as a caress. This paradoxical phrasing of being "inhumanly sincere," matched also with "the pittance," which is both a pittance of not much but also a bit of pity—these describe relations that are neither wholly caring nor wholly uncaring, neither compassionate nor dispassionate, but something subtly in between.

As a both empirical and phenomenal natural history, Thoreau's work revises the natural history that Ralph Waldo Emerson enjoined in his 1836 essay *Nature*. For Emerson, one "cannot be a naturalist until he satisfies all the demands of the spirit" (*E* 47), that is, of human spirit:

All the facts in natural history taken by themselves, have no value, but are barren, like a single sex. But marry it to human history, and it is full of life. Whole Floras, all Linnaeus; and Buffon's volumes, are dry catalogues of facts; but the most trivial of these facts, the habits of a plant, the organs, or work, or noise of an insect, applied to the illustration of a fact in intellectual philosophy, or, in any way associated to human nature, affects us in the most lively and agreeable manner. (*E* 21)

We could say that Thoreau took up the transcendental naturalist's profession seriously; he enquired into concrete nature on abstract questions of human philosophy, especially earlier in *Walden*. But in his later years, as in *Cape Cod*, it was more and more a humanness naturalized into natural history. That is, for Thoreau, the human as a part of natural history is a human that is seen in enlargement, yes, but enlarged as something diminished and flattened into the natural. It is almost as though he took the trivial facts mentioned by Emerson, and strove to make them the very ground—the "trivial place"—of his writing and truly test the limits of illustrating a fact. A "Nature, inhumanly sincere" is Nature anthropomorphized and yet not anthropomorphized, a natural history as seen by human nature as seen by natural history. Thoreau's indiscriminate blurring of human and natural history, of human nature and nature itself, are rolled together, loosened, and returned, as he says, as "sea-slime." It is this susurrations and trivialization that makes Thoreau appear antihuman.

Yet we may locate a kind of unsentimental sentimentality in Thoreau's nature; a different kind of sympathy than "snivelling sympathies" or emulative sympathies. For Harriet Beecher Stowe, who writes in her concluding remarks to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, "An atmosphere of sympathetic influence encircles every human being" (632). Sympathy is a force which draws its viewers together by a convulsive and penetrative spreading of tears; that is, it draws viewers together by common humanity, as it does for Audubon in its paradoxical ways. For Thoreau, however, an inhumanly sincere circuit of relation affords a means of relating to others in a less human, but also sincere way. Coming upon the so called "Humane house" built for sailors stranded upon the Cape Cod shores, Thoreau and his friend Channing are unable to find a way to enter the house and pass the night. In his musings on this ironic situation, Thoreau critiques what passes as sincerity in sentimental culture:

However, we were glad to sit outside, under the lee of the Humane house, to escape the piercing wind; and there we thought how cold is charity! how inhumane humanity! This then is what charity hides! Virtues antique and far away with ever a rust nail over the latch... my legs did not ache just then, though I am not wholly a stranger to that sentiment. But I did not intend this for a sentimental journey. (*C* 89-90)

The sentimentality that mourns victims of tragedy and follows the proper obsequies, the charity

that builds a house and then locks it against wayfarers, is a conventional humanitarianism of forms that gives the sense of genteel distance. Antique virtues suggest a family lineage, of wealth or title, that establishes a philanthropic elitism. Even if such a house of the Humane helped, one would feel as though one still sat outside, "ever and anon looking through the knot-hole" (C 89). In his allusion to Sterne's sentimental journey, Thoreau also signals his self-ironizing portrayal of a journey that may appear to be sentimental and to advocate a conventional relation to nature as an ideal setting of aesthetic experience but, in fact, presents a radically different engagement with both nonhumans and humans in an ecological relation. Thoreau's critique of inhumane humanity defends, instead, a truer sentimentality of a man who feels sores and aches as any other entity. Though he might seem tireless, hard, and even cynically dispassionate, this is a kind of optical trick where things do not appear as they are; or rather they appear as they are but are not recognized as such. James Patrick Brown sees Thoreau's "unsentimentality" in this passage and in his other descriptions of shipwrecks, especially that of the dead Irish servant, as a "hard realism coupled with a practice of inward-searching meditation by which one might discover one's place in the chain of economic exploitation" (17). Yet Thoreau's logic in *Cape Cod* is not necessarily one that surveys and encompasses a system—of justice or of exploitation—but one of reversals and paradoxes. In looking through the knot-hole into the dark innards of the humane house, Thoreau's optical trick of discerning what does not appear at first glance, is based upon the fact that, as he explains, "the pupil shall be enlarged by looking, there never was so dark a night but a faithful and patient eye, however small, might prevail over it" (C 88). This technique of reversal of vision continues its logic as Thoreau then concludes that the humane house is not humane after all. Continuing his reversals, the human and the economic are also the nonhuman and the ecological, especially in the sense that his object of contemplation is not clearly a living human but also a dead object, and that he himself is both hard man and a sentimental one. With a long, hard look, Thoreau's reversals blur the delineation between human and nonhuman, sentimentality and estrangement, giving a different picture of what constitutes the humane.

The house, or *oikos* and ecology, that Thoreau inhabits is the one outside of the Humane house. Thoreau, after all, takes great interest in dry catalogues and trivial facts of both natural and human history, the locomotion of oysters, the historical surveys of Cape Cod villages, the succession of apple trees and lighthouses; and one can imagine how "agreeable" Henry was if a friend would say, "I love Henry, but I cannot like him: and as for taking his arm, I should as soon think of taking the arm of an elm tree."<sup>15</sup> The spirit that imbues Thoreau's natural history—his regionalism—is wild and rank; "there is no flattery in it," but neither is there condescension. This neutrality gives attention to *all* the haphazard and miscellaneous bits and pieces vomited up by the sea, some bones and flesh of this and that, the fragmented remains of life and death, though they may not have the shocking scale of catastrophic disasters but rather the subdued resonance of the casual and mundane. Trivial details in a trivial place—for example, Margaret Fuller died in a shipwreck offshore of Fire Island on July 19, 1850, or the body of a drowned Irish girl "to which some rags still adhered, with a string, half-concealed by the flesh, about its swollen neck" on the Cohasset beach.

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15 From an anecdote related by Emerson in his elegy for Thoreau. (See Emerson, "Thoreau.")



## Chapter 2

### *Grotesquery: Organized Decays in Melville, Thaxter, and Jewett*

In her 1873 account of the Isles of Shoals where she grew up and lived for most of her life, Celia Thaxter née Loughton sketches the landscape and inhabitants of these islands offshore New Hampshire and Maine. Thaxter's blend of nature writing and folk history is a precursor to the regionalist short stories of Sarah Orne Jewett, who as a younger writer was embraced by Thaxter and the literary circles of their New England milieu. Thaxter's poems now read conventionally and tritely while her prose writing—a blend of nature writing and folk history—has a kind of lyrical grace that has weathered time.<sup>1</sup> Despite her miscellaneousness, Thaxter's genre was not unusual. Perhaps "natural history" is the best term for it, and it is related to works like Thoreau's *Cape Cod*. Thaxter, herself, opens with an acquaintance with Herman Melville's ten sketches of "The Encantadas," writing of her isles, "Very sad they look, stern, bleak, and unpromising, yet are they enchanted islands in a better sense of the word than are the great Gallipagos of which Mr. Melville discourses so delightfully" (7). Yet "The Encantadas," *Cape Cod*, and *Among the Isles of Shoals* share more than just an oceanic setting; they share a preoccupation with a regionalist description of nature—nature inclusive of human nature—and a kind of smudging or obscuration in their gaze that shuts the glare of sun on water. Further, Melville's "The Encantadas" (1854) serves as an intermediary that ties the natural history travel narrative to its fictional local color counterparts in that it plays upon the indistinguishable line between the fact and fiction in both its presentation and content.

The descriptive yet darkly aesthetic gaze, nascent in Melville's more mournful and melodramatic work and full-blown in Thoreau's record of his peninsular travels, characterizes these works as *sketches*. Regionalist or natural historical, fictional or nonfictional, the sketch "draws" a kind of rough picture—a picture that deforms its subject and at the same time attempts to show plainly and "naturalize" the deformity of its subject. There are, then, three interrelated deformations at work here that characterize certain sketches as literature of diminishment: the deformity of the subject or the environmental deformations of the subject, the deformity of the perspective, and the deformity inherent in the act and instrument of drawing itself. As Thaxter writes, "The eternal sound of the sea on every side has a tendency to wear away the edge of human thought and perception; sharp outlines become blurred and softened like a sketch in charcoal; nothing appeals to the mind with the same distinctness as on the mainland..." (8). In this littoral environment where everything is constantly wearing away, washing up, breaking and crashing, the view of objects is diminished, and the objects themselves are diminished in their exposure to the elements. Wrecks and carcasses stranded on the shore appear as hulks or adamantine marbles of red and white, they are grotesque without being gross, still lives without being alive. They have lost some element of appeal, and it is precisely this loss of appeal that attracts these writers.

Although regionalist writings have been thought of as memorializing the rural villages rapidly depopulated by migration to industrial centers, there is also a way in which they sustain different temporalities enveloped and involved one within the other. For it is not just nostalgia and its souvenir interest that describes this regional writing of provincialities and peripheries, as Richard Brodhead has noted, but also a more melancholic and restless remembering and relinquishment that Mitchell Breitwieser describes as "a paced surrender that extricates the living

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1 For a succinct evaluation of Thaxter's literary legacy for the twentieth century, see Westbrook's "Seeking the Unattainable."

from the lost, eventually, not a reclamation" (216). Inflected in this way, the *memento mori* in diminishment is not a remembrance of death but of life *within* loss. Diminishment might be thought of as more than a part of the human process of mourning; it is also an ecological process where decays and deformations are the premise for an acquiescence to *indistinction*. The grotesqueries of wreckage and decay are merely the ordinariness and mundanity of life; yet such a "paced surrender" is not a wholesale embrace of catastrophe and epochal demise (or of heroic salvation and restoration from such disasters) but rather a different way of ordering life along lines of impermanence and variation. To proceed, formally and casually, with falling apart because it proliferates life.

Through the Isles of Shoals—the subject of Thaxter's account and the cousin of Melville's "Encantadas"—a literature of diminishment takes shape in the form of islands and bodies in the state of deshabelle, disablement, and deformation. Manipulating a science and art of seeing through lenses—a kind of isinglass deformation that smears sight—this literature sees *via* a technique of decay and sees an object *of* decay. Its narrative diegesis, its "sketches" and views of nature, act like optical surfaces that reflect and distort images so that they flicker and blur. As with popular philosophical toys of the nineteenth century, the sketches show how vision works by playing with it, by exposing its techniques and producing "optical" effects. Yet by focusing on the blurring of vision rather than its revelatory aspects, the literature of diminishment demonstrates an optics that does not settle or fix images as objects of knowledge but creates intricate overlays and extensions of images that give themselves up to obscurity, but also to a kind of gross profuseness. This grotesquery is both a scientific and aesthetic way of seeing that affords a method of decomposition that is also a composition, a dissolution that is yet a cosmos.

Optical technology, and especially that displaying natural history subjects, featured prominently in the "rational recreation" of the nineteenth-century. From lyceum lectures and schoolhouse demonstrations, to magic lantern shows and parlor tricks, Americans had access to a variety of visual presentations and self-cultivating engagements such as natural philosophy, health, travel, and the arts. Yet natural history in conjunction with philosophical toys constitute particular catalysts in the rational recreation of nineteenth-century America. The history of the American lyceum movement is, in fact, bound up with the study of natural sciences and the use of technological apparatuses. In 1826, the first lyceum in Millbury, Massachusetts was organized by Josiah Holbrook, a farmer, naturalist, and maker of scientific instruments, and was the beginning of a movement which burgeoned into three thousand lyceums across fifteen states over the next ten years. In his catalogue of "Scientific Apparatus for Schools and Families" (1847), Holbrook advertised the use of his instruments as an accompaniment to the popular movement for the self-cultivation and the diffusion of knowledge:

It provides large and varied exercises for the eye and hand, in practical lessons on the laws and works of our Creator; and thus secures the most solid improvements for the pupil, while producing visible, tangible, portable illustrations, instructive to all human beings—alike to the unlettered savage and accomplished scholar. They hence promote, by *Scientific Exchange*, the diffusion of knowledge, as the most sure and effectual mode of individual improvement. (3)

As with the lyceum movement, Holbrook's apparatuses were meant for a widespread audience who could listen to and discuss scientific topics of interest, crisscrossing from public forum or schoolhouse to the domestic parlor room. His intent to promote "*Scientific Exchange*" takes part in nineteenth-century knowledge production, yet as his description shows, it is a certain kind of

phantasmagoria or delirium of knowledge. As technology that provides "visible, tangible, and portable illustrations" of natural phenomena that are at a remove from the actual subject and yet also involving physical participation of "exercises for the eye and hand," Holbrook's models, globes, and learning tools establish an theoretical attachment to nature mediated by technological instruments. Knowledge might be understood as concrete fact and useful tool that may be promulgated across the country to aid in the self-advancement of common people; but it also becomes an illustration at a remove, an illusion, an optical effect. Although Holbrook's apparatuses dealt mainly with geography, geology, and geometry, there were many other purveyors of optics.

Optical devices displayed any subject that could be represented on a slide or disc, but they were especially associated with the viewing of nature. McAllister's & Brothers' "Illustrated catalogue of optical, mathematical, and philosophical instruments" (1857) lists among their optic wares everything from the very simple cut glass plane of a "Claude Lorraine, or Landscape Mirror" for framing scenic views when on picturesque tours to the innovative, though ultimately failed, "Dioptric Lantern" that allowed a magic lantern technician to combine, blur, and transition between images on two discs using only one source of light and prisms instead of lenses. As the Claude glass suggests, the optical devices capitalized on a culture for viewing nature, especially nature framed as a scene or landscape. Not only does the catalogue advertise the Claude glass as a mirror that "condenses or diminishes the view into a true perspective effect" (23), it also describes how the magic lanterns, by virtue of their mechanical workings of light, shadow, and lens, create what was commonly called "dissolving views": "for while the spectator is viewing a painting it is made, almost imperceptibly, to melt into quite a dissimilar picture" (27). The devices, in other words, offered distorted views of nature that produced optical effects that allowed the viewer to see in a certain way—in a so-called "true perspective" that seems to act upon the object of view as a chemical reagent of diminishment or condensation, and also of dissolution and deliquescence.

That is, the nature that was shown was not such and such waterfall or canyon, but a nature that was always decaying and decomposing by the mere act of being exposed to view seemingly in *plein air*. Picking up on the technological aesthetics of the Claude glass and projecting them as illuminations in a dark room, magic lantern shows produced "diminishing" and "dissolving" views of natural scenes that blurred from one to the next. In 1850, the Melodeon concert hall of Boston hosted "Whipple's Grand Exhibition" of all manners of "optical wonders"—"Dissolving views! Magnifying Daguerreotypes, Kaleidoscope Pictures, & Pyramic Fires" with the first half of the show devoted to American scenery and the other half to European scenery. The popular viewing of nature is, in this way, fused with the optical technology of its display, creating particular effects and associations with nature idiosyncratic to those optics of dissolution and diminishment.<sup>2</sup>

The deterioration of perspective and nature is both method and subject in a set of texts that revolve around the archipelagic landscape, beginning with Melville and descending through Thaxter to Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs*. There, the sketch of "Poor Joanna" is one such natural history study of a grotesque object—an organized decay. By reading "Joanna" as the rewriting of Melville's story of an abandoned and solitary woman, and tracing that story through its many rewritings and re-viewings both thematically and textually, diminishment's

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2 Susan Fenimore Cooper's "Dissolving Views" in *The Home Book of the Picturesque* (1852) illustrates the deep-seated fusion between optical technology and the viewing of picturesque nature scenes. See also Rochelle Johnson, *Passions for Nature*.

sketch form and its method of diegesis and "sketching," as an optical form of rational recreation, shows how *seeing* erodes human values of moral and epistemological distinctions. It is because we do not know and cannot claim nor arbitrate strict provenances and consequences that we share everything, and it is from this commoning or heaping that things may come to life, may yet live.

*The Sketch, the Picturesque, and the Grotesque: Melville's "The Encantadas"*

To work out the delineations of what is diminishment and what is not, what is nudity and what is clothed in Emerson's supernatural history, I turn to how natural history writing self-consciously and deliberately approaches those very dilemmas through the lens of the picturesque aesthetic. The prevalence of the picturesque in nineteenth-century discourse allows it to be casually tossed about, but it is more than a passing remark whose relation to diminishment is one of both influence and difference. Where the picturesque deforms the object for the moral or humanized ideal picture, diminishment deforms the senses (and the object) to naturalize the object into, not exactly the picturesque, but the *grotesque*. As Thaxter noted, what is warped and worn away is not necessarily only the picture, but "the edge of human thought and perception." Before attending to what the grotesque is in Thaxter's regionalist nature writing, however, I trace her reference to Melville's "The Encantadas," a collection of travel sketches that utilizes picturesque blandishments in a way that ultimately obscures the human moralities that brace that aesthetic. The picturesque in Melville is so picturesque that it verges into the grotesque; and it is this grotesque aspect of the picturesque that, like the signpost at the end of "The Encantadas," points the way to a grotesquery that poses nature, human or otherwise, as natural and that suggests, accordingly, a different kind of morality based not on human nature but on this grotesque nature of edges fraying and wearing away.

Various definitions of the grotesque infiltrate the picturesque aesthetic of "The Encantadas" as a way to embellish or gloss Nature—that is, to provide sketches of Nature itself. The grotesque could refer to a decorative aesthetic of organic forms, often intricately patterned and fabulous, to rock formations, to any form perceived as distorted, abnormal, or unnatural, or even to literary caricatures, tragicomedies, and allegories. Melville's understanding of the grotesque-picturesque was likely influenced by his reading of Sir Thomas Browne, the seventeenth-century English physician whose eclectic writings on natural philosophy, antiquities, and religion became repopularized in the nineteenth century by Charles Lamb and others.<sup>3</sup> Browne's strange mixture of Enlightenment science and religious faith, while yet retaining the esoteric and curious pursuits of early modern science, along with his ornate and digressive manner may have appealed to Melville's own version of scientific inquiry, or at least become one that he would impersonate. Melville mentions Browne in *Mardi* and *Moby-Dick*, and though there are no specific citations of Browne in "The Encantadas," such an immersion with Browne's writing no doubt had a lasting effect on his own philosophical inquiries, as well as his literary style.<sup>4</sup> In *Religio Medici*, Browne insists upon his religious faith in God's design despite the atheism commonly perceived of those of his medical profession: "*Natura nihil agit frustra*

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3 As noted in Sealts, *Melville's Reading*, Melville borrowed an edition of the works of Thomas Browne in 1848 from Evert Duyckinck, and then bought his own copy in December 1849. A letter of Duyckinck of March 18, 1848 mentions Melville's reading of *Religio Medici* specifically.

4 In his comparison of Browne's and Melville's styles, Brian Foley concludes that, "The books from *Mardi* onward delineate Melville's struggle to reach a stance like Browne's, to acquire a kind of faith in the invisible world that could survive a growing doubt in his ability to perceive the visible world accurately" (267).

[Nature does nothing in vain], is the onely indisputable axiome in Philosophy, there are no *Grotesques* in nature; not anything framed to fill up empty cantons, and unnecessary spaces..." (18). He then elaborates upon this theme in his next point:

I hold there is a general beauty in all the works of God, and therefore no deformity in any kind or species of creature whatsoever: I cannot tell by what Logick we call a Toad, a Beare, or an Elephant, ugly; they being created in those outward shapes and figures which best expresse the actions of their inward formes; and having past with approbation that generall visitation of God, who saw that all that he had made was good, that is, conformable to his will, which abhors deformity, and is the rule of order and beauty. There is therefore no deformity but in monstrosity, wherein notwithstanding there is a kind of beauty, Nature so ingeniously contriving those irregular parts, as they become sometimes more remarkable than the principall Fabrick....In briefe, all things are artificiall, for Nature is the Art of God. (20)

According to Browne's vocabulary, there are no untoward or unfitting forms in Nature because it is God's artwork. Instead, these seemingly grotesque and irregular forms are not superfluous decoration, but well-made expressions of each creature. In pursuing the natural as artificial, indulging in the wild and the rough in "The Encantadas," Melville pushes Browne's axiom to an extreme literary test. That is, he pursues the pleasing picturesque in the presentation of even the ugly, the deformed and depraved, and the tragic, as if to say, If such is Nature, and such is the Art of God, is this how we conceive of such things as beautiful and good? If the sketches are inconclusive on this moral question, they do, however, present the picturesque as a study of nature and as an optical effect or art of grotesquery that performs a ratiocination that is nevertheless generative and lively.

Thus, when Thaxter alludes to Melville's ten sketches of the Galapagos Islands, she places her writing within a genre of natural history sketches that are as concerned with artifice as they are with nature, and as concerned with scientific inquiry as they are with enchantment. Sketch Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth are striking in that they are stories about specific human characters—folk tales of the isles concerning pirates, tyrant-kings, misanthropes, and others variously stranded upon its shores; the rest of the sketches read as natural history introductions to the isles' geological formations, its flora and fauna, and other curiosities. These scenic views or "sketches" are self-consciously framed by the aesthetic and technological appreciation of nature as "picturesque" in eighteenth and nineteenth-century travel, tourism, and rational recreation.

The picturesque as a combination of ideal aspects of nature balanced with a certain pleasing rusticity, roughness, or ruin dominated popular discourse concerning landscape. The penname for "The Encantadas," Salvator R. Tarnmoor, evokes seventeenth-century Italian painter Salvator Rosa who influenced the picturesque traditions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Melville's disposition in these sketches very much coincides with Rosa's paintings of melodramatic ruins and savage or melancholic landscapes, but also at times follows the rosy-hued pastorals of Claude Lorrain, another forebear of the picturesque tradition. Eighteenth-century British writers like William Gilpin, Sir Uvedale Price, Richard Payne Knight, and others took Rosa's and Lorrain's paintings as models from which to derive principles of an English picturesque aesthetic. Whether it was a Rosa-inspired scene of dark wildness and ruin or a Claudean balance of hills, water, trees, and cottages, the picturesque stressed above all a contained and harmonious composition where an appropriate amount of intricacy, roughness, or diversification modulated the whole and parts came together within the frame.

Key to its relation to regional sketches is its association with nature or the landscape,

which marks the convergence of the picturesque, nature and travel writing, and regionalism. The Claude-glass is expressive of the picturesque's tonal and compositional strategies, and eighteenth- and nineteenth-century tourists carried one with them so that they could hold up this rectangular, tinted glass before their eyes and literally frame and filter their view of new landscapes. The popularity of such picturesque tourism carried over to nineteenth-century America, and to refer to something as picturesque was both a valuable qualification (as with Emerson's attribution of "picturesque" to language) and, by the 1850s, as conventional and trite as the modern idioms "pretty as a picture" or "picture perfect." Due to its popularity as a common term and the history of its aesthetic category, the picturesque has a kind of etymological spread and ambiguity—one that, as we will see, intertwines tightly with the grotesque.

Melville's style with its overexuberant picturesqueness, draws the most extreme portrait of the picturesque as a means to trouble its validity and heighten its duplicity. Through his stylistic rendering, the extremes and distinctions of nature—tossing waves then calm waters, darkness and light, good and evil—quiver and collapse. One of the self-conscious moments of this aesthetic and technological framing occurs in Sketch Eighth of "The Encantadas" where a Chola, half-Indian woman witnesses in stark horror the drowning of her husband and brother on a fishing raft off Norfolk Isle. Perched in a bower upon a high point of the isle, she looks out among branches that form an "oval frame through which the bluely boundless sea roll[s] like a painted one":

And there, the invisible painter painted to her view the wave-tossed and disjointed raft, its once level logs slantingly upheaved, as raking masts, and the four struggling arms undistinguishable among them; and then all subsided into smooth-flowing creamy waters, slowly drifting the splintered wreck; while first and last, no sound of any sort was heard. Death in a silent picture; a dream of the eye; such vanishing shapes as the mirage shows. (129)

Such a picturesque view, such picture perfect picturesqueness, of a tragic drowning emanates an eerie vibration like the distortions of heat in the air. So tranquil and calm is Hunilla's distant view that, in the instantly subsiding aftermath of the wreck, the waters are "bluely boundless" and "smooth-flowing creamy"—adjectival qualifications that overqualify by sheer earnestness in their depiction as if to say, "How blue? Bluely blue." Overdone and made-up, the view presses too insistently on its artfulness and similitude with a trite "gone in the twinkling of an eye." With that last turn, is it death that is a mirage, a human mortality of ashes to ashes with the uncertain promise of the immortal soul, or is it the eye that makes death into a mirage, the *nature mort* that slyly inserts the signs of its decay among fruitful abundance? Either way, there is a sense of that decay or ruin that characterizes the picturesque, as well as a sense of its artful portrayal as an incongruity with actual circumstances that calls attention to the eye's complicity.

In moderating the purely sublime or beautiful with ruggedness and wildness, the picturesque claimed, however, to be more natural than artificial. In Gilpin's view, based on his landscape observations during travels in Britain, "the rules of picturesque beauty...are drawn from nature: so that to examine the face of nature by these rules, is no more than to examine nature by her own most beautiful exertions" (xxv). Although these rules admit alterations of the landscape as well, these are subtle and trivial changes so "that the eye of truth can never be offended; tho the picturesque eye may be exceedingly gratified" (xxxii). Through its association with landscape painting and travel, and by selecting actual aspects of nature as ideal guides for composition, the picturesque aligns itself with both aesthetic appreciation and accurate description. Yet both of these are considered "drawn" from nature, not where nature is "copied"

but where certain parts of nature are selected, isolated, rejected, or altered.<sup>5</sup> The picturesque modifies the landscape to mimic nature itself, but only those moments of nature that are picture perfect. As Walter John Hipple notes, "There is a paradox here: a system which isolates a certain property of nature for admiration, a property defined by its excellence as a subject for art, comes at last to reject the art for the nature which was at first only its subject" (198-99). The picturesque clothes itself with the "natural," it self-consciously aestheticizes nature and naturalizes its aesthetics. It revisions the naked eye or the "eye of truth" as a "picturesque eye," and one might imagine the Claude-glass as an instrument for focusing and clarifying the eye's intuition through its selective framing and filtering. By blurring or casting nature into a rosy hue, the glass allows the eye to see better. As Emerson's picturesque language suggests, "better" would not merely mean pleasing and harmonious, but also moral.

Even though its aesthetics according to Gilpin are supposedly guided *only* by nature, the picturesque also connotes human cultivation and morality because it composes "properly" and "naturally"—that is, artificially—a view of the landscape, and also because it often depicts ruins of human grandeur whose appeal lies also in their reminder of human vanity. The picturesque implicates natural scenery with human morality and historical awareness by fusing landscape with past associations and prompting certain aesthetic responses of association. Richard Knight described the picturesque tourist's train of association as, "The spectator, having his mind enriched with the embellishments of painter and poet, applies them, by the spontaneous association of ideas, to the natural object presented to his eye, which thus acquire ideal and imaginary beauties" (in Andrews 40). Uvedale Price, who recommended landscaping guidelines according to painting principles, theorized the process of such associationism through the picturesque's variety and intricacy. Because the picturesque is the expression of a guiding human intellect influenced by nature and education which opened up reflection rather than constricting it with set borders and lines, it offered a landscape with, as he wrote, "many places [where] the eye cannot discover the perfect spot and time of their union; yet is no less delighted with that mystery, than with the thousand reflexions and intricacies which attend it" (262-263). The picturesque landscape, whether modified by the painter's view or by the gardener's renovations, represents a human landscape drawn up from a well of art history and literary references that excites further reflection. The picturesque's compositional effects also held certain appeals to the relation of humans and nature.<sup>6</sup> Whether melancholic or rosy, each picturesque mood implies a view of human nature as glorious or virtuous—a gloomy view of decaying monuments to human glory, or a sentimental view of the bowers of human existence among lush, green woodlands.

Picturesque influences on Melville's aesthetics are not only painterly but also literary, and are not only British but also American. Explaining that "crayons, tracing softly melancholy lines, would best depict the mournful image of the dark-damasked Chola widow" (127), the narrator recalls Washington Irving's *The Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon*, an acknowledged predecessor of American short story sketches. In a way riffing on Irving's own gentlemanly American tourist who provides sentimental literary sketches of England and America, Melville's Tarnmoor also sketches with a "crayon" by offering short sketches on different aspects of the Galapagos Islands through his travels as a sailor in those South American waters. Defining the genre by an analogy between the visual and the literary, Irving's sketches suggest a form that is

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5 See Walter Hipple, *The Beautiful, the Sublime & the Picturesque in Eighteenth Century British Aesthetic Theory*, 192-202 on Gilpin's picturesque.

6 See Malcolm Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque*.

unfinished, glancing, digressive, and yet just well enough delineated to achieve the proper form of the picturesque.<sup>7</sup>

Yet Melville's piece, overqualified as a typical picturesque travel account, belies even as it confirms its aesthetic and generic traditions.<sup>8</sup> Melville's experiments with the picturesque engage with touristic conventions and also extend its aesthetic implications to the philosophical intent of *seeing* into the "essence" or nature of things—and human beings.<sup>9</sup> As Elisa Tamarkin points out, Ishmael in *Moby-Dick* suggests that "we only see the world well—its subtle values—if we look through 'colored or coloring glasses' or other mediums that half-shade or tint our view, 'else the palsied universe lies before us a leper,' colorless and blank in itself" (176). There is, on one hand, a blinding whiteness seen by the directness of Ahab's dogmatic vision—a bright whiteness of the whale that destroys its viewer and, on the other, a shaded view that reveals a "true perspective." While one effect of the picturesque is to filter our view so that one can see through brightness to subtle sunspots, the tinting also allows one to see through charisma to depravity and decay, through the whiteness of the whale to its skin with hieroglyphs and scars. Melville's "picturesque" incorporates more than just the Claude-glass and something of the whale itself.

To truly study and investigate that other species means seeing what is there, and what is there is the whale—its mauled off head, its carcass, its ambergris, etc. That is, Melville's technique in *Moby-Dick* registers the literary text as a lens for the study of the natural object, of the specimen, a seeing that is itself a kind of science; but it utilizes an entire panoply of angles and aesthetics, not limited to the picturesque, to approach to that massive creature. In "Cetology," Melville's Ishmael attempts to classify whales, considering even its internal parts, exclaiming, "And if you descend into the bowels of the various leviathans, why there you will not find distinctions of a fiftieth part as available to the systematizer as those external ones already enumerated. What then remains? nothing but to take hold of the whales bodily, in their entire liberal volume, and boldly sort them that way" (152). Species differentiation does not, in Melville, succeed by dissection but by bodily involvement, by approaching the whale as a body even if only individual parts are accessible or certain parts always incomprehensible. To do otherwise, to fabricate the whale out of other creatures, or give it a vine-like curl around an anchor, would create "a very picturesque but purely fabulous creature" (286). Because these fabulous whales are like the ornamental grotesques of Roman antiquity made up of hybrid flourishes of animal and vegetable forms to decorate the edges and frames of murals, Melville refuses that category as "picturesque" because it does not retain fidelity to nature.

This moment may be read as an embrace of the scientific method of empirical observation even as it satirizes classificatory conundrums.<sup>10</sup> Tracing references in the

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7 See Hamilton's *America's Sketchbook* for a survey of the sketch genre in American literature.

8 For another reading of the American picturesque sketch tradition, see Deanna Fernie's *Hawthorne, Sculpture, and the Question of American Art*. Fernie situates the sketch (and sculptural fragments) in the context of the popularity of neoclassical European traditions in mid-nineteenth century America and argues that writers like Emerson, Hawthorne, and Melville posed the sketch form as the sign of an original and creative American impulse much like that of the Romantic fragment in German Idealism via Friedrich Schlegel. Fernie's version of the fragment is deeply embedded *within* the picturesque and romantic traditions.

9 See Elisa Tamarkin, "Melville and Pictures" for an thorough overview of Melville's interest in the picturesque especially during his later years (after 1857), and John Bryant, "Toning Down the Green: Melville's Picturesque" in *Sten* 147.

10 Connecting Melville's empirical interest to Romantic science and its emphasis on wonder, Jennifer Baker argues that "[i]t is only because Ishmael has reduced the whale to empirical data that a restricted, exclusively sensuous, mode of perception ultimately leads to a more imaginative one" (86).



cetological chapters back to Browne, Brian Foley also argues that Melville took up Browne's "method of vulgar errors," that is, by "exploring the limits of human knowledge...—consulting the best scientific or historical authorities and using them to show the inadequacy of man's learning" (271-272). Merging the scientific practice of his medical profession with his religious philosophy, Browne insisted on accuracy and research in order to show how even such methods were inadequate to explain Nature's, that is, God's, mysteries. "Cetology" demonstrates, further, how the visual, textual, and natural historical are intertwined for Melville. Not only does he measure the whale by folio sizes in this chapter, but he references the whale (or dolphin) twined around an anchor as the sign of Aldus Manutius, one of the primary influential printmakers of the Italian Renaissance. Like the fluked ends of a whale's tail or the points of an anchor, to see and represent a natural object goes both ways—it may pierce through pasteboard to nature itself, but it also finds nature to be inextricable from its literary and visual texture.

Although Melville rejects the picturesque in *Moby-Dick*, his wholesale embrace of it in "The Encantadas" proposes to revise the aesthetic and science of nature from a picturesque, which he deems "purely fabulous," into a picturesque understood to be partly fabular and partly real, or both fabular and real. Nature is, in other words, this strange and monstrous creature of both legend and science—it is such a whale, with just such a fluke. In "The Encantadas," Melville dwells specifically upon this fluke of natural history where empirical fidelity is nonetheless artful. Unlike *Moby-Dick*, however, Nature on these islands is not a whale, nor is his text a whale, and there is no overwhelming centripetal topos, but rather a dispersed, archipelagic topos. Contemplating more specifically the natural historical, yet artificial, realm of the Galapagos Islands, Melville turns to a far more diminished aesthetic, a diminishment with its own form and structure. Rather than discarding the picturesque he pulls it tenuously and intricately as far as it will go, so that his own tales might be called, if not "picturesque," then by the term he leaves out of his denomination—"grotesque." The "book-binder's whale winding like a vine-stalk round the stock of a descending anchor" (286) in *Moby-Dick* with its composite form of animal and plant finds further expression in the Galapagos tortoise encrusted with moss, a Rock Redondo shelved and eaved with birds, Oberlus with his cane, and Hunilla with her notched reed—hybrid grotesque forms that furthermore flicker into each other over the course of the sketches. With their connected motifs—dogs, rulers, serfs, abandonment, conquest, solitariness—the folk tale sketches appear like the same stories with different variations, which also bear more subtle relations and shared motifs with the nature writing sketches. They rise up in the surface of Melville's text, a wandering embroidery around that natural object, the Galapagos Islands, as amalgamated figures of mossy tortoises, guano-encrusted rock, colonies of dogs and people, man and woman, birds and sea spray.

This is a nature of formal incongruity and diminishment rather than ideality or harmony, that also expresses itself in Melville's mixing of these figures and tropes across the haphazardly organized sketches of "The Encantadas." The sketches do not hold together as a narrative sequence, but rather reflect off of one another in glances and gestural permutations. This form recalls Montaigne's comparison of his own essays to the decorative flourishes painted by an artist painting: "...the empty space around [a picture] he fills with grotesques, which are fantastic paintings whose only charm lies in their variety and strangeness. And what are these things of mine, in truth, but grotesques and monstrous bodies, pieced together of divers members, without definite shape, having no order, sequence, or proportion other than accidental."<sup>11</sup> Formally, then,

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<sup>11</sup> Sealts lists Melville as having access to a work of Montaigne based on his brother Allan's purchase of an edition in 1 July 1848.

the grotesque illustrates a nature that is not only miscellaneous and ornamental, but also a kind of extensive and marginal proliferation that fills the edges.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, even if there is a colossal center around which the grotesque embroiders, it seems to disappear under the writhing masses of vines, curls, whimsically curved limbs, and floating heads. Nature has no central essence, no ideal type, no whole, but only endless permutations, which seems to foreshadow Darwin's theory of evolution, but likely draws from Melville's reading of Renaissance-inflected natural philosophy and art.

Through this genealogy, the picturesque and grotesque are more closely intertwined than they might first appear, and what is considered a grotesque diminishment is as intent on seeing nature as picturesque ideality. In articulating Melville's aesthetic as it develops out of the picturesque and into what he also calls the grotesque, Basem Ra'ad writes, "In a way, the roughness and irregularity typical of the external picturesque was transformed into an inward feature of art" (214).<sup>13</sup> The grotesque internalizes, then, what the picturesque attempts to hide or ameliorate by its harmoniousness—the twisting and distortion of ruggedness, which is, in the grotesque as it is in the picturesque, nature. The two in fact share a common lineage in British aesthetics, especially in that of architecture and garden design. Late Renaissance articulations of the Gothic—termed grotesque or "grotto-esque" based on the murals found in the excavations of the Titus baths—were ornamental depictions of prodigal growths, organic and fantastic, such as conglomerations of floral, fungal, bestial, and calcified flourishings, which would influence early Victorian decorations for fountains, grottos, and other elements of landscape architecture.<sup>14</sup> In this context, the picturesque and the grotesque are difficult to discern from one another because both indicate a kind of rough proliferation in natural or rustic landscapes. As Ruskin notes in *The Stones of Venice* Vol. 3 (1851-53):

Now this picturesque element, which is always given, if by nothing else, merely by ruggedness, adds usually very largely to the pleasurable of grotesque work, especially to that of its inferior kinds; but it is not for this reason to be confounded with the grotesqueness itself. The knots and rents of the timbers, the irregular lying of the shingles on the roofs, the vigorous light and shadow, the fractures and weather-stains of the old stones...are the picturesque elements of the architecture: the grotesque ones are those which are not produced by the working of nature and of time, but exclusively by the fancy of man; and, as also for the most part by his indolent and uncultivated fancy, they are always, in some degree, wanting in grandeur, unless the picturesque element be united with them. (135)

For Ruskin, picturesque ruggedness comes from natural erosion and exposure while grotesque

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12 Interestingly, Theo Davis writes of an ornamental aesthetic in *Moby-Dick* as a sense of *indifference* in which beauty exists amidst horrific violence: "The ornamental aesthetics in *Moby-Dick* flout any demand that beauty be ethically meaningful, as beauty remains and even flourishes in the midst of cruelty and desolation. *Moby-Dick* is a text in which absolute disappointment is garlanded by inordinate, ornamental beauty" (45). Yet in "The Encantadas," the ornamental proliferation is not necessarily beautiful.

13 Although Ra'ad chiefly examines Melville's remarks in 1856-57 notebooks from his trip to Europe, he also mentions the desolate, anti-associationist landscape of "The Encantadas." In his estimate, the grotesque is a development of art away from the picturesque's sensibility for imitating nature and referentiality toward abstraction. Melville's interest in deserts, sand, barrenness, and nakedness are expressions of that unpicturesque and grotesque abstraction.

14 See Trodd et al, "Introduction" in *Victorian Culture and the Idea of the Grotesque*, and the excellent example they cite, William Wright's *Grotesque Architecture, or Rural Amusement* (1767, and republished 1790 and 1802), of the overlap between the picturesque and grotesque. Ruskin's own example of grotesque picturesque in the following quote is the work of Samuel Prout, an English painter whose picturesque watercolors he admired.

ruggedness comes from the "fancy of man" adding curlicues, glyphs, and garnishment. If, on the one hand, the grotesque connotes artificiality or deformed abnormality, and was, in popular Victorian discourse, attributed to garden gargoyles and other fantastical creatures and growths; on the other hand, it is also not so far from the "naturalness" of the picturesque which, as Gilpin's description admits, is one artfully composed by its human viewer. The grotesque, in other words, is as interested in artificially organic and rugged forms as the picturesque, but in a way that borders upon crass caricature unless blended with naturalness, at least in Ruskin's estimate. As ornament on the cornices and pinnacles of a building, or gilding illuminated manuscripts, the grotesque is, further, the "art of the wayside, as opposed to that which is the business of men's lives" (Ruskin 132). Ruskin's further delineations between a vulgar and noble grotesque, associated respectively with the Renaissance and Gothic grotesques, suggest that the grotesque is a kind of play or artful jest that can be either of a frivolous, degraded mind or of a serious mind that even in its recreational work expresses something of the shadows of sublimity and divine terror. In this respect, Irving's "Sketch-Book" and the literary genre of the "sketch" that his work inspired with its roving, idle traveler's eye are as much in the tradition of the grotesque as with the picturesque.

The uneasy tendency toward artifice that characterizes the grotesque in the nineteenth century accounts for its aesthetic potency, however, to mediate between the natural and the artificial, the virtuous and the deceitful. We know that Melville probably read Ruskin's *Modern Painters* in 1848, and that he read and marked up his own edition obtained in 1865. Although there is no evidence that he read *The Stones of Venice* prior to the publication of "The Encantadas" in 1854, the chronological proximity of these works and Melville's interest in Ruskin's commentary suggest at least a parallel obsession in critically assessing and elaborating upon Renaissance art and other popular topics and implications of aesthetic discourse. For Ruskin, who writes from a Christian worldview that "the whole visible creation is a mere perishable symbol of things eternal and true" (154), the grotesque is the distortion produced by human capacity unable to fully see nor represent the sublime, but that represents it in inferior forms:

Now, so far as the truth is seen by the imagination in its wholeness and quietness, the vision is sublime; but so far as it is narrowed and broken by the inconsistencies of the human capacity, it becomes grotesque; and it would seem to be rare that any very exalted truth should be impressed on the imagination without some grotesqueness in its aspect, proportioned to the degree of *diminution of breadth* in the grasp which is given of it. (153)

Aesthetic diminishment, unable to transparently see or represent the truth, is the noble grotesque that instead *alludes* to the sublime vision on a slant or as through a dark mirror. Similar to Browne's application of science, Ruskin's metrics of the art's virtues engages with a history of theological criticism which derives art (and science) from its basis in human corruptibility or deficiency. Where Ruskin saw human artifice as a deficient shadow of the sublime, Browne saw human science as rationally exposing its own deficit. As Frances Barasch notes, grotesque art was, on the one hand, associated with human vanity and irrationality since the fall from Paradise and, on the other hand, considered an allegorical representation of divine truth, and she mentions the continuation of this dichotomy in eighteenth-century debates on the appropriateness of allegory in Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queen* (1590). For example, John Hughes, a contributor to the *Spectator*, wrote two essays prefixed to the 1715 edition of Spenser defending his allegories

and ornamental style as "Grotesque Invention."<sup>15</sup> The connection between Spenser and the grotesque is telling since many of the sketches in "The Encantadas" include epigraphs from *The Faerie Queen* which point to Melville's interest in its aesthetics of the allegorical grotesque as a "diminution of breadth" that does not corrupt nor warn of deceit, but that illuminates darkly.

This framework of corruptible human knowledge and Edenic innocence is the setting of Melville's *The Encantadas* where "Eden" is itself the grotesque and illusory foliage that muffles and casts intricate shadows of a nature that, however, suggests that there is no other nature but this grotesque. Returning to "Sketch the Eighth: The Chola Widow and Norfolk Isle," we will see how its play of showing and not showing its version of a wrecked, abandoned woman presents the grotesque nude, or the natural grotesque. After her husband's and brother's drowning, Hunilla survives on the island for untold years; the captain who brought them there and promised to return never comes, and of what ships that have passed in the meantime, the narration's paralepsis withholds explanation. When she is rescued by Tarnmoor's crew, the original two dogs she had brought to the island have multiplied into a loving, swarming pack. Only able to take two home with her, Hunilla sits stoically in the departing boat while the rest of the abandoned dogs howl and course along the edges of the water. The story of Hunilla, however, must be read in context of other stories in the collection, all of which glimmer in the shadows of each other.<sup>16</sup> Hunilla's dogs seem to reprise the pack of dogs in "Sketch the Seventh" that guard the king of Charles's Isle whose strict rule over his colonists reappears as Oberlus's enslavement of unwary sailors to till his fields in "Sketch the Ninth." The Payta in Chile to which Hunilla returns reappears as the Payta that Oberlus goes to after he first leaves his island.

Further, Melville's narrator admits that he, too, has altered the stories, changing their locations to better match his sense of each isle or modifying details like the wording of Oberlus's letter to better suit his sly character.<sup>17</sup> Thus, even though Hunilla's story is one of virtue enduring and humanity's triumph—"see here Hunilla, this lone shipwrecked soul, out of treachery invoking trust. Humanity, thou strong thing, I worship thee, not in the laureled victor, but in this vanquished one" (132)—it flickers in close kinship with, say, Oberlus's story of a solitary nature that only grows more depraved and more twisted in its drunken "proneness" (140)—a word suggesting both the natural tendency of his growth and the frozen stupor he is often found in. His "proneness" mirrors Hunilla's statuesque stoicism so that her rocky forbearance becomes overlaid with his inertial dissolution. Although Hunilla's story appears a purely picturesque sketch of blue waters and greenery, tragedy and triumph, viewed from a calm distance, it comes into grotesque juxtaposition with the story of Oberlus who enslaves unwitting sailors to toil in his island garden.

Like Hunilla, Oberlus is a stranded soul upon one of the enchanted islands, except that solitude twists and wizens him into a diabolic creature, that seems to stand in direct contrast to her virtuous nobility. Given to conniving ambitions, he manages to trick sailors into a drunken stupor at his lowly hut, whereupon he enslaves them to toil in his vegetable garden. Later, under the ruse of providing fresh vegetables, he lures another ship's crew over to his side of the island and steals one of their boats, making off to Payta to enjoy a brief freedom. Where Hunilla waves

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15 See Barasch 130-131.

16 Paul Hurl also argues that this flickering effect is the technique of *The Piazza Tales* as a whole, with the stories in the collection bearing relations to each other throughout. See Hurl, *American Terror: The Feeling of Thinking in Edwards, Poe, and Melville*.

17 It is also worth noting that the "two unnamed events" (133) that the narrator chooses to leave untold or "out" of his recounting of Hunilla's plight may very well be the other two stories of the Dog-King and Oberlus, which neatly buttress Hunilla's story on either side.

her handkerchief to attract attention to the anchored ship that will rescue her, Oberlus turns his back "bowed over, and sullenly revolving round his murphy hill" (140) against visitors inquiring for potatoes. Where she sits stoically straight in the boat leaving her home, Oberlus's escape with his stolen boat is as unstraightforward as he is crooked—a convoluted event in which Oberlus leaves a letter exonerating himself as a mistreated innocent and claiming to sail for the "Feejee Isles," but eventually surfacing in Guayaquil, his slaves mysteriously jettisoned. The narrator sets up Hunilla as a picturesque figure of enduring humanity for our sympathy and worship, Oberlus a grotesque one of human vanity for our detestation and hate.

Yet taken together as extreme opposites one right after the other, with dualities and juxtapositions colliding and collapsing into one another, Oberlus and Hunilla become dissolving views of both human nature and nature itself—each of them a kind of naturalized object washed onto the shore of the narrative, taken up and transformed into picturesque-grotesque sketches that shift imperceptibly one into the other. Certain repeated tropes in each sketch become flickering indications of their fittedness that click together almost too snugly. There is, for example, Hunilla's reed—"no metaphor: a real Eastern reed"—which she notches to keep accounts of days and supplies, and which the narrator imagines as a "dull flute, which played on, gave no sound—as if counting birds flown by in air would hasten tortoises creeping through the woods" (133). This is one of those tropical reeds that has drifted onto the shores of Norfolk Isle, and it recalls a paradisaical—and pastoral—beauty in both its evocations and its smooth, hollow form, not unlike Keats' Grecian urn: "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard / Are sweeter: therefore ye soft pipes, play on" (11-12). And yet Hunilla's reed, so perfect and so polished by its wreckage, and thus standing for Hunilla's martyred transfixion, has its counterpart in Oberlus's hoe: "So warped and crooked was his strange nature, that the very handle of his hoe seemed gradually to have shrunk and twisted in his grasp, being a wretched bent stick, elbowed more like a savage's war-sickle than a civilized hoe-handle" (139). Oberlus's hoe handle is as wretched as himself, and no doubt a piece of driftwood picked up to serve maladapted to its purpose. Where Hunilla's island is a version of Paradise, Oberlus's is a hellish desert, with a black beach formed from lava flows. And just as these bare sticks of reeds and wood have been stranded onto the Encantadas, so, too, have Hunilla and Oberlus been stranded in their respective island enclosures; they lie prone, exposed, and deformed—into notched and polished smoothness or twisted wretchedness—and in the end, there is no difference really. They are merely two slants—picturesque and grotesque—upon the same nature.

Nature on the Encantadas is, in other words, grotesque-picturesque, but not merely a still picture of such an aesthetic, but active "dissolving" process of the narrative presentation. The narrator's description of Oberlus's sailor-slaves aptly and metonymically demonstrates this process before the reader's eyes. A rotting and corruption, the sailors who become Oberlus's minions are allegorical personifications of a decomposing nature:

But indeed, prepared for almost any eventual evil by their previous lawless life, as a sort of ranging Cow-Boys of the sea, which had dissolved within them the whole moral man, so that they were ready to concrete in the first offered mold of baseness now; rotted down from manhood by their hopeless misery on the isles; wonted to cringe in all things to their lord, himself the worst of slaves; these wretches were now wholly corrupted in his hands. (143)

The ideal moral uprightness and fortitude is, in them, crumbled down and liquefied into a baseless shape ready to "concrete" and harden into any shape. Although these are men, or at least figures with some vestigial remains of manhood, they are also representative of a more

general natural process of decomposition. The corruption of these sailors is, after all, attributed to their very nature or "proneness" to drunkenness and dissolution as "Cow-Boys of the sea." This nature seems to tend toward decrepitude, but if the sketch on Oberlus is taken as a slant upon Hunilla's sketch, is it not such an end-stopped and unreflective process. We can imagine the narrator's description of debris on the isles as indications of this open-ended narrative transformation (or deformation):

Those parts of the strand free from the marks of fire, stretch away in wide level beaches of multitudinous dead shells, with here and there decayed bits of sugar-cane, bamboos, and cocoa-nuts, washed upon this other and darker world from the charming palm isles to the westward and southward; all the way from Paradise to Tartarus; while mixed with the relics of distant beauty you will sometimes see fragments of charred wood and mouldering ribs of wrecks. (100)

This seawrack marks the movement from Paradise to Tartarus, as well as the movement from Hunilla's virtue to Oberlus's degeneracy. The enumeration of tropical reeds and shells shifts suddenly to charred and wrecked wood so that antipodes sit uncomfortably next to one another, and yet are strangely kin to one another as organic material. The movement is a form of decomposition, where, however, things are not exactly as they seem. Reeds and relics are indeed debris, but the bits of tropical paradise are indiscriminately mixed in with the remainders of a conflagration. Like messages left in bottles bobbing in the ocean, these wreckages are open to interpretation as signs of both a sunny, lush abundance or a fiery disaster.

These duplicitous and déjà vu effects, which underscore other warnings of optical illusions and misguiding appearances in all the sketches, show that the grotesque-picturesque casts objects into shades of dismalness and cheer that distort and metamorphose nature, or rather present the perception of nature, as well as human nature, as distorted, or in Ruskin's terms, an anamorphic "diminution of breadth." In his study of the grotesque, Geoffrey Harpham has drawn out this aspect of the grotesque not really examined by Ruskin—its hybridity, indeterminacy, and disproportion which refuse categorical or generic boundaries—as an art which does not assume any hypothetical "type" or "normative" form, whether in a species or in a decorative pattern or design.<sup>18</sup> Although the picturesque and grotesque both represent nature as commingling ruggedness with smoothness, light with dark, savagery with civilization, they also subtly diverge from one another in their treatment of oppositions. Where the picturesque modulates oppositions according to *ideal forms* of nature to achieve balance, the grotesque combines oppositions to disturb any possibility of an ideal. It is an expression of deformity that undermines its dialectical relationship to ideal form to leave the deformed as the *only* form. The grotesque becomes not deformation, but a collapse of idealized pure form and stigmatized deformation, and displays, in effect, more fidelity to nature through this unbridling. This is, of course, a certain view of nature, or of nature in art, *as* grotesque. In Sketch the Eighth, we are given a certain view of Hunilla, the stranded, wrecked woman as the figure of absolute exposure—naked nature—that the text yet refuses to expose. She is worshiped as virtuous "Humanity," while in the next sketch, Oberlus looks like "a heaped drift of withered leaves" (139), and they merge to become woman-man, human-nature, virtue-degradation, stoic-drunken proneness. This is a grotesque nature, a nudity, that is, however, never directly stated, though it is certainly implied.

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18 Harpham's work might be seen as following from a Bahktinian or modern concept of the grotesque, as well as the Ruskin version. His response to E.H. Gombrich's *The Sense of Order* and his association of the grotesque with nature in as a resistance to genre and species are especially noteworthy. See Harpham 41-42.

In essaying forth the picturesque representation of nature at its worst upon the *Encantadas*, Melville's sketches become a kind of visual or optical play of grotesque "seeing" that multiplies reflective images that dissolve into one another. Like the many popular philosophical toys of the nineteenth century, Melville's sketches manipulate literary optics to show not only how vision works, but how it plays and proliferates lively images. Though such toys as the thaumatrope, phenakistoscope, kaleidoscope, and stereoscope were meant to provide a form of rational recreation that showed and instructed people on the mechanical functioning or production of vision, they often evolved into other devices with a more covert operation of optical effects to produce hallucinatory and deceptive images like the phantasmagoria.<sup>19</sup> Like the thaumatrope, which worked by causing the eye to combine an image on one side of a card with the afterimage of one on the other side when the card was spun or flipped rapidly, Melville's juxtapositions work in flickering succession with one another to create a tropic set of images—tortoise-moss, dog-king, human-nature. As one description of the thaumatrope put it, "during its revolutions a grotesque or whimsical combination is formed of the two images, which strike the eye as one."<sup>20</sup> Though the images are supposedly grotesque, based on the strange hybrid forms created, they are also grotesque as an aesthetic and science of vision that shows how what we see is produced—how "nature" is produced. Likewise the narrator of the *The Encantadas* suggests that his sketches are the result of such optical effect when he describes imagining a Galapagos tortoise after having returned to the Adirondack Mountains: "Nay, such is the vividness of my memory, or the magic of my fancy, that I know not whether I am not the occasional victim of optical delusion concerning the Galapagos" (102). Yet Melville's sketches are not delusions, what we might call the fancies of a deranged mind, but rather optical effects based on the science of vision itself. Consider also his references to other optical tests or prosthetics in the text: the reversed E shape of the islands which looks like the optotype<sup>21</sup> on eye acuity test charts, especially that of the "tumbling E" or "illiterate E," and the comparison of Hunilla's notches in her reed to Braille. This grotesque "seeing" is not a blind seeing but a cognizant one, a ratiocination of sight that understands and points to its own techniques. There are no grotesques in nature, but there are grotesque sights.

The seawrack on the islands' shores seems to represent, further, the formal organization of the sketches as a kind of natural and scientific-aesthetic phenomenon. Like Melville's diptych "The Paradise of Bachelors and The Tartarus of Maids," extremes like Hunilla and Oberlus remain separate though flickering into one another with a schizophrenic urgency. "The *Encantadas*" is ambitious in its multiple flickerings, in threes or, if one counts the natural history sections, far more; it would be all the sketches together—ten. While the diptych view offers a flickering that might tend toward reconciliation, an easy overlay or contrast of one over the other, the sketches create flickerings that confound. Building upon the simple optical effect of the thaumatrope, "The *Encantadas*" presents reflective juxtapositions and blurs more like the magic lantern's dissolving views and kaleidoscopic effects. The lanterns work through the binary projections of two lenses angled so that they would exactly overlay each other. A typical magic

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19 See Crary, *Techniques of the Observer* and Bellion, *Citizen Spectator*.

20 ---, "The Thaumatrope," *The Cincinnati Literary Gazette (1824-1825)* (Jun 11, 1825): 3, 24; *American Periodicals* pg. 188

21 Although it seems unlikely that today's familiar optical chart with the "tumbling E" was available to optometrists and the visually impaired of the antebellum era, it is also likely that some version of the optotype was used by spectacle-makers to determine the visual impairment and fit of lenses for their clients. An advertisement in the *American Journal of Medical Sciences* in 1863 lists for sale "Test-Types for the Determination of Acuteness of Vision" by H. Snellen, the Dutch ophthalmologist who developed a standard chart of optotypes in 1862.

lantern operation would use a slider or cover over one image and then slide it across to cover the other image, creating an "imperceptible" "dissolving" transition between two images that would conceal more of one while revealing more of another in the same illuminated frame. Various experiments and configurations of the magic lanterns, making use of multiple lanterns for multiple images or using prisms for lenses so that only one lantern source of illumination was needed, were also available throughout the mid-nineteenth century, multiplying, as well, the number, effects, and movements of image possible.<sup>22</sup>

Likewise, "The Encantadas" exhibits this kaleidoscopic, magic lantern effect of dissolution when its framed tales no longer imbricate one another so much as slide and jostle against one another, glancing against one another like digressive cracks in a fragmented form. The magic, that is, the art and science, of Melville's Encantadas depends upon its viewer's or reader's ability to put the images together, to realize the trick of overlay that is occurring. As with the seawrack that drifts onto the shores of the Galapagos Islands, these sketches sit ill-fittingly together, tangled incongruously by chance. Paradise and Tartarus do not complement one another, nor do they snap together with satisfying snugness. They refer to the same place, but with discrepancies and shifts in the details like a shawl or a shoreline with ragged edges to which burrs and debris of all kinds cling and disperse. The optical "delusion" that the narrator sees in New England is the "ghost of a gigantic tortoise, with 'Memento \*\*\*\*\*' burning in live letters upon his back" (103). The remembrance of mortality, of natural disintegration, is an emblem of the grotesque aesthetic and science that informs Melville's study of nature. Like Browne and Ruskin, Melville's aesthetics and science of optical effects prompt a vision of nature as grotesque, nature as seen, as "diminution of breadth." The proliferating flourishes of sinuous organic forms, the monstrosities of vegetable and animal composite, the rocky crags shaped by erosion, the twist of weeds and wreckage strewn upon the shores, these forms of diminishment reflecting and refracting one another. This is the nature—the seawrack—of the Encantadas.

### *Ecological Optics and Grotesque Decomposition*

Melville's optical "delusions," their tricks of light and vitreous lenses, reveal the grotesque composition of how vision works as an illusory and contrastive series of images that dissolve one into the other in the eye of the beholder. As a view particularly of scenery, of seashell collections and plants and animals, these optics are a part of how the nineteenth century sees nature through the lens of, say, the Claude glass to the magic lanterns shows with their natural history and landscape slides. Melville's "The Encantadas" evidences the profusion of this popular technology for depicting natural curiosities and picturesque landscapes, but it also experiments with these optics and their aesthetics, focusing and juxtaposing the views to such extremes that they begin to blur and quiver. The picturesque, under these conditions, becomes a grotesque flickering between images, creating composite and dissolving forms. What one sees and how one sees is through this optical spectacle, which shapes and mediates relations between subjects. The grotesquerie of multiplying overlays and dissolutions may seem to play to a phantasmagoria of disorientation and deceit, a world of paranoia. Yet Melville's transposition of the technology to the literary text reveals more of how vision and careful scrutiny works, rather than hiding its operations, because it isolates and highlights the individual sketches and their optical effects. And what we see is that memento mori—both as subject and through its process

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22 For a detailed history of magic lantern technology from the late nineteenth century, see L.H. Laudy, "The Magic Lantern and its Applications."



of dissolution. The dissolving view is one shared by all, the diminishing grounds shared by all; and rather than placing one in a disempowered position or another into a powerful one, we are, instead, all vulnerable to the vagaries of mortality.

As with Thoreau's environmental optics, the sense of shared and common relations comes out of a grotesque view that proliferates and spreads through a sensibility of "diminution of breadth." In Melville's "The Encantadas," optics constitutes part of the very nature of our relations to other entities, and the grotesque optics of diminishment allows for a kind of blurring of relations as view overlays and dissolves into view, each view haunted by the other as they coalesce, departing, arriving, merging, separating. Disparate sights become indistinctly related to one another through the one burning eye of the magic lantern throwing its light out onto the wall of a dark room. At the heart of grotesque and environmental optics is its embrace of vision's illusory qualities—the way vision plays tricks on us, combining and distorting things, precisely because it cannot be divorced from psychology, physiology, culture, history, visual disturbances, afterimages and other effects that are part of the nature of sight.

Melville's sketches or slides of magic lantern views deliberately unsettle the equation that what we see is what we know and, further, that what we know is what we care for. Instead, what we see in one view flickers into ambiguous relation with another view, and, as we will see, these optical effects give rise to haunting imbrications that obscure conventional determinations of cause-and-effect or crime-and-punishment. Instead the diffuse relations give way to a generalized or shared sense of liability, of being both bound to each other but also loosened from each other in an amorphous contingency that transforms, also, how one thinks of objects, property, and other into an ecology of diminishment. Writers that take up Melville's tropes and technological apparatus, particularly nature writer and poet Celia Thaxter and local colorist Sarah Orne Jewett, demonstrate the process of this decomposition via magic lantern optics and its views of organic material. In this sense, diminishment's dissolving view of diffuse ecological relations represents the submerged condition that makes possible the profound epistemic shifts of experience and change as contingent and open-ended processes that are usually exemplified by Darwin's theory of evolution.

*"these fragmentary and inadequate sketches of the Isles of Shoals" - Thaxter*

*"these weeds were the symbols of those grotesque and fabulous thoughts" - Thoreau*

When Celia Thaxter compared her Isles of Shoals to Melville's Enchanted Islands she drew direct inspiration from both the content and form of "The Encantadas." Of those Galapagos Islands, Melville wrote, "It is to be doubted whether any spot of earth can, in desolateness, furnish a parallel to this group." And Thaxter answered, writing of the Isles of Shoals, "Very sad they look, stern, bleak, and unpromising, yet are they enchanted islands in a better sense of the word than are the great Gallipagos of which Mr. Melville discourses so delightfully" (*IS* 7). Concerning these texts' relation to one another, Perry Westbrook, Thaxter's most appreciative critic in the mid-twentieth century, considers Thaxter's style a regionalist realism that "had to depict the beauties as well as the ugliness of life superimposed on and modified by desolation" (507), and sees only grotesqueries in Melville's sketches. Yet, as we have seen, Melville's grotesque is one intertwined with the picturesque. Thaxter's realism is ultimately one modified more by the picturesque than the grotesque, but through the locus of her work the grotesque-picturesque becomes an explicitly regionalist aesthetic.

Thaxter's writing has been consistently recognized as regionalist precisely because she

presents her writing as imperfect and because she is a woman writing short realist pieces and poems constellating around the themes and subjects of a particular place. Critics have described regionalism as a realist mode, often in the genre of local color fiction or travel sketch, that places itself in a diminutive and feminine relation to a supposedly more central and masculine realist novel advocated by William Dean Howells in the late nineteenth century.<sup>23</sup> This mode was, however, immensely popular and widely published in the major literary magazines of the time. Of a milieu with other prominent New England literati like John Greenleaf Whittier, T.W. Higginson, and James and Annie Fields, Thaxter wrote and published among the New England writers and editors of her day. Her writings have the flavor of Longfellow's *Poems of the Fireside and Seaside* written on a New England coast, picturesquely blending cheer with melancholia and conforming to literary conventionalities and social gentility.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, Thaxter's *Among the Isles of Shoals* betrays something more than picturesque New England—something that I have been calling grotesque. Although different from Melville's grotesque, Thaxter's grotesque also works with enchantments, or optical distortions, of similar species, and we shall see how the Isles and the Encantadas might come of the same regional provenance.

Although *Among the Isles of Shoals* is more or less one continuous text without conspicuous divisions, Thaxter calls it in her prefatory remarks an "imperfect" "chronicle" made up of "fragmentary and inadequate sketches" (5). As "sketches," *Isles* purports to be a kind of travel or nature writing like Melville's; but without explicitly labeled section divisions, its sketches are delimited by the changing subjects of the narrative's meandering. Her own description of the coastline is exemplary of how she moves from topic to topic, topos to topos:

The coast-line varies, of course, with high or low tide. At low water the shores are much more forbidding than at high tide, for a broad band of dark sea-weed girdles each island, and gives a sullen aspect to the whole group. But in calm days, when the moon is full and the tides are so low that it sometimes seems as if the sea were being drained away on purpose to show to eager eyes what lies beneath the lowest ebb, bands of golden-green and brown moss thickly clustered on the moist ledges are exposed, and the water is cut by the ruffled edges of the kelps that grow in brown and shining forests on every side. At sunrise or sunset the effect of the long rays slanting across these masses of rich color is very beautiful. But at high tide the shores are most charming; every little cove and inlet is filled with the music of the waves and their life, light, color, and sparkle. Who shall describe the wonderful noise of the sea among the rocks, to me the most suggestive of all the sounds in nature. Each island, every isolated rock, has its own peculiar note, and ears made delicate by listening, in great and frequent peril, can distinguish the bearings of each in a dense fog. (19)

It is impossible to provide an excerpt of the text that would give a sense of its general form unless we take this piece to be a fractal of the whole—a part of the coastline of which the coastline parts. Like Melville's flickering sketches, Thaxter's sketches vary with low and high tide, forbidding and drained, charming and sparkling, peculiar and perilous. Her dissolving

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23 See, for example, Ann Douglas Wood, "The Literature of Impoverishment: The Woman Local Colorists in America, 1865-1914," for a critique of regionalism as a decline from the potency of women's virtues celebrated by sentimental writers of an earlier generation, and Fetterly and Pryse, *Writing out of Place*, for a feminist recovery of regionalism as women's writing. For a description of regionalism as a mode of realism, see Eric Sundquist, "Realism and Regionalism."

24 See Westbrook, "Celia Thaxter: Seeker of the Unattainable," and Jane Vallier, "The Role of Thaxter in American Literary History."

views blurring from one section to the next does not so much flicker between differences (as Melville's sketches do) as rub one into the other. No sooner are we drifting into low tide, than we are in a calm dusk or dawn; but no sooner are we dozing in these long shadows, than we are swelling up with high tide and the sunny sparkle and splash of water calling to rock. And even then Thaxter does not stop, but pulls the drift from sunshine to perilous storm. Such drifting characterizes the movement and blurring of Thaxter's text as a whole. Flipping from island history on the first inhabitants, sailors wrecked on its shores, pirates and fisherfolk, to more recent old villagers and their songs and accents, to life on the Shoals from Thaxter's own childhood to a general description, views of sunsets and storms, wind and water making their variegated patterns across the sky, plants, birds, insects, and fish, a child's death, sails raised and flickering in the waves, the seasons coming and going, stories of shipwrecks and ghosts, everything rising and subsiding—the narrative has the rhythmic form of her setting. Although this section serves to illustrate the stunning descriptive element of the text that no doubt drew more summer visitors to the islands who would stay at Appledore Hotel—its enchantment which is "enchanting in the better sense of the word"—it also suggests darker enchantments despite Thaxter's claim. That rote sound of the sea among rocks, each making its own ominous tone, suggestive of what kind of voice?—wonderful and peculiar—human or nonhuman—she never says, but the immensity of its power to crush and pound is felt.

Every element of Thaxter's prose works by this blurring between sheer contrasts of the awful and beautiful. A young Shoals girl "as picturesque a creature as one would wish to see" (37) might be paired with the Islander woman whose endless, fretful housework leaves her worn to a bitter husk: "O wreck in woman's shape!" (67). The "slowly mellowing light" "tranquil over the placid sea" turns in the space of a few words to "waves and rocks that kill and destroy" (41) as she sits against the low wall where two sailors from the Sagunto wreck of 1813 were found frozen. The spotted jewel-weed, the eyebright, pimpernel, and white violets, the iris, wild-rose, golden-rod, and aster—all these "as rich and splendid as a flower in Doctor Rappacini's famous garden" (27), but therefore as treacherously beautiful? At first glance, Thaxter's rhythmic ebb and flow of awful and beautiful is no more than a picturesque harmonizing, but as her references to "The Encantadas" and "Rapaccini's Garden" reveal, these are also more sinister currents. If those Appledore flowers are not filled with venom, then certainly the others that she later enumerates are:

At Smutty-nose alone certain plants of the wicked looking henbane (*Hyoscyamus niger*) flourish, and, on Londoner's only, there spreads at the top of the beach a large sea-lungwort (*Mertensia maritima*). At Star the crooked little ways between the houses are lined with tall plants of the poisonous hemlock (the *Conium* that made the death draught of Socrates), which flourishes amain, and is the only green thing out of the small walled enclosures, except the grass and the burdocks; for the cows and the children devastate the ground. (29)

The poisonous proliferation on Smutty-nose and Star Island forces one to reconsider the picturesque, floral abundance on Appledore Island, much in the way Melville's flickering works between Charles's, Norfolk, and Hood's Isles with the Dog-King, Hunilla, and Oberlus. Thaxter revels in these contrasts among and within the islands of the Shoals; she is "the pretty Miranda" Hawthorne called her when he visited the Isles in the summer of 1852. And what does she admire—look upon with wonder and marvel—what is "miraculous"? The incongruity of the terms of life on the islands is what is wonderful ("awful and beautiful nature!" [Thaxter 41-42])—that thin soil yields rich blooms, that poison flourishes as tenaciously as the fragrant, that

what blossoms must weather tribulations and ravages of all kinds, that liveliness may also be the source of destruction. What makes these aspects distinct to the islands—for they are certainly generalizable—is their vivid concentration and heightening in the desolate setting of the Isles of Shoals. Thaxter writes of finding wildflowers "whose faces it is a continual surprise to find looking up at you from the rough ground, among the rocks" for "[e]very flower seems twice as beautiful under these circumstances; and it is a fact that the salt air and a peculiar richness in the soil give a luxuriance of growth and a depth of color not found elsewhere" (26). Is the soil rich and the salt air inspiring, or are the grounds so bare and meager that the few wildflowers there are look bright in comparison? Does the soil "transfigure" the familiar poppy into a "blaze in such imperial scarlet" (28) or does it so weaken its tissue that the very light pierces through and withers the petals, and the blaze is the blaze of color as it fritters away and extinguishes?

As on the Encantadas, nature is not so straightforward, flora and fauna are dark despite their brightness, and there is a fundamental twisting, weaving, and deforming in the course of nature that is accentuated in the isolated and compressed confines of the island topography. While Thaxter's technique of rolling these grotesque undercurrents into a general orchestration of ebbs and flows mellows out the effect picturesquely, the narrow circumscription of scene to the Isles and the uncanny intensity yielded by scarcity becomes a kind of grotesque observation and presentation. What might have been a picturesque mixture of awful and beautiful elsewhere becomes grotesque by the sheer compression and marginalization into the confines of islands. In a way, it is the environmental conditions of the islands that necessitates a grotesque view, that is, a view that is grotesque due to the nature of its grotesque object.

Seawrack that washes up onto the shores, for example, is a mixture of all sorts of miscellaneous debris. On the Galapagos, the sugarcane and coconuts of tropical provenance, and the wreckage of volcanic disturbance or storms are not separate from one another, but very much from the same oceanic source and indiscriminately thrown up by the tides and arrayed along the strand so that nothing is purely beautiful or awful. Melville's flickering sketches in "The Encantadas" cannot show this except through grotesque-picturesque lens which partition the paradisaical from the infernal, and slant each into extremely cheerful or dismal aspects of nature. It is unsurprising that both "paradise" and "inferno" are words that indicate delimited spatial forms—an *enclosed* park and the *underground*, respectively; they are inherently grotesque spaces just as islands themselves are. Thaxter's sketches seem to take up where Melville leaves off, to attempt a full imbrication of picturesque and grotesque lenses by rubbing away the separation between them—awful and beautiful at once. Yet if her results appear conventionally picturesque—and they certainly are, in one respect—they are also limited to the very nature of her island resources. Thaxter's sketches are fully borne out of that circumscription, and relinquish themselves to those limits. To see the nature of these islands is to not only see two sensibilities and two materialities of awful and beautiful at once, but also return that quivering simultaneity to a view of seawrack from a remote coastline as Thoreau does in *Cape Cod*.

Nature on the Isles is, in part, represented and dramatized by Thaxter with her own life on the islands, and *Among the Isles of Shoals* does not shy away from inserting childhood reminiscences and personal experiences as part of its natural history. Her own seawrack, the "relics" she picks out from her islands and which compose her sketches—flowers and seaweed, memories and stories of storms and shipwrecks, driftwood, shells, a skull dug up from the south shore of Appledore—are patently picturesque objects of vitality and decay that, however, turn grotesque. Take her childhood playtime among seaweed and flowers:

...we cut from the broad, brown leaves of the slippery, varnished kelps, grotesque shapes

of man and bird and beast that withered in the wind and blew away; or we fashioned rude boats from bits of driftwood, manned them with a weird crew of kelpies, and set them adrift on the great deep, to float we cared not whither. (124)

All flowers had for me such human interest, they were so dear and precious, I hardly liked to gather them, and when they were withered, I carried them all to one place and laid them tenderly together, and never liked to pass the spot where they were hidden. (133)

Growing up on White Island, Thaxter and her brother played with whatever was left to them and whatever was at their disposal—often the refuse of the sea, but also the living creatures and plants of those rocky shores. This "play," a *grotesque* play in Ruskin's sense, is literally an aesthetic arrangement and cultivation of plants, delicately laid or rendered, but also rudely fashioned and cut on the margins between land and sea. It is a play of lively subjects that also "wither" and die or drift away; a play of life tended, tortured, or neglected by a child's recreation. Although the flowers and seaweeds form a child's picturesque juxtaposition of vegetable gold and weedy dross, and even within themselves as dying flowers, on the one hand, and reanimated seaweed, on the other, they tend toward an overall disintegration—withering and drifting away—that Thaxter, as the writer, emphasizes more strongly than picturesque wholeness. The young Celia cannot bear to consider death, but the adult Celia has no qualms.

Thaxter's most explicit rumination on death comes at the end of the sketches when she describes a skull dug up by youth camping on Appledore's south side. A *memento mori*, the skull remains for awhile in her keeping and in her thoughts:

Sitting by the driftwood blaze late into the still autumn nights alone at my desk, it kept me company, —a vase of brilliant flowers on one side, the skull on the other, and the shaded lamp between, equally lighting both. A curious head it was, thick as an Ethiop's, with no space above the eyes, high above the ears, and heavy behind them. But O, those hollows where the eyes once looked out, beholding the same sea and sky we see to-day! Those great, melancholy, empty hollows, —what sort of creature gazed from them? Cunning and malice, anger and hate, may have burned within them in sullen flame; who shall say if any beauty ever illumined them? If hate smouldered here, did love ever look out and transfigure the poor, dull face? did any spark from the far heaven ever brighten it? any touch of lofty thought or aspiration turn the clay to fire? And when, so many years ago, this being glided away from behind these awful windows and left them empty for ever and ever, did he find what in his life here he could not have possessed, with this head, which he did not make, and therefore was not responsible for? Many and many a question I put silently to the silent casket which had held a human soul; there was no sound to answer me save only the great, gentle whisper of the sea without the windows, and now and then a sigh from the autumn wind. There came to me a sense of the pathos of the infinite patience of humanity, waiting so helplessly and blindly for the unravelling of the riddle that has troubled every thoughtful soul since the beginning of time. Little roots of plants were clasped about the temples. Behind the right ear were three indentations, as if made by some sharp instrument, suggesting foul play. An Indian tomahawk might have made those marks, or a pirate's cutlass: who can say? What matter is it now? I kept the relic for months, till it crumbled so fast when I daily dusted it that I feared it would disappear entirely; so I carried it quietly back and laid it in the grave from which it had been taken, wondering, as I drew the shallow earth over it, who had stood

round about when it was buried for the first time, centuries ago; what manner of people, and were they afraid or sorry. But there was no voice to answer me. (175-76)

The seemingly equal and picturesque illumination of death and life, skull and flowers, ends with a discounting "What matter?" with no answer. For a Miranda who never leaves her islands, the skull is a Caliban-like figure, more cunning and barbaric (Ethiopian, Indian, pirate) than beautiful, more indicative of foul play and ruthless colonization than proper cultivation. It is a deformed and defaced human head representing immoralities—melancholy, evil, dullness, hate—the remainder or casket of the soul that has fled already, and Thaxter cynically wonders whether any virtues ever transfigured its shape. Exhumed and exposed, the skull and Thaxter's conjectures of its past life have a Gothic awfulness to them that quickly dies away. Instead, she dissolves its sensationalism, as well as her own disenchantment, with a sense of patience and endurance that seems to return to a picturesque and common humanity. This skull, stoic and mute, is Thaxter's Hunilla.

In the end, however, she relinquishes the skull to an almost existential emptiness—"who can say? what matter is it now?" Hovering on the edge of Thaxter's wondering is the "riddle" or question of an afterlife—whether the skull's former owner found something after its death. But by annulling that question, she leaves only an overwhelming feeling of dispossession—that in life, as in death, one "could not have possessed" what one wants, not even one's own skull and remains. That all belongs to nature and its nonhuman embraces, the sea, the wind, the earth. This is Thaxter's reenchantment of the Isles of Shoals. The skull's bleached bones and empty sockets are a nudity so thoroughly denuded there is nothing left to make out of it, no lovely decay and virtuous resilience, but a species of grotesque-picturesque nature that crumbles apart rather than composing together. And indeed, after relating this sketch, she moves rather abruptly on to a new object on hand—a scrap of "time-stained, battered newspaper" containing a "weird, romantic legend of these islands" (177).

Given that this final sequence on the skull is surrounded by "weird" stories of ghosts that frequent the Isles of Shoals, and that Thaxter ends *Isles* by imagining immigrants repopulating the islands, her dialogue with the skull is also a kind of re-animation. Unlike her childhood play animating the seaweed around her, however, it is a kind of failed animation. It is play that produces a species of life that concedes to its own expiration; and it is this frailty and perishability that gives it a kind of grotesque life and makes this not only a picturesque chiaroscuro of life and death, but also a grotesque one of meager existence and sullen death apathetic to human concerns. The skull becomes, indeed, a kind of Caliban of obdurate materiality that must take its own course. Where the "weird crew of kelpies" take their own vagrant course and are even forgotten by a child's wandering attention, the skull smolders fitfully and then sits mutely and emptily despite entreaties that it come to life to assuage fear and remorse. Its hollows, like Melville's lacunae, are unfillable, its bones—already dust—refuse assembly and fortification, and the three sharp indentations behind the skull's ear are exacting particularities. Melville's own Caliban—Oberus who announces his kinship by repeating the hiss "This island's mine by Sycorax my mother" (140)—enslaves unlucky sailors who chance upon Hood's Isle and eventually steals a boat to get off the island. He ends up in a jail in Payta, "the central figure of a mongrel and assassin band" (146), putting his treachery and cruelty conspicuously on view in the public plaza. Taking up *her* Caliban, Thaxter does not seek to elide ugliness and refractoriness either, but nor does she heighten and conjure up its perversities as Melville does. She does not dwell on flickering intensities between malice and beauty, nor does she hold still a palatable composition of decay and vitality, but allows for kind of natural

succession. If she is like Miranda, she is also like Prospero, who renounces his magic: "graves at my command / Have waked their sleepers, oped, and let 'em forth / By my so potent art. But this rough magic / I here abjure" (5.i.48-51). Rather than continue the skull's exposure and revive its history, which in fact accelerate its disintegration, she returns it to the grave where it may crumble away into earth. Her magic is the magic of disenchantment, a magic that yields purely picturesque "airy charms" to natural ones of a differently enchanting and differently grotesque quality than Melville's. This is not to say that disintegration and succession are inherently grotesque, but that the species of nature that forms this art and science governs its grotesqueness.

### *Salvaging Driftweed*

The drift of weeds, the seawrack washed up on shore—these are emblems of a grotesque that might seem too inadvertently and vaguely attached to New England to be considered regional. However, the littoral landscapes that underlie the figurations and embodiments of wreckage from the sea in Thaxter and Melville are, in fact, even more tightly woven. Though there is an immediate loose commonality between the stories' island settings and in their fascination with "specimen," literary historical traces also tend toward and coalesce around the Isles of Shoals off the coast of New Hampshire and Maine. Melville's thinking and writing of "The Encantadas," partly initiated and developed over correspondence with Hawthorne, remains entangled in their respective island journeys off the coast of New England in the summer and fall of 1852. The wrecked woman of the Galapagos finds herself upon New England shores that are not so far off from, and even merge with, Thaxter's Isles of Shoals.

The composition history of "The Encantadas" begins with Melville's first mention of a story about tortoises or tortoise-hunting based on his travels to sell to Harper's Brothers, but as we have seen, the sketches are far more than a story about tortoises. Sattelmeyer and Barbour have pointed to two major sources for Hunilla: a newspaper story of an Indian woman found stranded off the coast of California and the history of a woman name Agatha Robertson abandoned by her sailor husband that Melville encountered during a vacation at Naushon Island. For this reason, they find "The Encantadas" "a salvage operation twice removed from its original locus" (407), that is, it is a collection of sketches salvaged from the Galapagos shore as debris and seaweed is gathered and repurposed, but seaweed two times removed, once to California and once more to New England. However, their survey cannot comprehend the nature of Melville's influences and sources:

For "The Encantadas," a work hastily composed and by turns brilliant, slapdash, and even, toward the end, largely a compilation of others' works, the problems of tracing his borrowings and understanding his method of composition are in large part still unsolved. (406-7).

Yet even if this miscellaneous and haphazard composition—or "decomposition"—does not allow an exact tracing of Melville's method, it does lend itself to a different kind of reading, one that follows not the separate threads of every possible source but that takes the tangle or *knot* itself as the thing to follow. What we follow is something like seawrack itself, something stranded onto the shore, a woman or many women, or perhaps something that is not a woman at all but bleached bone or wood.

The story of Hunilla, or of someone like Hunilla, begins in New England. Melville, returning from a vacation on the Elizabeth Islands off the coast of New Bedford and just southwest from Cape Cod, writes to Hawthorne on July 17 congratulating him on the publication

of *Blithedale Romance*, which he has already begun reading. He mentions offhand that he was at Naushon, that "solitary Crusoeish island,"<sup>25</sup> when he saw someone holding Hawthorne's new book. Weeks later, the seaside currents and auras still on his mind, he writes again to Hawthorne on August 13 detailing a history related to him by a lawyer he met while on Nantucket, that of Agatha Hatch, a woman of nearby Pembroke, who had married a sailor who had wrecked there. The sailor Robertson returned to voyage, with no news of his whereabouts, and did not reemerge until seventeen years later. By that time, he had married again and had another family elsewhere, to which he returned, though maintaining limited contact with Agatha and his daughter by her from then on. It was not until his death and Robertson's daughter's claims to her father's property through his will that his second family became apprised of their existence and that the lawyer Melville met, Mr. Clifford, became engaged in the case. Melville insists that this tale, so exemplary of the "great patience, & endurance, & resignedness of the women of the island in submitting so uncomplainingly to the long, long absences [*sic*] of their sailor husbands," would suit Hawthorne and urges him to write one based on Agatha, writing, "you will find out the suggestiveness for yourself; & all the better perhaps, for my not intermeddling—"<sup>26</sup>

Melville, however, does meddle and fairly sketches out the entire possible story in this letter, one that dwells primarily on Agatha's meeting of the sailor and then her protracted waiting for his return. The story opens with the wreck and ends with images corresponding to Agatha's drawn-out attention: the lighthouse where Agatha lives, the mail-post at the crossroads to the lighthouse that, like Agatha, awaits and eventually decays, and her father, the lighthouse keeper and a widower. Nothing is said of the legal proceedings<sup>27</sup> that brought the story to Melville's attention, but he encloses the account written to him of Agatha by the lawyer who told him the original history. In September of 1852 Hawthorne went, whether prompted by Melville's suggestion or satisfying his own needs for an island retreat, to the Isles of Shoals, staying at the Appledore Hotel of the Lighton's and Thaxter's for nearly two weeks. Though Hawthorne's letters to Melville have been lost, it appears he seriously considered writing the story and even discussed it with Melville in October and November after returning from the Isles, but then chose not to even though he took copious notes of church records from Star Island (Gosport) of the Isles as late as the spring of 1853, not to mention his extensive journal entries during the visit. Melville's last letter concerning the affair announces his decision to undertake the story himself and requests, "With your permission I shall make use of the 'Isle of Shoals,' as far as the name goes at least....I invoke your blessing upon my endeavors; and breathe a fair wind upon me."<sup>28</sup> In this way, the Isles of Shoals becomes intertwined with not only the Elizabeth Islands and the coastal area of New England around Cape Cod where Agatha and her family lived, but also with the islands that would become the setting of Melville's own island sketches.

Further, as Sattelmeyer and Barbour have noted, newspapers Melville very likely read circulated a story in November of 1853 of a "Female Robinson Crusoe," an Indian woman who had been abandoned on the Santa Cruz Island off the coast of California for eighteen years. This "Crusoe" fittingly overlaps with Agatha on her Crusoeish island around the very same moment when Melville was writing to Hawthorne about using the Isles of Shoals for his composition.

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25 Melville's letter to Hawthorne, 17 July 1852 (*L* 152).

26 13 August 1852 (*L* 153-54, 155).

27 Though perhaps it is implied in Melville's sense of the story as "property" that suits and therefore should appropriately belong to Hawthorne. As both Hawthorne's and Melville's use of "property" show, the story material and the corporeal material found by each them is something that they see as shared. Or perhaps, not so much shared as dispersed.

28 After 25 November 1852 (*L* 163).



Melville possibly alludes to this story, eventually named "Isle of the Cross," as the work "which [he] was prevented from printing" in a letter to Harper Brothers about another nearly completed manuscript he hopes to publish with them—"Tortoise Hunting Adventure." A fire at the Harper's offices seems to have ended Melville's attempts to publish those two manuscripts with them, and there is much speculation over these lost manuscripts<sup>29</sup>—both "The Isles of Cross" and "Tortoise Hunting." Whatever their denouement, all we have is "The Encantadas," published in *Putnam's* March, April and May issues of 1854 and whose division between natural history guide, with extended excursions on tortoises, and the folk tales I have already distinguished may very well be a desperate patchwork of the two manuscripts of the Tortoises and the Isles.<sup>30</sup>

In this "salvage" work, Melville telescopes the Naushon Islands with the Galapagos Islands and the Isles of Shoals, and then finally with the Santa Cruz Islands; as with Thaxter's transplanted California poppy—these straggling islands or traveling weeds suggest a regionalism bound not so much by location as by drift, by happenstance of making it to shore and being picked up by a beachcomber. Through the drift and merge of these islands and the currents that travel between them, which turn and roll in their movements the lost or wrecked debris of the sea, a tangle of seawrack washes up. Margaret Fuller, Zenobia, Agatha, Hunilla, Miranda—all in some way ravaged and stranded on impassive shores. All turning and murmuring into "the sweep of the shore" with the waves, the gulls wheeling above the roar and spray, the slow crumbling of rocky cliffs. In his outline of the "Isle of the Cross," Melville returns again and again to the image of a post or pole at first standing in fortitude and gradually deteriorating. This is not a sign of faith for it is not a crucifixion promising salvation but a crucifixion salvaged out of nothing—as Melville's narrator remonstrates in *Sketch the Eighth*, "they cannot break faith who never plighted it" (130). Melville's crosses might signify despair, but because their reference is null and void, they are of an endurance that is merely erosion. For the story, Melville proposes at first the prow-bone of a wrecked ship lodged and projecting out of the beach to serve as a reminder of the Agatha's missing husband; then a mail-post at the crossroads that waits for his letter that never comes. Like the foremast against which we last see Margaret Fuller, these posts present some last stand for a lost manuscript, a lost language—a communication sent or awaited, standing in prolonged attention, which nevertheless decays, smudging and rubbing away like charcoal sketches. Not the answer, but the waiting occupies and distends and moderates the mind, a modulation that is matched by the object of attention as it, too, crumbles and fades. It is these blurrings of mind and object that haunt Thaxter's Isles of Shoals as she dwells upon this flower, that twist of seaweed, this crumbling skull. This caesura (from the Latin *caedere* to cut, to hew, so akin to *cadere* to fall) is literally a hewn piece of organic matter; it is a *drawing* that draws out time's decompositions. Like Hunilla's reed and Oberlus's hoe handle, which are instruments of song and tillage, these pieces of wood and human debris stand—and fall—for not exactly *forms* of poesy and writing, but erosions and deformations of a strangely awestruck corpus, a naturalized body and language of grotesque shape.

The deformation of cut wood also appears in *Blithedale* as a reworking of a snippet from Hawthorne's notebook on encountering an old wood-pile in a wood. This vision of "a green

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29 Herschel Parker's "Herman Melville's The Isle of the Cross" gives a case for the existence of this lost manuscript; besides Sattelmeyer and Barbour, see also Lea Newman, *A Reader's Guide to the Short Stories of Herman Melville*, for a survey of the compositional history of "The Encantadas."

30 *Putnam's*, incidentally, published three installments of Thoreau's *Cape Cod* a year later in 1855, which is also thoroughly engrossed in salvage work (i.e. of seaweed for manure, lost cargo, and human casualties of wrecks) and also noted by critics as a salvage work as well.

mound...in which the softened outline of the wood-pile was still perceptible" (Hawthorne *BR* 193) may haunt Melville not only because he had just read *Blithedale* at the time of writing his letter to Hawthorne about Agatha but also because he was with Hawthorne the very day that the original notebook entry was recorded, and indeed most of *Blithedale* was written during the height of Melville's and Hawthorne's friendship when they lived near each other in Pittsfield and Lenox respectively. In the entry dated Saturday, September 7th of 1850, Hawthorne writes:

Herman Melville went away, after breakfast.

In a wood, a heap or pile of logs and stick, that had been cut for firewood, and piled up square, in order to be carted away to the house, when convenience served;—or rather to be sledged, in sleighing time. But the moss had accumulated on them, and leaves falling over them, from year to year, and decaying, a kind of soil had quite covered them; although the softened outline of the woodpile was perceptible in the green mound. It was perhaps fifty years—perhaps more—since the woodman had cut and piled these logs and sticks, intending them for his winter-fire. But he probably needs no fire now. There was something strangely interesting in this simple circumstance. Imagine the long dead woodman, his long dead wife and family, and one old man who was a little child when the wood was cut, coming back from their graves, and trying to make a fire with this mossy fuel. (*AN* 297)

Whether the wood is an actual wood near Lenox or some indefinite, imaginary wood, whether Hawthorne and Melville came upon the woodpile together or Hawthorne came to it after his departure, it is not ascertainable. But Hawthorne's interest, as with Melville's, is in the deformation of organic shape—the decay of the woodpile into a green mound, which yet is fuel for some fire.<sup>31</sup> It is, in fact, with fire that Melville begins "The Encantadas":

Take five-and-twenty heaps of cinders dumped here and there in an outside city lot; imagine some of them magnified into mountains, and the vacant lot the sea; and you will have a fit idea of the general aspect of the Encantadas, or Enchanted Isles. A group rather of extinct volcanoes than of isles; looking much as the world might, after a penal conflagration. (99)

Like Thaxter's soft charcoal, itself a carbonized plant matter, Hawthorne's woodpile and Melville's cinders and crayons are all composed from organic matter ruined and disintegrated by fire or by other natural processes, with no recourse to divine salvation and yet salvaged and repurposed to tell a tale. They are soft mounds of crumbling soil or soot that are distinct enough to be piles and heaps. As mounds, as organic material, and as thought-experiments that bespeak a kind of subdued and post-climactic or funereal atmosphere, they remind one of the turning of all matter into dust, volcanoes into islands, people into corpses, human bodies into sand and foam, thought into blotted shapes.

This organic decomposition, however, comes out of a scientific-aesthetic process that trains its view upon natural history subjects. The optical dissolution of wood-piles, islands, and even human beings, melds mechanical techniques with organic matter that yields a grotesque, yet ecological version of decomposition where life both crumbles into nonlife and then revives again, making fire with mossy fuel, making life with the ashes of conflagration. Melville's "crayon" and Thaxter's "charcoal" are not that different from one another, and the sketching technique they ascribe to each aim for the same effect—a kind of liveliness achieved by blurring

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31 Darrell Abel has written of the wood-pile and other similar emblems of human organic decomposition representative of artistic or writerly practice in Hawthorne's work. See "Giving Lustre to Gray Shadows: Hawthorne's Potent Art" (1969).

and softening that is simultaneously a result of death and destruction. The word "crayon" comes from the French word for chalk, and in the nineteenth century, "crayon" referred to any number of drawing instruments which blended a colored pigment derived from organic or mineral matter with a clay base that allows for the kind of powdery rubbing different from our modern wax-based crayons. Even Thoreau's pencil—the one he invented for his family's pencil factory—depends on the same formula of mixing an ink pigment (graphite) with a clay base to produce a lead which reduced the susceptibility for shattering.<sup>32</sup> That techné of blurring and rubbing is, of course, also at work in the thematic preoccupation of his "sketches" of Cape Cod, of sand, shores, and shipwrecks. And, to go back further in this history, Audubon's paintings for *The Birds of America* are more accurately mixed media pieces that most commonly used a combination of graphite, watercolor, and pastel.<sup>33</sup>

It is crucial in Audubon's lexicon that he calls his attempt to present birds in a true-to-nature manner "drawing" even though he also painted with watercolors and sometimes even oils.<sup>34</sup> His unusual method of overlaying watercolors with pastels was one that he experimented with and developed over time in order to reproduce the softness of bird plumage, and his dependence on this overlay technique as well as on his underlying graphite sketches shows why "drawing" holds life more closely by its active and material disintegration. Crayon, pastel, chalk, and pencil are both the instrument and the writing—the drawing. Their crumbling form stands and falls in a caesura, that is, *holds* in a break, a breaking that is also a salvaging—"Crumbling is not an instant's Act / A fundamental pause / Dilapidation's processes / Are organized Decays" (Emily Dickinson).

### *Organized Decays: The Isles as Ruderal Form*

Descending from the organized decays of picturesque and natural history writings—Audubon, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, Thaxter—is a regionalist literary form for which I take Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* as the exemplar. This is a writing that is aware of its literariness as *decay* rather than as a picture or as nature herself, and while its forms and preoccupations follow from its predecessors, its regionalism also revises them. *Pointed Firs* is not only self-conscious of this, for its narrative can also be read as a commentary on regionalist literature through its writer-narrator, but also fits into the insular nineteenth-century literary history I've sketched out. This is an insularity—topographically island-like, and also

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32 See Henry Petroski's *The Pencil*.

33 See Reba Fishman Snyder's analysis of Audubon's pieces for all the materials and techniques used by Audubon and his assistants to create the images.

34 From Audubon's "My Style of Drawing": My Drawings at first were taken altogether in Water Colours, but they wanted softness and a great deal of them to finish them to my liking in this Tedious Style.—I sat for a long time dispirited at this—particularly when trying in vain to immitate birds of soft and downy plumage, such as is that of Most owls, Pigeons, Hawks and Herons, how this could be remedied required a New sett of thoughts or some accident, and here the latter came to my aid.—

One day after having finished the Miniature portrait of the dearest Friend I have in this World A portion of the face was injured by a drop of Water which had dried on the Spot, and although I laboured a great deal to make amend for this, it was all in Vain—recollecting Just then that whilt a pupil of David I had drawn heads and figures in different coloured Chalks, I resorted to a piece that matched the tint intended for the part, applied the pigment, rubbed the place with a cork Stump and at once produced the desired effect!—

My Drawing of owls, Pigeons or Herons were much improved by application of Such Materials, indeed after a few Years of patience Some of My attempts began almost to please Me and I have continued the same Style ever since and that is Now for More than Thirty Years. (764)

conceptually insular, isolated, and limited—that weaves together the picturesque and grotesque of Melville and Thaxter, as well as the natural history techniques of Audubon and Thoreau, to describe a genealogy of *nudity* and *specificity* that form organizing principles of regionalism. *Pointed Firs* is a regionalist work entangled in and exemplary of this mass of loosely connected writings on islands, waves, seaweed, sand, and wrecked women.

Diminutive, minor, and yet altogether potent, Jewett's work is at once easy to overlook and difficult to dismiss. William Dean Howells admired her precisely honest realism, but deplored its precious smallness and sentimentality; Henry James praised her "beautiful little quantum of achievement."<sup>35</sup> Publishing short regionalist fictions describing the lives of mostly marginal figures—women, widows, the elderly, children, and the poor—in isolated and often dilapidated New England villages, Jewett was one among many other regionalist writers like Mary Wilkins Freeman, Cooke, Mary Noialles Murfee, etc who represented in the lives and places left behind by industrialization and thus rarefied and rendered "strange" to a modern and cosmopolitan populace in major cities. Regionalism, as many critics have noted, has been a historically feminized genre due to its perceived minor status, style, and subject by the literary arbitrators of its heyday; and yet it was also the most popular mode of literature published in widely circulated literary magazines like *Atlantic Monthly*, *Putnam's*, or *Scribner's* as local color fiction, serial novels, travel sketches, or poetry.<sup>36</sup> It appealed to a similar sentimental and picturesque sensibility as an earlier generation of sentimentalists, but seemed less strident though no less earnest. Ann Douglas Wood describes regionalism as a "literature of impoverishment" and an unfavorable decline from sentimentalism; regionalist literature is, she writes, "[an] exercise in nostalgia or a release for despair rather than a vehicle for covert power play" (13). For Douglas Wood, sentimentalists like Harriet Beecher Stowe championed conventional feminine virtues while the regionalists "had lost faith in their potency" and instead present "in sharp detail all the refuse and dirt the sentimentalists had ignored" (16). Yet what perhaps seems like conventional sentimentality in regionalism is in fact a process of wearing away sentiment; and as regionalist literature departs from sentimentalism toward a different kind of realism, it also invests different forms and figures with a particular vivacity. That "quantum" is a discrete and limited amount, but also a kind of energy given off during radioactive decay or molecular denaturing. Perhaps that is too technological a term, and the quanta that exudes from these works are more like that from decaying compost or manure, softening green mounds, yet not without their own technique (a provincial "technology") or organization.

The rumination of feminized form converges with the nudity of natural history sketches in regionalist realism. In Jewett's work, such a nude can be traced in the figure of none other than Melville's Agatha and her many metamorphoses. Agatha, or some form of Agatha, reappears in Jewett's work in importantly several ways—in a short story "Marsh Rosemary" and in *The Country of the Pointed Firs* as the story of Joanna on Shell-heap Island—that revise the earlier picturesque, sentimental, and natural history traditions. In *Pointed Firs*, the writer-narrator returns to Dunnet Landing, a village on the coast of Maine that she has visited once before, to work on a manuscript. On her arrival, she finds "the unchanged shores of the pointed firs, the same quaintness of village with its elaborate conventionalities; all that mixture of

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35 In Henry James, "Mr. and Mrs. James T. Fields," *Atlantic Monthly* 116 (July 1915): 21-31.

36 See Pryse and Fetterley, Davitt Bell, and Gebhard on the gendering of regionalism. Gebhard focuses study on the figure of the spinster associated with women local colorists; Bell marks the intersection of femininity, realism, and regionalism; while Pryse and Fetterley represent a feminist recovery of regionalism. For an overview of these approaches, see June Howard's introduction in *New Essays on the Country of the Pointed Firs*.

remoteness, and childish certainty of being the centre of civilization of which her affection dreams had told" (377). With its rocky shores and woods and steep gabled cottages, the village is a picturesque sight for a vacationer in search of a seaside retreat—conventional, quaint, and a mixture of wildness and civilization. It is, like Melville's "oval frame" for a "bluely boundless sea," almost too picturesque. Yet Dunnet Landing, with its isolatoes and islands, is of that same, drifting New England seawrack that forms the straggling islands of Melville and Thaxter, and its picturesque is a kind of grotesque.

As a collection of loosely connected and loosely organized stories about the eccentric characters the writer meets during her retreat, *Pointed Firs* follows the form and subject of grotesque-picturesque sketches. The unnamed narrator finds herself continually distracted from her manuscript by the lives of the Dunnet Landing folk around her, whose tales and her observations of which instead form the sketches that constitute the novel. Jewett presents these as a kind of art-work and idle-work on the margins—her *sketches*—not primary, not grand, not central, but some stories her narrator seems to report quite simply from the people of Dunnet Landing. These stories or portraits of folk are Jewett's wrecked objects salvaged from the shore; they are people whose isolation and oddity are an effect and feature of a landscape of islands and coasts with long distances between rural homesteads far from cities. And they are people that Jewett attempts to see and to depict with the kind of realism that I have been calling nudity. Her sketches take the island topos as a way to return again and again, wave upon wave, to view its salvaged objects. And these objects become grotesque, are grotesque; they are folk who we will see, as Thaxter does of her skull and poppy and seaweed, crumble and drift away even as we attempt to fix our view upon them. This is regionalism's realism, that is, this is its nudity.

Although Dunnet Landing folk frequently complain of the stagnancy of their society in a place where a moribund fishing industry has brought about comparative dullness among a people with no seafaring prospects, the writer-narrator finds these people worth observing and mulling over. Every person she meets appears to her a kind of prospect in themselves in a place where there are supposedly no prospects. Her hostess is Mrs. Almira Todd, an herbalist and widow, whose visitor one day, a Mrs. Fosdick, brings them to the topic of Dunnet Landing folk through gossip and reminiscence. Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Fosdick complain of the lack of novelty and singularity among people in the region now, and turn to talking of "queer folks," "peculiar persons," "curiosities of human natur'," and "strange straying creatur's" (428, 429) from Dunnet's past; whereas the writer-narrator has been finding such curiosities all around her still: "It seemed to me that there were peculiarities of character in the region of Dunnet Landing yet, but I did not like to interrupt" (428). These characters are of a particular nature—elderly men and women, widows, retired captains and fishermen, spinsters and hermits, for the most part—a nature of geriatric decay and solitary ruin, that could be picturesque like Wordsworthian rural figures, but because the decay becomes internal to Jewett's literary technique, this is a nature represented not for composed wholeness but composting form. We will see how the grotesque nature of regionalism mounds seaweed, shells, people, beasts, waves, heap upon heap.

Like Melville's and Thaxter's adaptation of magic lantern technology, Jewett twists picturesque figures in a grotesque way, but unlike Melville's hyperbolic flickering or Thaxter's drifts and blurs, Jewett's technique works with layers of intertext and diegesis. It has a cumulateness that comes from the stronger thread of narrative that follows the writer-narrator through sketches of her visits and stays around Dunnet Landing. By tracing Jewett's reworking of the Agatha story in particular, we will see how these optical overlays further develop and illuminate the peculiar mode of regionalist writing that Melville's and Thaxter's own collections

of seawracked sketches began in different ways.

The Agatha of *Pointed Firs* is recalled by Mrs. Fosdick as a woman named Joanna who, a generation ago, had forsaken Dunnet Landing and lived alone on a nearby island. Mrs. Fosdick explains Joanna's moving to the desolate Shell-heap Island as due to her being "crossed in love" (429) with her fiancé running off to marry another woman a month before their marriage, while Mrs. Todd explains it as a "penance" (431). Mrs. Todd relates her one visit to Joanna, who was her cousin-in-law by her late husband, and her entreaty that Joanna come and live with her or her mother, which Joanna refused, saying she had committed the "unpardonable sin" (439). The two stories do not quite line up—one of being heartbroken and the other of being a transgressor—and it is not clear what happened to Joanna unless she is someone like Hester Prynne whose adultery was considered both romance and sin.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, both Mrs. Fosdick and Mrs. Todd consider the fiancé in the wrong, the young man who "wa'n't well thought of,—there were those who thought Joanna's money is what tempted him" (430), "a shifty-eyed, coaxin' sort of man, that got what he wanted out o' folks" (441). In that sense, Joanna appears a rewriting of Jewett's earlier "Marsh Rosemary" which, in the words of William Dean Howells, is a short story:

where the material of a much longer tale is wildly flung away in the story of the poor old maid who marries the worthless youth sailor, and who makes a long journey to expose him to the second wife after he abandons her, and then seeing their happy home through the window, with its promise of usefulness for the man, returns to her desolation without taking her revenge. (238)

Joanna's shifty fiancé who marries someone else is the counterpart of the "worthless youth sailor," leaving Joanna the counterpart of the "poor old maid." However, unlike Joanna but more like Hester Prynne, the maid of "Marsh Rosemary" is a tailoress who, after supposing her husband dead in a shipwreck, "blossom[s]" (662) with devotion for helping her neighbors in need, industriously plying her needle and visiting households; all the women, though, are in some way deserted or abandoned by their lovers. Howells recognized this as material for a "longer tale"—perhaps a novel like *The Scarlet Letter*—just as Melville recognized his Agatha as material for Hawthorne. Jewett's "Marsh Rosemary," like Melville's Hunilla, hesitates from the full extension of a novel and prefers quaint reductions, or as I have been arguing, a regionalist decay—a kind of sketch that is not so much fragmented mosaic-like as disintegrating, softening, and mulching, with a "naturalizing" perspective of this process. In these two rewritings of Agatha, it is as though Jewett pondered over the story over time, first into "Marsh Rosemary," and then continuing into "Poor Joanna," letting the story mature and age, or denature and decay.

In the rewriting as "Poor Joanna," Jewett further rehashes the story through two storytellers—or rather three, including the writer-narrator—so that whatever the story was, it is in this regionalist form truncated or pruned, yet rather vague, one might even say smudged like a palimpsest rubbed over many a time with so many past scratches that the surface is difficult to read. We have both Mrs. Fosdick's version of Joanna and Mrs. Todd's Joanna; and finally, we have the writer-narrator's telling of Joanna. Rather than a Hester Prynne story where social mores ostracize a woman, the writer-narrator construes Joanna as a story of personal freedom—not of a woman too modern for her time, but a woman medieval for her time; not of a woman abandoned or exiled, but of a woman independent.<sup>38</sup> It is tempting to follow this version of the

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37 This connection to Hawthorne is also noted by Louis Renza in *The White Heron*.

38 On feminist readings of Jewett: One of the major differences between Melville's *Isles of Cross* and Jewett's versions is that hers were not only written and published (depending on whether one agrees that Hunilla's story

story, and indeed the narrator does as far as she can, venturing even onto Shell-heap Island itself in a subsequent trip:

There was the world, and here was she with eternity well begun. In the life of each of us, I said to myself, there is a place remote and islanded, and given to endless regret or secret happiness; we are each the unaccompanied hermit and recluse of an hour or a day; we understand our fellows of the cell to whatever age of history they may belong. (444)

Her grave the site of occasional pilgrimages and of nesting birds, Joanna comes to be a saint for the hermetic and cloistered life, not merely enduring but eternal and endless. Her loneliness, but also her resilience is a hidden moment and part every person. By looking upon the view of the mainland as she imagines Joanna must have done in her place, the narrator analogizes her own situation as a writer on her coastal retreat to Joanna's hermitage and seems to sentimentally and picturesquely valorize their common dedication or devotion—the kind of steadfast heroism and fidelity of attendance and postponement that Melville notes in Hunilla and in his figurations of a lighthouse, a post, and prow-bone for Agatha. Here lies Agatha, Ágata or Saint Agatha of excised breasts, of women painted and venerated for these mutilated breasts, patron saint of all things mammillary, martyrs, wet nurses, and volcanoes. What hand cut off your breasts? what art gaping gash—Tyger!—Tyger! Agatha and Joanna, and Eakins' unnamed mastectomy patient, wounded, mounded, buried, over and over.

The overlay is a technique that becomes *topos*; as the accumulation of sand and dirt and shell becomes a mound, becomes an insular peninsular formation, cape, head, point, spit, so do literary figures heap upon one another to form a regionalism. This overlaying happens when Jewett switches between the metadiegesis of Mrs. Todd's visit to Joanna and its frame of Mrs. Todd telling the story to Mrs. Fosdick. The narrative interrupts Mrs. Todd's story where she encounters Joanna in her doorway on Shell-heap Island so that Mrs. Todd can attend to a customer; when it returns to the framed story, we have this view:

"How did she look?" demanded Mrs. Fosdick, without preface, as our large hostess returned to the little room with a mist about her from standing long in the wet doorway, the sudden draught of her coming beat out the smoke and flame from the Franklin stove. "How did poor Joanna look?" (436)

As if in answer to the question of how Joanna looked, we see Mrs. Todd framed in the doorway just as we last saw Joanna framed in *her* doorway. By interposing Mrs. Todd into Joanna's place within the framed story—and conspicuously calling our attention to this framing by the doorway—Jewett effectively asks us to optically overlay Mrs. Todd over Joanna. In this way we consider Mrs. Todd and Joanna together in the same *topos*, and then the narrator herself along with them when she overlays herself at Shell-heap Island where she imagines Joanna might have stood, mound upon mound, heap upon heaping heart and heaving breast. Before our eyes, Joanna deforms into Mrs. Todd and the writer deforms into Joanna; and likewise, Mrs. Todd deforms before our eyes. To see Joanna is to revise vision so that it overlays and mounds her with stranded woman of other tales and with stranded women within *Pointed Firs* also, blurring and decomposing layer upon layer. Not only is this a grotesque figure, but Jewett's technique embraces a grotesquery combining the mechanical optics of her overlay with the organic

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represents some metamorphosis of the Agatha Robertson sketch), but that they also focalize Agatha's perspective rather than her erstwhile husband's. Before stopping at the simple conclusion of providing a woman's perspective on things and criticizing masculine exploits, one must acknowledge that Jewett's characters and narrative structure is far more complicated than that; and, in the end, her interest is not so far from that of Melville's.

figurations of her subject and language. With the temporal gatherings and releases of memory that recall "Poor Joanna" to the narrative present, there is also then this topographical resurrection and ruination in each sketch like the building up of strata where soil and rock gathers and compacts and then erodes down or the swells and surges of waves rushing in and out a shore.

The diegetic relation between Mrs. Todd and Joanna establishes Mrs. Todd as another woman seemingly alone and waiting, but it requires revisions of her nature as well. The widow of Captain Nathan Todd and the unrequited lover of an unnamed man, Mrs. Todd appears another martyr of abandonment. After she shares her memories of her unnamed lover on one occasion, the narrator pauses to observe her:

She stood in the centre of a braided rug, and its rings of black and gray seemed to circle about her feet in the dim light. Her height and massiveness in the low room gave her the look of a huge sibyl, while the strange fragrance of the mysterious herb blew in from the little garden. (381)

And on another occasion after speaking of past love, the narrator watches her go:

An absolute, archaic grief possessed this country-woman; she seemed like a renewal of some historic soul, with her sorrows and the remoteness of a daily life busied with rustic simplicities and the scents of primeval herbs. (417)

These frequent allusions to Greek figures—sibyl, caryatide, Antigone, an idyl of Theocritus—by the narrator invoke the awe-inspiring and even inhuman strength of a woman. Mrs. Todd's mesmerism in these moments is as an abandoned woman but as one resolutely alone in much the same way that the narrator imagines Joanna as a saint. A centripetal force seems to consolidate her figure, and she appears a fount of strength in her stoic grief—a grief that sets her apart but also one that archaizes and idolizes her. These statuesque and pastoral poses contrast and combine, however, with the garrulous and heavy-set old wives' persona that Mrs. Todd also inhabits. Her persistent narrow-mindedness and frequent criticisms toward certain non-relatives or in-laws in fact shocks the narrator or is narratively placed to surprise the reader and presumably the narrator as well. Her denigrations of "such sordid creatur's as Mari' Harris" (464), her "hate" toward a particular cousin of Nathan's, her condemnation of Elijah Tilley as "a ploddin' man" (483)—these are also portraits of Mrs. Todd. One of her petty comments about another of Nathan's cousins leads the narrator to register this revision with the pause, "This was so different from Mrs. Todd's usual largeness of mind that I had a moment's uneasiness; but the cloud passed quickly over her spirit, and was gone with the offender" (465). Though the narrator turns quickly from this portrait, the fluctuations of Mrs. Todd's character are apparent. From large-mindedness to small-mindedness, from her plump bulk to Joanna's small figure, from sibyl to gossip, and back, Mrs. Todd seems to change shape in each sketch but this is Mrs. Todd as she is, this is her nature—an "historic soul," a plain countrywoman, a "magnificent asparagus." Like Eakins' revision of Greenough's neoclassical *Medora*, Jewett's constant revisions of Mrs. Todd subscribe to nineteenth-century neoclassical obsessions while also deforming them. By overlaying Mrs. Todd and Joanna, Jewett's sketches blur the women together while also allowing a way to see them, or rather, to "naturalize" and decompose them—"how did Joanna look?"

Through such a dissolving overlay, the writer-narrator also revises her own view of Joanna from picturesque aloneness to companionship while she stands on Shell-heap Island and looks back toward the mainland. Her melancholic contemplation on islanded life turns immediately to a more cheery sentiment:

But as I stood alone on the island, in the sea-breeze, suddenly there came a sound of



distant voices; gay voices and laughter from a pleasure-boat that was going seaward full of boys and girls. I knew, as if she had told me, that poor Joanna must have heard the like on many and many a summer afternoon, and must have welcomed the good cheer in spite of hopelessness and winter weather, and all the sorrow and disappointment in the world. (444-445)

The writer-narrator both reverses her previous vision of loneliness to a kind of societal inclusion, and revises the figure of the woman, the post struck in sand, held in a broken or refused communication, to include herself and others. With the interposition of Mrs. Todd, Joanna, and the writer-narrator herself, what we see when we see Joanna is no longer a woman alone but in company with others. Not "unaccompanied" but rather accompanied by the writer-narrator, Mrs. Todd, and the boys and girls of a summer afternoon, "poor Joanna" find affinity with society—a rather particular kind of society. The parameters of this society are made clearer in the narrator's own way of belonging to the people she lives among in Dunnet Landing. While Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Fosdick dwell on how Joanna survived on her island and how folk accommodated her seclusion—respecting her privacy, leaving useful items on the shores for her, looking out for her light—the narrator listens on:

I had been reflecting upon a state of society which admitted such personal freedom and a voluntary hermitage. There was something mediæval in the behavior of poor Joanna Todd under a disappointment of the heart. The two women had drawn closer together, and were talking on, quite unconscious of a listener. (433)

The narrator's muteness—her expressions of interest, which are not actually expressed in the dialogue—and the general quiet of the narration are both an effect of the style and a deliberate muteness on the part of the narrator and often of other characters. She prefers, for the most part, an eavesdropper's or observer's position in the stories so that once Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Fosdick turn to discuss Mrs. Todd's last and only visit to Joanna on Shell-heap island, she is able to remove herself and step aside. Like Melville, Thoreau, and other authors I have looked at here, Jewett prefers the first-person for this particular text—but a first-person removed, as though the pretense of closeness accentuates the enacted distance.<sup>39</sup> This is at once something like Thoreau's sense of being outside a circuit of expression and also being in silent communion within the circuit. Unlike a sentimental outburst of tears which crescendos and engulfs all onlookers into tears as well, this regionalist circuit is dispassionate and mute. It is a different way to "belong" in such a society by being impersonally and quietly a part of it. When she goes herself to "see" Joanna on the island, she once again takes this mute yet companioned position looking out from the prospect of Shell-heap Island.

This is also the assumed position at the end of "Marsh Rosemary" and of Jewett's "A White Heron" whose relation to these "abandoned" or "reclusive" women only becomes clear at the story's close. The position that these stories urge is, ultimately, that of the naturalist's mute observation, but one that revises the terms of being and of engagement presented in Audubon's naturalism. The closing of "Marsh Rosemary" refers to the old maid who has returned home without her revenge as a stalwart flower of the marshes, "Who can laugh at my Marsh Rosemary, or who can cry, for that matter?" (668). Jewett's narrative address is peculiar in its familiarizing turn to the reader—"you"—which pulls one into relation with the old maid, as a flower, and the narrator. To truly take the place that Jewett's narrators draw one into is to answer her question of

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39 Other critics have commented on Jewett's form of first-person removed narration. See, for example, Breitwieser: "...Jewett keeps to the first person, staying on the same limb with the fieldwork narrator, but farther out on it, rendering her observer increasingly conspicuous" (Breitwieser 173).

"who can laugh, or who can cry" by neither laughing nor crying. That empty rhetoric is not so empty after all; and the narrative address and its answering quiet is not as lonely and independent an endeavor as imagined. It is a place shared with these figures of wreckage, but almost impassively or passively shared as plants share their plots of land with other plants. This position is not pitying as it would be in a sentimentalist narrative and nor is it condescending with the fatalistic determinism of naturalism; it is mute closeness.

In "A White Heron," an unsentimental and naturalizing circuit of relation also concludes the story where a hunter-naturalist visits a rural homestead while in search of a rare white heron of the region. Although he asks the young girl Sylvia who lives there where she has seen the heron, she chooses to keep secret the location. The narrator's last exhortation to Sylvia as she sits with the heron is: "And wait! wait! do not move a foot or a finger, little girl, do not send an arrow of light and consciousness from your two eager eyes, for the heron has perched on a pine bough not far beyond yours, and cries back to his mate on the nest and plumes his feathers for the new day!" (678). This extinguishing of one's own life and consciousness mirrors the muteness of *Pointed Firs'* writer-narrator and of "Marsh Rosemary"'s reader. It is to appear almost dead but perhaps only to other people—the human society for which the naturalist-hunter is a harbinger and which she renounces by refusing to tell. Sylvia, a young orphaned girl, is Jewett's abandoned woman in this story and she enters an altogether different society by her muteness—"and Sylvia cannot speak" (679)—one uncertainly welcome for her—"Were the birds better friends than their hunter might have been,—who can tell?" (679). Jewett's apostrophes—"who can laugh?" "who can cry?" "who can tell?"—address a "who" that does not laugh, cry, or tell, who is a personable nonperson or an impersonal person and has an unspoken part in the dialogue. Like the narrative address that draws "you" toward being with and as plants, the "who can tell" in "A White Heron" draws its reader toward being with another species. As her name suggests, Sylvia is as much of wood or grass as of flesh, and she is at home among the herons and pine trees as she is with people. The uncertainty of her society is not so much whether others exist as whether others are suitable or friendly or not, whether another is even *personable*. It is, perhaps, a hostile and unpersonlike society even if the persons are persons: "I like Henry, but I cannot love him."

In seeing Jewett's rural folk, her versions of stranded objects upon the shore of some distant civilization, we see them both in the nudity of their decomposition and in the specificity of their relation apart and with others. The optical and diegetic technique of Jewett's narrative is one that overlays her figures—Joanna, Mrs. Todd, the unnamed writer—and those of other tales both her own and not her own to form a particular island topos, the heaping of sand and driftwood and weed, a "dreadful small place to make a world of" (430), a kind of shell-heaped island. Each sketch offers a person and a view, a way to see that is a way to mull and mulch over, a way to draw and to be drawn into being with drift and ravage.

*Weeds and Strayaways and Women: Botanizing Wreckage in Jewett's The Country of the Pointed Firs*

Who can laugh at my Marsh Rosemary, or who can cry, for that matter? The gray primness of the plant is made up of a hundred colors, if you look close enough to find them. This same Marsh Rosemary stands in her own place, and holds her dry leaves and tiny blossoms steadily toward the same sun that the pink lotus blooms for, and the white rose.

- Jewett, "Marsh Rosemary"

The voice said, "Cry!" And he said, "What shall I cry?" "All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field."

- Isaiah 40:6 (KJV)

Seaweed, poppies, marsh rosemary, and herbs—the greenery of regionalism is a verdancy without lushness, without flourish, and yet, as Jewett writes of the rosemary, "made up of a hundred colors, if you look close enough to find them." Its color is the dull gray overtone of a dry woody plant with the subtle iridescence of tiny violet petals inflorescent. Or its color is that frail blaze of golden orange of a poppy; or the murky olive, red, and green gradations of seaweed racked upon the shore; or the whitened bare bone of storm-tossed wood. Botanical tropes proliferate in these grotesque-picturesque sketches perhaps because of its prehistory as floral ornamentation for garden grottoes; perhaps because plants so naturally unravel, twist, and tangle; perhaps because of a particular tendency for such organic figures in regionalism. The emphasis on botany in regionalism, especially as a feminized genre, is unremarkable in the nineteenth century. The language of flowers was and is the domain of sentimental writers of all kinds; floral tropes have been associated with feminine beauty and fertility; gardening was a popular feminine pastime, if not a necessity; and botany was one of the first sciences acceptable for women practitioners. As one writer in an 1837 issue of the *Maine Monthly Magazine* put it, "botany may be safely commended to the attention of young ladies without incurring the censure of any party" (in Buell *E* 45). Further, the specificity of the plants named in these regional works cluster together to form a particular biota or vegetable character for that place—as the firs and spruce are for Dunnet Landing, and the poppy for the Isles of Shoals. Yet there is something peculiar about Jewett's form of botany, allusions to which come from not only Mrs. Todd as the resident herbalist in *Pointed Firs* but also, as we see in "Marsh Rosemary," Jewett's narrators, so that the language of botany comes to characterize non-botanical objects—namely people—as well.

In the narrative appeal of "who can cry" in "Marsh Rosemary," Jewett echoes as well the anonymous Biblical voice—"Cry!"—that calls forth Isaiah's prophecy to lead his people away from Babylon through wilderness and back to the word of God. There people are analogized to plants, botanized and turned to grass on terms of divine salvation. "All flesh is grass"—"as a flower of the field so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more" (Psalm 103: 15-16). Against the perishable nature of all flesh stands the eternity of God, and the divine breath that gives mortal life is also the breath that cedes mortal life to eternal life. Isaiah's words lead his people away from the mortal doings of princes and nations and casts their eyes up high upon the wind that will sweep them away as dust, as mere drops in a bucket: "he taketh up the isles as a very little thing" (Isaiah 10:15). And even the place that shall know no more the grass and flowers shall be known no more, and the earth that has been left as dust is swept up like isles, shall be nothing more than isles. All perishes, all flesh is grass—cry! "The voice said, Cry!" The voice—a voice—of God? Cry! Unknown, anonymous, beckoning—cry! Cry! Who can cry? Who can "Cry!"? In Isaiah, this voice remains unattributed, unclaimed, quivering between the omnipotent aura of God's command and the most beseeching impotence of subjectlessness, gaping speech, nothing more than sound and fury and misery. Jewett's "who can cry" questions the immortality of the divine voice, the divine current that flows through all life. From the ambiguity of the cry, cipher that gives out of nothing, a voice asks, "Who can cry?" turning divine command into a sublunary

act—not God, but you, not God, but this plant of dry leaves and tiny blossoms. Cry. No strength for the faint, no wings for the weary, but this withering grass, this flower of the field, these isles, this crumbling coast of rock and sand and flung up bodies. Jewett's echo of Isaiah's cry directs the view to the marsh rosemary—to grass, to flesh, to weed—instead of some everlasting omnipotence, to prim and retiring impoverishment, resilience that lets itself erode to nothing, instead of shining adamant. Perishability is not contrasted against everlastingness; from all flesh is grass, there is only more grass, grass that flourishes and perishes, again and again, over and over.

Botanizing, then, literarily performs a decompositional process in regionalist naturalism. "Marsh Rosemary" strives to present the old maid—Ann Floyd—so that we see her, so that we answer that question—how did she look?—by turning Nancy into a marsh shrub with small flowers. Jewett's strange transformation of woman into plant makes recourse to the pitying deliverance of Daphne from the attentions of Apollo by turning her into a laurel tree—"Only her shining beauty was left." Yet regionalism's view is less a transformation or conversion and more a deformation, less a pittance and more a regard; and what is left is not beauty, but a dry, gray plant—a weed. Instead of the rose by the side of a prison, a sensuous and lush contrast to its setting, Jewett chooses the marsh rosemary to encapsulate her woman. Like Thaxter's poppy, the marsh rosemary is a peculiar "poverty-strengthened" plant to latch onto: more shrub than flower, though its uses were many as an herb and a root; a humble plant suited to its marshy, saline soil as the poppy to its sandy ground. To view Jewett's "Marsh Rosemary," her Sylvia, and her Joanna is neither to ridicule or sentimentalize these women; nor is it to idolize them as saints, heroines, and anchorites. To see them is to botanize, and to botanize is to turn people into plants.

Through the hashing and crosshashing of views and perspectives, Jewett's sketches of the Dunnet Landing folk leave a final impression of deterioration and adulteration. Following Mrs. Todd's lead in botanizing people, in turning people into plants, Jewett's narration literally decomposes her people by rehashing them through different and fluctuating perspectival lenses like that of Mrs. Todd's and the writer-narrator's. Her literary decomposition is her version of regionalist realism, a kind of botanizing that represents reality's deformations by diegetically and optically carrying out those deformations, and by deforming the subject adulterates the subject. As with organic decomposition which turns the vitality of one season into fodder for the next so that the temporal turnings render each season's verdure into a recurring and yet novel matter; so the narrator's experience of the reunion is one of newness folded into a sense of recurrence, remembrance already blurred by the fleeting present, turning friends even at the moment of their newness into familiar and old friends: "[I] parted from certain new friends as if they were old friends; we were rich with the treasure of a new remembrance." The susurrations of memory and recurrence, even that of plodding repetition, enfold these sketches of new old folk, as spring rises and folds back into mulch. Jewett's decomposition, which blends new and old into this moment of departure, and which insists on the writer-narrator's belonging in the family, presents its vision—its nudity—as thoroughly adulterated.

Such a "corruptive" decomposition works into the formal and thematic implications of the elisions and revisions surrounding Jewett's telling or viewing of Joanna as well. Neither a Hester Prynne of lush rose nor the forlorn Agatha of driftwood, Joanna is instead the gray, prim marsh rosemary—an unremarkable flower of nevertheless hundreds of colors. There is a kind of mousiness to Joanna, that is both an effect of her actual character and of the narrative overlays that render her indistinct and shiftily as her body morphs from the largeness of Mrs. Todd to her

slim figure to the narrator invisible body. Is her isolate condition a mark of sainthood or of penance; is she a figure of personal freedom or of ostracism?

This indefinite quality in Joanna's sin or saintliness matches, in fact, the trope of "wrecked" women in Melville's "The Encantadas" and the proposed "Isles of Cross," and returns us to the Edenic epistemology in which knowledge is associated with sin. In his outline of Agatha's story, Melville concludes of the sailor's reflections on abandoning his wife:

The whole sin stole upon his insensibly—so that it would perhaps have been hard for him to settle upon the exact day when he could say to himself, "*Now* I have deserted my wife["]; unless, indeed upon the day he wedded the Alexandran lady. (*L* 155)

The violation of social mores shifts from the woman to the man, from wife to husband, and yet that sense of transgression is itself indistinct. It is this hazy quality that Melville wanted to represent, and he chose to produce that effect through the aporia in the splintering and schizophrenic sketches in "The Encantadas," but also more directly in the embattled censorship in the depiction of Hunilla. The euphemisms and elisions in the text visually and rhetorically cover up or erase nudity, or improper exposure, in "The Cholla Widow." Interrupting the recounting of Hunilla's time on the island after burying her husband, a series of dead-end, long dashes mark the narrator's failures and refusals to narrate. Hester Blum suggests that these dashes and elisions follow and comment upon nineteenth-century moral propriety and editorial practices that obscure rape, sexual violations, and other forms of illicit exposure. The first two times, the dashes are followed by the narrator's own ruminations on censorship and fate, until he simply skips back to his ship's discovery of Hunilla and their preparations to give her passage back to Chile. When the captain asks Hunilla why she stopped notching her reed with each day's passing and whether any other vessels passed by, Hunilla herself refuses to say why—"Señor, ask me not"—and stops herself—"Nay, Señor; —but——" (*E* 133). What Hunilla refuses to tell is perhaps a tale of having been found before and dealt poorly, even raped.

Hunilla's tergiversation dramatizes the haziness of transgression that is also associated with Jewett's Joanna. The object of editorial censorship, it is unclear how or whether Hunilla has been sexually violated, though she has certainly been barred and obscured by editorial and moral proprieties themselves. Further, Hunilla's juxtaposition with Oberlus and the king of Charles' Isle blurs the distinction between victim and perpetrator, just as the moral codes governing her reception blurs her position. If Hunilla were judged by nineteenth-century standards, she would be a degraded woman because moral proprieties shuns the victim by hiding her, turning the victim effectively into the perpetrator. As in the Garden of Paradise, Hunilla should not eat from the fruit of knowledge, should not expose herself; it is knowledge of her story that would brand her as a violated woman.

By complying with these moral metrics and its editorial excisions and modifications that obscure, or obversely, erotically depict choice tidbits of its object, Melville's narrator finds himself both the predator and the prey, the perpetrator and the victim.<sup>40</sup> The narrator acquiesces to censorship, but troubles its efficacy—"Events, not books, should be forbid"—and its own dallying—"sporting with the heart of him who reads" the way "feline Fate will sometimes dally with a human soul, and by a nameless magic make it repulse a sane despair with a hope which is but mad" (*E* 132). So did Hunilla's Fate dally with her, so Melville's narrator dallies with his

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40 The historical connection or thin line between natural history displays and pornographic displays, between the educated and the vulgar, can be seen in many techniques of display from Peale's natural history museum, as discussed in Amy Werbel's *Thomas Eakins: Art, Medicine, and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia*, to the peepshow potential of individual optical devices like the stereoscope and early cinematic devices.

reader. "Dally" is a charged word to use here; it is not only the delay of the narration, but a kind of illicit flirting that violates Hunilla and places the editing narrator in the same position as a sexual predator, but further one that seems to take delight in mangling its victim slowly, a torturous extraction that promises eventual expiation.

Because Melville's and Jewett's techniques rely upon the optical lens of dissolving views and botanizing decomposition to dramatize this problem of seeing and not seeing, knowing and not knowing, a woman, the exposure of a woman is also the exposure of Nature. Like Audubon and other natural historians in the business of exhibiting nature, Melville and Jewett negotiate with the lines drawn between what counts as morally proper or improper knowledge. The line between the genteel, intellectual study of nudes and natural history and the vulgar peeping at nakedness marks the ambiguity at the heart of rational recreation which aims to both educate and amuse. This is also the hazy line that marks sexual transgression in the wrecked women of Jewett's and Melville's story, where feminine exposure or nudity indeterminately marks the woman as classical art object or as morally improper, as innocent victim or adulteress. In other words, women may either become figures for the objects of aesthetic or scientific knowledge or for temptations away from that intellectual study. Lord Brougham, the founder of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, took great pains to differentiate the pleasure of knowledge from baser passions. In "A Dissertation on the Objects, Advantages and Pleasures of Science," also published in the American Library of Useful Knowledge in 1831, he bases "the gratification of curiosity" on a disinterested, Kantian judgement:

The mere gratification of curiosity; the knowing more today than we knew yesterday; the understanding what before seemed obscure and puzzling; the contemplation of general truths, and the comparing together of different things,—is an agreeable occupation of the mind; and beside the present enjoyment, elevates the faculties above low pursuits, purifies and refines the passions, and helps our reason to assuage their violence. (140)

He also cautions against the potential of images, as well as fictional stories, to lead to prurience rather than intellectual enjoyment, a possibility that Melville's sketches appear intent upon trying and to which Jewett's sketches allude.<sup>41</sup> Is Hunilla's exposure an x-rated sexual violation or a natural historical tour of the islands? Is "The Encantadas" fiction or nonfiction, fantastic allegory or picturesque travel sketch? Is Joanna sinner or saint? Is *The Country of Pointed Firs* a collection of loosely connected short stories or is it a more respectable realist novel?

To expose one's degradation would be as absolute an exposure as a woman wrecked and naked on the shore. Outside of these laws, however, Hunilla, Agatha, and Joanna are neither degraded nor victims, or at least, not clearly either, and on the shores of the isles, they are, so to speak, simply wrecked and naked. If censorship obscures out of propriety, nature obscures because it *is* obscure. Melville's narrator finally attributes his "dallying" to nature, which implies the point-of-view of a travel account, yet one that is not exactly picturesque nor nonfiction. After Hunilla's exchange with the captain, the narrator breaks off a final time from relating what happened, saying:

But no, I will not file this thing complete for scoffing souls to quote, and call it firm proof

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41 For a discussion of the educational potential and illicit deviations of rational recreation with respect to botanical illustration, see Anne Secord, "Botany on a Plate: Pleasure and the Power of Pictures in Promoting Early Nineteenth-Century Scientific Knowledge." As she notes on the popularity and propriety of optical spectacles, "The enjoyment of spectators consisted in their simultaneously being absorbed by a visual spectacle and seeing the making of the spectacle itself. This experience of occupying two places at once allowed for a distancing of observer and representation, a management of pleasure that was to make optical spectacles one of the most acceptable forms of middle-class entertainment" (50).

upon their side. The half shall here remain untold. Those two unnamed events which befell Hunilla on this isle, let them abide between her and her God. In nature, as in law, it may be libelous to speak some truths. (*E* 133)

What befell Hunilla and how much of her we are allowed to see takes place, then, in the realm of nature. It is not a matter of moral propriety that censors Hunilla's story, but a matter of nature; or it is a matter that mixes up morality and immorality, realism and illusion. Melville's narrator refuses the bind of law which requires confirmed and filed "knowledge" for an untold tale held in abeyance; he gestures, instead, to a nature of indeterminacy and obscurity. Perhaps in nature, one cannot say what is the truth because the truth does not depend on knowledge, neither factual nor moral knowledge. For Jewett, this inconclusiveness, transgressive haziness becomes the entire drift of the story through the rehashing overlays, as with the dissolving views of a magic lantern show. It is not clear there whether Joanna is the adulterer or her fiancé, and that unclarity, that smudginess in the lens of narrative views is what makes Jewett's telling grotesque. If Joanna is, like the other women—and men—we have thus far met, a nude cast up onto New England shores, she represents the strangeness of a nudity that is both a transgression and not a transgression, the strangeness of a form as deformed, of an adulteration that is not an "original sin," but a natural characteristic. Her provenance, like that of all Dunnet Landing folk, is out of sheer genetic chance, out of adulteration, onto that seashore Thoreau called "a neutral ground," "a trivial place." She is the nude that is not beautiful, but "peculiar," one of Mrs. Todd's "strayaway folks." If she is any kind of strayaway plant, she is seaweed that has drifted onto an insular beach.

Seaweed is the organic matter that has most lent itself to this particular and insular natural history of regionalism. Little is said of seaweed in *Pointed Firs* except as a background scent to Dunnet Landing—"The world was filled with a fragrance of fir-balsam and the faintest flavor of seaweed from the ledges, bare and brown at low tide in the little harbor" (450)—and yet it offers itself up as kin to the trees and rustic herbs and wildflowers that do figure in the text and is emblematic of the driftweed that characterizes regionalism.

*The Coral Pin: "I am but restoring to you your own property"*

When Mrs. Todd visits Joanna on Shell-heap Island, she brings a coral pin for Joanna from her husband Nathan. Brightening at this remembrance of Nathan, Joanna holds the pin for a moment and then hands it back, "I want you to have it, Almiry, an' wear it for love o' both o' us" (439). At the end of *Pointed Firs*, as the writer-narrator readies to leave Dunnet Landing, she finds the coral pin among the packages of farewell presents left to her by Mrs. Todd. The pin, as it moves from Joanna's story into the frame narrative of the writer's visit to this little coastal village, from hand to hand, is like other objects washed up onto the shores of what I have been calling a natural history of regionalism. It is an object cast up and tangled, an object of wreckage and strands, picked up and passed along by waves, wreckers, salvagers. In relinquishing the pin, Joanna relinquishes her individual claim to property and gives it up to that neutral ground of the shore, which gathers and spreads all refuse and debris indiscriminately. The transgressive haziness that does not attach blame nor credit instead spreads out all claims as a sharing or commoning that radically revises the standards of social and environmental responsibility one holds. The coral pin is no more a gift that can belong to one person and given to another, than the shells and Indian relics which are heaped upon the island. They drift on to wherever they might go to whoever might next receive them. This "commons" and the

relinquishments and receptions it requires is the resting ground of regionalism; it is its beached landing, its ever receding shore, its stranded strand, which comes out of the decomposition and erosion of its nature.

This sense of loss or relinquishment, which is ultimately a holding in common, attends regionalism on the level not only of subject matter, but also of formal capacity. It is a literature of diminution and scarce means, a literature of sketches rather than novel lengths. Yet this aspect of regionalism is also, as we have seen, a point of contention. In his comments on "Marsh Rosemary," William Dean Howells provides a complaint for this oxymoronic "lavishness" for deficiency in local color sketches in general:

It is this occasional lavishness in the writers of short stories which gives one question whether a branch of the art of fiction tempting to such profusion ought to be encouraged. The motives which are both great and simple are not so many that the profusion can afford to waste them in the narrow limits of a tale or sketch, and we conjure the writer of short stories to make sure that he has not one of these in hand before he casts his plot irrevocably in that miniature mould. We think a little question will usually enable him to decide whether he has hold of a short-story motive or a long-story motive. (238-39)

For Howells, local colorists often waste good story material by reducing it to a short story. The "narrow limits of a tale of sketch" are restrictive for a motive better suited to a realist novel; in short, Howells' claim for realism is that it deserves greater and grander treatment. As a mode of realism, regionalism must fulfill the demands of the realist motive, not by profusely diminishing a tale but by adequately serving long-story profusion. As a novel of sketches, is *Pointed Firs* a defense of the "miniature mould" or is it an attempt to write with a "long-story motive"? Written originally as a few sketches serialized in *The Atlantic*, and retaining its sketch organization and sensibility in its novel form, I would consider *Pointed Firs* with its rewriting of the Agatha Robertson story as Jewett's response to Howells signifying her preference for the sketch form with its "narrow limits" and "waste."

Such a preference is emblemized by Dunnet Landing folk as seen by the narrator-writer, whose view becomes a metacritical view upon regionalism. Reminiscing of Santin Bowden at the end of the reunion, the narrator evokes Thomas Gray's pastoral sense of wasted or unknown Miltons:

It was not the first time that I was full of wonder at the waste of human ability in this world, as a botanist wonders at the wastefulness of nature, the thousand seeds that die, the unused provision of every sort. The reserve force of society grows more and more amazing to one's thought. More than one face among the Bowdens showed that only opportunity and stimulus were lacking,—a narrow set of circumstances had caged a fine able character and held it captive. One sees exactly the same types in a country gathering as in the most brilliant city company. You are safe to be understood if the spirit of your speech is the same for one neighbor as for the other. (466)

This is as much a waste of culture (Gray's lament) as it is a waste of nature; and the human ability held in reserve in a gathering like the Bowden reunion seems to lie fallow—untapped but also captive—by the lack of stimulation in the remote setting. Even while the narrator affirms the equal potential between country and city folk, she diminishes the country for its poor resources and lack of exchange. It is almost as though Jewett has put into her narrator's mouth the same criticism that William Dean Howells gave for regionalism. Like Thoreau who marvels at nature's destruction of life, however, Jewett allows that great swathe of human ability to be destroyed by letting it sit unused, rotting, and moldering away. She refuses the pieties and



heroics of Howells' recuperation of stories and of life. In *Pointed Firs*, Jewett suggests that to listen and to revise commentary, to return and to go, to bid farewell at that long last moment seems cruel—Emerson's casualties—but in fact leaves them to a common ground, a kind of dust beneath one's feet that goes with one everywhere one goes.

The common inheritance that Jewett's writer-narrator alludes to helpfully returns us to Joanna's island. The scene of a common burial (and birthing) ground, Shell-heap Island itself recalls Thoreau's vast morgue of the seashore where "we too are a product of sea-slime." The relative silence, as well as the silent erasures of Jewett's text, to the Native Americans and the ethnic diversity of Maine's coastal population<sup>42</sup>, are easy to deplore and to suspect Jewett of the conventional disregard for certain minorities in favor of a more palatable and picturesque population. Yet if we take into account the mute disposition of her writer-narrator and the form of belonging that it implies; and if we consider the narrative structure of Jewett's introduction of Joanna and Shell-heap Island; it is clear that Jewett's little region is very much a commons. Not only does Mrs. Fosdick's and Mrs. Todd's discussion of Shell-heap Island begin with their understanding of it as a former gathering place for Native American, but their limited perspectives and tellings of that "great bangeing-place" and "their shell-heap" (428) leave the island's status inconclusive. Mrs. Todd admits, "I've heard myself that 't was one o' their cannibal places, but I never could believe it" (428). The shell-heap or shellmound is, of course, not an unusual landmark in the American landscape. Mentioned by neither Mrs. Fosdick nor Mrs. Todd, but certainly understood in this way by Jewett's narrative, Shell-heap Island is a burial ground for the Indians, those "tame-looking folks" or "them painted savages" (428), and for Joanna. It becomes, in the stratified rendering of these histories, a *common* burial ground which is common because it is the site where Joanna's remains and Indian relics come together. Was Shell-heap Island the burial ground of Native Americans—was it overtaken and appropriated by Joanna or her brethren? Who can tell? And so Jewett leaves Shell-heap Island's Native American past in the haziness of hearsay, just as the tellings of Joanna's story are hearsay as well. There is an irresponsibility in this, and an irresponsibility to accounting for unequal conditions and historical rewriting, just as there is a fundamental impossibility of full reparation and truth telling, but it leaves the island open to its future inhabitants and visitors.<sup>43</sup>

The commonness of Shell-heap Island extends to the relics and tributes that make their way onto the island. While one reading would render the collecting of Indian arrowheads and ceramic pieces from the island a desecration and pillaging, another would leave the collection in common—to whoever will come for them; no trustees or gatekeepers except that the natural processes and barriers in tides and shallow and rocky inlets hinder one's way to Shell-heap Island. This sense of circulating goods follows into Joanna's story as Mrs. Fosdick and Mrs. Todd describe how villagers would take to leaving useful things for Joanna out on a certain hillock of the island where one could get close enough to on a boat to throw something ashore; and then into the frame narrative itself when the coral pin circulates as a gift to—or rather

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42 See, on treatment of Native Americans and their artifacts, Bill Brown's "Regional Artifacts" in *A Sense of Things*, and, on erasure of the ethnic population for a more attractive touristic presentation, Hsuan Hsu's "Literature and Regional Production" in his monograph *Geography and the Production of Space*.

43 As Chakrabarty notes in his critique of the Anthropocene, "The Climate of History," there is still a problem of environmental justice and the postcolonial politics of uneven environmental impacts. Yet environmental justice remains tied to the causal, ratiocinative logic of the Enlightenment; is it possible that ameliorative conditions would occur through unmeasured, undetermined, unreparative methods at certain regional scales, if not on all scales such as the individual and global? Examples of such loopholes existing in our current economic circumstances might include worker co-ops, shared living arrangements, etc.

something held in common by—Joanna, Nathan, Mrs. Todd, and the writer-narrator. Perhaps it is too facile to call something common when so many claims and rights to a particular object or plot of land contend, but it is both a difficult relinquishment of single or personal ownership and a difficult holding in common. When the narrator readies to leave Dunnet Landing at long last, Mrs. Todd treats her quite brusquely, speaking to her "in an unusually loud and business-like voice," acting "gruff," and leaving the writer without sending her off—"she shook her head and waved her hand without looking back" (485). This brusque farewell is both a touch of sentiment, but also a roughness that eases the pain of separation—a giving up. As the writer puts it, "So we die before our own eyes; so we see some chapter of our lives come to their natural end" (485). Naturalizing her leavetaking to a death, the writer makes herself, like Joanna, something that cast up onto the shore, open to scavengers and to the sun and wind, ultimately held in common.

To treat in common is also to be shorn of special and personal interests, as difficult as it is; and it is also to be bound to common interests. When Melville writes to Hawthorne with the Agatha story, he does not so much give it to Hawthorne as "restore" them to him:

If you should be sufficiently interested, to engage upon a regular story founded on this narration [narrative?]; then I consider you but fairly entitled to the following tributary items, collected by me, by chance, during my strolls thro the islands; & which—as you will perceive—seem legitimately to belong to the story, in its rounded & beautified & thoroughly developed state:—but of all this you must of course be your own judge—I but submit the matter to you—I dont decide. (*L* 155)

And again: "I am but restoring to you your own property—which you would quickly enough have identified for yourself—had you but been on the spot as I happened to be" (*L* 157). Like Thoreau's scavengers, Melville finds these items along the shore, washed about by the waves into smooth and peculiarly worn shapes that might be polished to beauty by someone who will turn them into a story. If the Agatha story belongs to Melville, he freely gives them up, submitting them to Hawthorne; yet he also insists that the story already belonged to Hawthorne, was lost to him and would have been his had he been on the shore where they washed up. The Agatha story, then, seems to belong to both, to be held in common by Melville's relinquishment and restoration. This is, of course, not the evaluation of property in the original Agatha story. There, Agatha's and Robertson's daughter's entitlement to entailment rights gives her legal claim to her father's property, giving rise to the story that the lawyer would eventually pass on to Melville. By revising "property" to something "common," Melville can pass on the story to Hawthorne—and also take the story back to write on his own, which is exactly what he does. The offering is both an offering and not an offering, a gift given and taken back and forth, a salvaged good shared between people; it matters not who it belongs to since it belonged to both and all, and the right of taking the story is open to anyone's rewriting.

In this sense, the ecology of diminishment with its tenuous, yet tensile threading that diffuses relations throughout cannot assign particular actions and responses, but rather imagines a proximate commons in which any action involves every other action, every actor shares with every other actor. It is not, then, an ecology for individual relations nor relations on vaster scales, but the mediate grouping of our extendable and limited vision.

### Chapter 3

#### "Because I see—New Englandly—": Emily Dickinson's Regional Specificity<sup>1</sup>

The Robin's my Criterion for Tune—  
Because I grow—where Robins do—  
But, were I Cuckoo born—  
I'd swear by him—<sup>2</sup>

ROB'IN n. [L. *rubecula*, from *rubeo*, to be red.]

A bird of the genus *Motacilla*, called also redbreast. This is the English application of the word.

In the United States, a bird with a red breast, a species of *Turdus*.<sup>3</sup>

In Noah Webster's 1844 *American Dictionary of the English Language*, there are two definitions for the robin—one designating an English bird *Motacilla rubecula* and the other an American bird *Turdus migratorius*, both red-breasted birds known as the Robin. By the series of rules and comparisons set up in Emily Dickinson's "The Robin's my Criterion for Tune—" one might assume that the robin in this poem is the American Robin, in contrast to the Cuckoo, a European bird. The Robin is the poetic speaker's "Criterion" because she "grow[s]—where Robins do—" and the customary observance that "The ode familiar—rules the Noon—" announces a homely and provincial preference for the indigenous and familiar, which the poem eventually reveals is that pertaining to New England (J285: 2, 5). Yet the final lines of the poem both maintain and ironically collapse the hierarchical and geographical comparisons between Britain and New England into a form of equivalence, just as the "Robin" is actually a collapsed referent for two different birds:

The Seasons flit—I'm taught—  
Without the Snow's Tableau  
Winter, were lie—to me—  
Because I see—New Englandly—  
The Queen, discerns like me—  
Provincially— (J285: 11-16)

The analogy with the queen's survey of her provinces overlays the speaker's provincial seeing with a sense of greater capacities. Yet this greatness is enabled by its relation to the Queen *and* by the "New Englandly" limits of seeing. Further, seeing winter is made present and real for the speaker by virtue of a narrow, regionally specific view of the "Snow's Tableau." Without that understanding of winter's stillness, one does not know its intrinsic seasonality, how winter still "flits" *in* its stillness. To see "New Englandly" turns out to be an expansive mode of seeing that allows the longitudinal breadth of watching seasons go by while tied to an acute awareness of the actually present winter.

The oft-quoted phrase seeing "New Englandly" has been understood to express both Dickinson's provincial qualities—her place in a New England literary tradition, or a nineteenth-century American women writer's tradition—as well as her singularly pointed difference or

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1 Portions of this chapter have appeared previously in "'Because I see--New Englandly--': Seeing Species in the

2 From Emily Dickinson, *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Poem #285).

3 Noah Webster, "Robin," in Cynthia Hallen, ed., *Renovated Online Edition of Noah Webster's 1844 American Dictionary of the English Language*, <http://edl.byu.edu/index.php>, 2009.

detachment.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, the common Robin, with definitions traceable to both England and New England, bears the standard for a "New Englandly" vision that can be somehow limited and capacious at once. So frequent in Dickinson's poems, so typical and emblematic of her poetic sensibility, the Robin is also a thoroughly specific creature, whose specificity must not have escaped Dickinson's attention as it had not escaped her dictionary's. However, while the Robin seems at first glance to be a singular bird, Webster's listing of two definitions reveals a linguistic subterfuge in the common name, which covers two varieties of birds belonging neither to the same genus nor to the same continent. The Robin is like one bird that divides into two birds that spiral and chase each other in the skies, drawing raveling and unravelling lines of divergence and convergence.

Dickinson's splitting and collapsing references are only the first flit of what I consider a regional specificity in Dickinson's seeing "New Englandly" where specifying a referent—the Robin, New England, winter, provincially—widens out to unsettle the definition of that referent. Dickinson's poetic figurations of regional species are less references to literary commonplaces of particular birds or actual ornithological entities than they are self-conscious and careful performances of speculation. Her Robin is a robin that splits into two species of birds, and her Cuckoo a volatile thing to swear by, since it is a bird that lays its eggs in other bird species' nests. These figures, as a particular species of poetic figuration, ask us to understand Dickinson's poetics as borrowing from science for a regionalist apprehension of the world. This is a regionalism that places itself in a diminished yet relative and closely imbricated position with others—Robins, Cuckoos, Daisies, and also the Queen—rather than in an elevation over others as objectified and accumulated knowledge. As a way of relating to human and nonhuman natures, Dickinson's regionalism posits a poetic natural-historical perspective that turns attention from a purely scientific data-based or even a place-based ecological ethics to a diminutive way of seeing that affords for every entity a narrow, but significant ground or "placeholder" for its own capacity to be implicated in life.<sup>5</sup> To see New Englandly is to see with a minute attention that discriminates between species even as it reformats the criteria for species as poetic-empiric figures. For Dickinson, this refined seeing is diminished seeing in that it sees narrowly and it sees self-consciously, while considering that diminishment the necessary basis for growth and succession, for "growing where Robins do."

If her region is where Robins grow, Dickinson's poetics suggest a regionalism whose specificity at once yields to characterization and to shifting boundaries and definitions as it slips between New England and Europe. A region, after all, is an area ruled, from *regere*, 'to rule or direct'; it is an area measured and surveyed regally—in Dickinson's terms, queenly or New Englandly—so that its boundaries depend on and change with its rulers. The regionalist specificity that underlies every selection, location, and group can value both a narrow-minded provincialism and a self-aware sense of capacity as with Dickinson's seeing.

### *Site Specificity; Sight Specificity*

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4 For Dickinson as part of New England literary culture, see Lawrence Buell, *New England Literary Culture*, and as part of a nineteenth-century women's literary culture, see Elizabeth Petrino, *Emily Dickinson and Her Contemporaries*.

5 Regionalism as a place-based environmentalism can be seen in bioregionalist reinhabitation of the land according to local natural features rather than normative political centers. These movements remain tied to territorial claims of a region based on the arrangement of watersheds, landforms, and biota. See Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*; and Lynch et al, *The Bioregional Imagination*.

Haecceity, or "thisness," is a medieval philosophical idea of indivisible and particular individuation first proposed by John Duns Scotus in contrast to the abstraction of quiddity or "whatness." Quiddity is the essential property shared or held in common that explains *what* something is, for example, human nature. Haecceity is also an essential property, but one that distinguishes something from everything else. Duns Scotus' strongest analogue to illustrate this individuation happens to be that of biological species from genera. Species is defined by its "specific difference" between two species within a genus, with that same difference explaining why such a species cannot be divided into further subspecies. If haecceity is what makes one thing discrete from another and is just like the specificity that makes the human species different from other species, then it is vulnerable to the variety of critiques that have since been made on the differentiation of species, especially that between humans and animals. In "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)," Jacques Derrida rewrites the history of man's autobiography where seeing himself mirrored in a cat's gaze makes him aware of his nudity, that is, of himself as human and fallible:

A reflected shame, the mirror of shame ashamed of itself, a shame that is at the same time specular, unjustifiable, and unable to be admitted to. At the optical center of this reflection would appear this thing—and in my eyes the focus of this incomparable existence—that is called nudity. And about which it is believed that it is proper to man, that is to say foreign to animals, naked as they are, or so it is thought, without the slightest inkling of being so. (373)

Derrida's intellectual history of Western philosophy's treatment of the animal rewrites a genesis of man's differentiation from animals based on his different nudity of original sin. This story intersects with the one Agamben tells of clothing and nudity in Christian theology, but it describes Edenic innocence with the nudity of animal that does not know its nudity. If nudity is "*this!*"—a kind of specificity that can only be seen in some explicit instance, a specificity in nature, of seeing nature—it is also the specificity that has become so intertwined with a lapsarian narrative of man that Agamben cannot see his way out of it. Derrida tells this "autobiography," however, in order to question it and recognizes it as something that may be impossible to tell, or at least, that "nudity" within this tradition is untenable:

...by saying "I" the signatory of an autobiography would claim to point himself out physically, introduce himself in the present...and in his totally naked truth. And in the naked truth, if there is such a thing, of his or her sexual difference, of all their sexual differences. By naming himself and responding in his own name he would be saying "I stake and engage my nudity without shame." One can well doubt whether this pledge, this wager, this desire or promise of nudity is possible. Nudity perhaps remains untenable. (418)

For Derrida, then, the Christian theology that bases human exceptionalism on original sin and its transgressive nakedness is also the same apparatus that instantiates gender inequality as signified by the satirical use of "man" to indicate human. Is there such a nudity that could see the totally naked truth, specify and describe, without the biases and baggage of an entire intellectual tradition? It is as though "nudity" is the point at which everything comes together—and falls apart—it is the critical point where the opportunity to depart from that tradition occurs; and what I propose is a nudity every bit as entangled with specificity, but a specificity of a different kind.

Specificity, or haecceity, is, of course, what regionalism is about; "region," just as well as "species," would have served as Duns Scotus' example of haecceity. Regionalism entails a kind of site-specificity that at once yields to characterization and to the instability of shifting

boundaries. The sense of fluctuation in "site-specificity" is also one that I will extend to its verbal articulation—"site" that is not just location but also vision. The *specificity* that underlies every selection, location, and grouping can value both a narrow-minded provincialism and a self-aware sense of capacity as in Dickinson's "seeing New Englandly." Specificity retains its awe of nudity as seeing a naked truth, as though such a truth was available, but it also sees nudity as nothing more than a species of truth. As the Latin root *specere* 'to look' suggests, specificity and species are cognates whose relation brings meticulous and careful ways of seeing to bear upon propensities for speciesism. Species is less an absolute or exceptional category and more a practice of seeing that creates flexible and tentative categories. These aspects of "sight"—specificity, speculation, specularly, and species—are how regionalism may be specified.

In Dickinson's poetry, regionalist specificity retains a certain awe toward knowing and *seeing* a thing—a Robin—as though such an objectively or divinely viewed bird were available. At the same time, it admits its own seeing of the bird as nothing more than a species—one kind of seeing and one kind of bird among other birds, other robins. "Species," in nineteenth-century natural history, was an unresolved term of taxonomic identification. Some scientific authorities understood it to be an almost arbitrary category, to be treated, as Charles Darwin writes, "in the same manner as those naturalists treat genera, who admit that genera are merely artificial combinations made for convenience" (*O* 172). Or, as Dickinson shows in an analogy that burdens "species" with a painful weight, "species" may be only a nominal attribution of singularity that actually designates multiplying varieties: "As manifold for Anguish— / As Species—be—for name—" (J264: 7-8).<sup>6</sup> "Species" is merely a convenient name for distinguishing and specifying differences that are not essential and fixed, but mutable and evolving. As the root *specere* 'to look' suggests, specificity and species are cognates whose relation brings minute and careful ways of seeing to bear upon the definition and categorization of living beings. In Dickinson's regionalist poetics, "species" is less an absolute or exceptional category and more a practice of reflective seeing that very deliberately diminishes the grounds of its own sight and apprehends only diminished subjects in order to create flexible and tentative categories that revise diminishment into a kind of refined capacity.

As the robin's definitions and Dickinson's own figurations of "species" show, species are described by a scientific language and perception that Dickinson both shares and revises into a regionalist specificity when she ironically alludes to and collapses distinctions. Recent examinations of Dickinson's relation to science have revealed how her poetics moved with—within and without—the sciences of her day. Nina Baym has argued that Dickinson's skeptical engagement with science departs from the natural theology found in her textbooks, while Robin Peel finds Dickinson experimenting with both natural theology and the modern disciplines of science to form her own spiritual interpretation through a scientific method. My study of Dickinson's poetics brings together scientific and regionalist aspects of her work that literary criticism has thus far addressed discretely. While engaging with natural history by relating Dickinson's specificity to the species debates of the nineteenth century, I also associate this specificity with regional seeing—seeing New Englandly—to explore regionalism as a philosophical way of seeing and apprehending nature.

Sight or seeing in Dickinson's poetry is often delimited—and extended—by provincial views. Dickinson practices a refined observation that blocks out more than it sees, a nearly blind

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6 From "A Weight with Needles on the pounds—" (Poem #264).

and clearly selective seeing. As Michelle Kohler notes, Dickinson's figurations of vision emphasize the "the situatedness, obscurity, and limited capacity of...vision" (45); and James Guthrie suggests that her poetic vision has much to do with her own travails with optical illness.<sup>7</sup> If Dickinson's speaker cannot see fully or completely, as in "Before I got my eye put out," it is because she has been blinded by the sheer light of Noon, by a plenty that is too much for her eye, by an "I" whose exultant, blazing "mine" extinguishes itself. The perils of visual oversaturation here are not due to an overpopulated or overabundant world for the speaker is unstinting in her appreciation of the "stintless stars." They are due, instead, to a self that would ravenously consume the endlessness of the sky, of Noon, of the news: "I tell you that my Heart / Would split—for size of me—" (J327: 7-8). Through the play of words in the first line, it is one "eye" that is put out, that is, the swollen, greedy "I," leaving behind a singular eye, a diminished and partial self that is the speaker's "soul": "So safer—guess—with just my soul / Upon the Window pane— / Where other Creatures put their eyes— / Incautious—of the Sun—" (J327: 18-21).<sup>8</sup> This recurrent sense of a self-conscious and self-restrained view, pressed up against the windowpane, lends itself to a reading that sees Dickinson as practicing a kind of asceticism.<sup>9</sup> Yet seeing through the windowpane does not necessarily separate the world from the abstaining self since a window allows a view that makes visible the specificity of what one can or cannot access. Dickinson's window, like "the Door ajar," is less a barrier than a conduit between the self and other people, species, or worlds. The window is an opening for one to see out and for the wind—for the world—to be let in. Neither blind nor abstaining from sight, Dickinson's speaker sees cautiously and speculatively with "finite eyes" peering through the window pane, with the immanent soul rather than the transcendent eye. In casting the dazzling sunbeam out of her eye, she may see less brilliantly, but more meticulously—she may see New Englandly.

The countervailing metrics of experiencing too much and experiencing too little find their resolution tipped toward a regionalist prescription for the minute rather than the excessive. The robin, Dickinson's New England signifier, returns in "Victory comes late" beset with the frost of winter and the task of scavenging for food during a time when most sources of food have hidden themselves away under blanket whiteness and slumbering wait for the spring. Yet abundance and scarcity do not make a difference since "Crumbs—fit such little mouths— / Cherries—suit Robins— / The Eagle's Golden Breakfast strangles—Them—" (J690: 10-12). The robin is peculiarly suited for wintertime foraging, and the seeming crisis of poverty that haunts regionalist settings like a New England winter belatedly converts into a triumphant appropriation of small means.<sup>10</sup>

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7 See Guthrie, "Measuring the Sun." For Kohler, who contrasts Dickinson's embodied eye against Emerson's transparent eyeball, the "limited capacity to see and identify 'reality' is what in fact gives [Dickinson] access to metaphorical vision, wherein one thing is *like* another" (45). As I will argue, Dickinson's poetic vision might also be described as metaphorical, but it is one where the vehicle is very much empirically grounded.

8 From "Before I got my eye put out" (Poem #327).

9 Vivian Pollak, for example, reads Dickinson's poetry as expressing an "ethics of abstinence" and concludes that Dickinson's imagery of starvation and thirst describes "a cycle of deprivation, self-deprivation, and attempted self-sustenance" (65, 74). Pollak's reading insightfully draws out the peculiarities of food in Dickinson's poetics—it can be seen and smelled from a distance but never touched and tasted, it is desired but once attained remains uneaten—and of social or emotional nourishment that remains unfulfilled for Dickinson's poetic persona. My reading of Dickinson's specificity, however, presents an engagement with the world that is less ascetic or detached and more curious and involved.

10 Dickinson's attribution of cherries to robins is unsurprisingly accurate for American Robins, which are known to winter in their breeding range which extends through most of the United States and whose fall and winter diet depends on foraging berries and other fruit, especially cultivated and wild cherries when in the Northeast.

Such a preference for diminishment obtains to such a degree that even the robin, whose smallness fittingly suits him to his setting, does not seem so small to a consciousness that considers itself even smaller. "I dreaded that first Robin so" turns not only the robin but also other natural phenomena into immensities that encroach upon the speaker's view. In this poem, Dickinson's own version of scientific-imaginative practices of seeing attends to the deficiencies, or rather partialities, of *her* view, but also the partial views *of the subjects* of her view. If in "Before I got my eyes put out" there seems to be a line of separation between herself and the other creatures who cannot help but see the blinding noonday light, in "I dreaded that first Robin so" there is a greater relative sense of the other creatures who also see. Here, Dickinson's poetic speaker does not crave sensory fulfillment, but instead cringes and shies away from it. The robin, daffodils, bees, and blossoms herald a similarly excessive experience as the Noon—the robin "hurts a little," the woodland sounds "mangle," the daffodils' petals "pierce," the grass merely "looks," but all this is too much for the speaker, who as the "Queen of Calvary" can only her "childish plumes / Lift, in bereaved acknowledgment / Of their unthinking drums" (J348: 24, 26-28). As in "The Robin's my Criterion for Tune—," where limitedness inverts into capaciousness when the speaker's provincialism matches the queen's greater provinces, the Queen of Calvary (the place of crucifixion) represents the inversion attained by martyrdom where suffering and death lead to sanctity. The speaker's self-diminishment and "suffering" of these other creatures when they arrive—"They're here, though; not a creature failed— / No blossom stayed away / In gentle deference to me" (J348: 21-23)—inversely grants her an expansive position from which she is able to acknowledge others beyond herself.

This *topos* of mortality and suffering is a *topos* of experience—a human experiencing the birds and bees and blossoms. This self is, furthermore, acutely aware of its sensory experience as contingent upon the correspondent seeing that other species reflect back. The speaker petulantly pleads to the grass that she believes may be looking back at her, "I wished the grass would hurry, / So when 't was time to see, / He 'd be too tall, the tallest one / Could stretch to look at me" (J348: 13-16). Not only does the speaker sense the grass, but she is imminently aware of *his* sense of her, which she figures as a mutual seeing. The "I" who voraciously cries out "For mine—to look at when I liked—" realizes here that the "Dipping Birds" and "Amber Road" may look at her as much as she at them. Sight goes both ways, and this New Englandly seeing is awful in the sense of awe, where the speaker's dread is at the same time acute wonder of what is seen and of being under scrutiny herself. Assuming the embodiment of a bird shorter than the grass and lifting her "childish plumes," the speaker's shape-shifting is like a children's game where one curiously and imaginatively mirrors "that first Robin" one finds among the grass and cautiously tries to make friends with it. Dickinson's poetic self looks through the windowpane, then, back and forth *with* other species; her eyes know no other way to see, and if her soul is upon the windowpane, so, too, are her eyes, for she sees not with only eyes or with only soul, but with the half-blinded, one eye or "I" seeing partial and minor things. Dickinson's shrewd awareness and fascination with the minds of other creatures is an understanding of relative consciousnesses—a mutual sensitivity to and wonder at other species that also resignedly recognizes a mutual insensitivity, her queenliness and their "unthinking drums"—half knowing and half unknowing.

Dickinson's New Englandly seeing is less willing to assume the other's view even while it broaches analogy; it is a far more speculative seeing of species where Audubon's is a bipolar seeing. His view attempts to portray nature unadulterated yet simultaneously adulterates it; his drawings are of life *and* of death; his nudes are veracious—or virtuous—*and* erotic. Yet the



dichotomous cutting of that gaze still clings to Dickinson's treatments of birds and flowers and insects. In "I dreaded that first Robin so," the robin "hurts a little, though" (J348: 4), the daffodil's yellow petals "pierce...with a fashion / So foreign" (J348: 11-12), and every creature, bees and blossoms alike, besieges her. What this poem registers is how regard from anyone or anything assaults, how even the most benign chirpings of spring, the green shoots and buds, and the most cautious observations and gropings, are a kind of wounding. Though here it is Dickinson's poetic self who is hurt, the incongruity of the cause of hurt with the magnitude of hurt suggests that the perpetrator and recipient are misaligned as well. If a robin's song has the "power to mangle" (J348: 8), then surely the poetic voice has such an oppressive power, too. Whether it is the grass that sees, the robin that sings, or Mrs. André who draws, whether it is Audubon or Dickinson who writes, each species of viewing is vexed by the cut of what Dickinson might call "a certain Slant."<sup>11</sup>

This kind of curious observation—inquisitive but also sensitive—is Dickinson's version of specular scientific seeing. The subjects of Dickinson's view have their own minute yet partial views made available to perception by poetic-scientific figuration. Robin Peel aligns these experiential methods of poetic vision with scientific observation: "Dickinson might constantly present us with a cozy [aesthetic, cultivated] garden world of small birds, flowers, and insects, but behind this is the cool eye of the scientific observer" (307). Though Dickinson's eye might coolly observe from an apprehensive distance or through a windowpane, as Peel suggests, hers is still a human eye whose science may be cold but is not dispassionate. James McIntosh writes of Dickinson's relation to nature as both a sentimentalism and a poetics of the unknown that shows "the paradox of intimacy with nature as neighbor and stranger" (148), echoing Stanley Cavell's notion of Thoreau's "neighboring" with nature.<sup>12</sup> Yet Dickinson's relation to nature is also characterized by mutual smallness and lack of partiality. Within Dickinson's New Englandly poetics—which we may also call her New Englandly science—her speaker's partial seeing is also other species' partial seeing; their visions are both limited and also expansive, as her provinciality is from the queen's survey of her province. The smallness of Dickinson's vision is reflected in the smallness of the creatures in her poems, and this specificity at once points to the limits of knowing and inscribes those limits as its own principle of seeming self-diminishment, of seeming winter.

When a view or window into knowing becomes visible, it is also temporally knitted into winter. The winter's eye is Dickinson's New Englandly eye that looks out upon "the Snow's Tableau," knowing that "Seasons flit." The speaker that dreads "that first Robin," the growing grass and the blossoms, speaks from the retreating glacial melt of winter's surrender to spring. In other words, Dickinson's poetics, though it treats every season of the year, is perennially in winter; it is a poetics that demands her "Right of Frost," her right of seeming diminishment and wintry sparseness that survives on "White Sustenance."<sup>13</sup> Winter's perspective is when one's

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11 From "There's a certain Slant of Light" (Poem #258). The "cut" of seeing resonates with what Karen Barad calls diffraction: "Diffraction, understood using quantum physics, is not just a matter of interference, but of entanglement, an ethico-onto-epistemological matter. This difference is very important. It underlines the fact that knowing is a direct material engagement, a cutting together-apart, where cuts do violence but also open up and rework the agential conditions of possibility. There is not this knowing from a distance. Instead of there being a separation of subject and object, there is an entanglement of subject and object, which is called the 'phenomenon.' Objectivity, instead of being about offering an undistorted mirror image of the world, is about accountability to marks on bodies, and responsibility to the entanglements of which we are a part" (52).

12 Stanley Cavell, *Senses of Walden*, see especially pages 104-107.

13 From "I cannot live with You—" (Poem #640). See also Folsom, "The Souls That Snow": Winter in the Poetry

sight is most hard-pressed—to see amidst a blinding blanket of white snow, to see through the cold, to see the life that might otherwise be missed. Contrasting the trope of spring as the return of vitalized poetic powers, the retreat to winter in Dickinson's poetics attributes vitality to more diminutive and less extravagant gestures than the clarion calls and outpourings that characterize spring. Winter is not merely what Thomas Higginson described as a "a slight and temporary retardation of the life of Nature" (376), but a trope for another way of life altogether. Dickinson's self-circumscribing figures like winter, the Robin, and the window, are regionalizing referents—referents that specify a diminished or limited ground in order to reveal diminishment as a capacious and sensitive way of seeing.

*"By my Window have I for Scenery"*

Dickinson's regionalism is a windowed view whose specificity constellates with the other cognates of *specere* and thus intersects with the sciences of her day—in particular, that concerning species. Birds, flowers, and other small creatures are common familiars in Dickinson's poetry, and the term "species," while less common, is not unfamiliar. Dickinson's usage, as noted earlier, seems to include a scientific understanding of species transmutation, but also a more general understanding of species as a nominal or linguistic placeholder for a discrete form of life. Although she probably never read Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859), she would have been aware of the discussions concerning Darwin's theory through contemporary publications, especially, as Jack Capps has noted, the *Atlantic Monthly*, which printed Asa Gray's reviews of Darwin in July, August, and October of 1860.<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Willis correlates Dickinson's reference to "species" (as in "This World is not Conclusion.") with Darwin's sense of evolution as an unending movement, so that "species" "suggests a strategic complication of the poem's network of meanings, shifting our attention away from traditional teleology and toward the expanding worldviews of contemporary science" (26). Moving past the transcendentalist opening, "This World is not Conclusion. / A Species stands beyond—," the poem proceeds to a more ironic critique of a faith that "slips—and laughs, and rallies— / Blushes, if any see— / Plucks at a twig of Evidence— / And asks a Vane, the way—" (J501: 13-16). If faith has become enthralled by scientific methods, it has also become shaky and bashful from that association because science itself rests on twigs and the caprice of winds that the weathervane can only dizzily point out. As Willis shows, Dickinson's poetics can be read not only as oriented to a ghostly or divine world beyond, but also as indicating immanent worlds of experience that are inaccessible or "Invisible" to our own existence. Within contemporary scientific discussions of nature, that is, of other worlds, other creatures, other species, the conclusions were not so much "expanding" as insistently uncertain and open.

Another poem corroborates this reading of species as inhabitants of this world that, however, are not so much figures of uncertainty and unending change as they are markers of a

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of Emily Dickinson": "The 'Snow's Tableau' is vital in Dickinson's poetry, and winter's shifting nuances reveal much of the nature of Dickinson's poetic stance, straddling American romanticism and realism, the transcendent reading of nature and the realistic rendering of it" (362). As we will see later, Thoreau's regionalist specificity also crosses from transcendental nature to a more empirically-inflected one.

14 Besides Peel's *Emily Dickinson and the Hill of Science*, other studies that establish a connection between Dickinson and Darwin include James Guthrie's "Darwinian Dickinson," which is primarily a reading of "God made a little Gentian—" that corresponds well to my readings of Dickinson's New England specificity, and Jane Donahue Eberwein's "Outgrowing Genesis? Dickinson, Darwin, and Higher Criticism," which places Dickinson within the context of Darwin's scientific work and Transcendental Romanticism.

transient, but ordinary and biological existence. "Went up a year this evening!" recounts the passing of a fellow villager who in his last moments "Was grateful for the Roses / In life's diverse bouquet — / Talked softly of new species / To pick another day" (J93: 13-16). Here, "species" exhibits the scientific understanding of the term as a biological individual, so that "new species" suggest biological diversity even though these "species"—the roses and the daisy mentioned later—do not correspond exactly to the subdivisions of taxonomic nomenclature. In Dickinson's usage, species is always closely related to that scientific attempt at encapsulating an individual life or *zoë*, and also to a figurative embodiment of mortal liveliness. Though the rose is held out as an ideal flower specimen that represents, perhaps, the grandest and lushest moments of one's life, the poem concludes with a very ordinary and humble flower to indicate the change from life to death: "A Difference — A Daisy — / Is all the rest I knew!" (J93: 23-24). This quiet and unremarkable passing of village life adumbrated by the daisy recalls the daisy from "The Robin's my Criterion for Tune—," which Dickinson cites along with the buttercup, as one of her New England flowers. The provincial scene of village funerary rites, the daisy, and the gossipy exclamations of the poem's speaker all contribute to a superficially regionalist aesthetic that seems unconscious of its own mode except in the brief counterpoint of the rose to other diverse "species" like the daisy.

It is only when regionalist references or "species" are placed in deeper, collapsing contrast to figures like the Queen or the roses that a regionalist diminishment is apparent through what Dickinson calls elsewhere an "internal difference."<sup>15</sup> This difference is like the light which exhales from a face with its last breath—"Ascended from our vision / To Countenances new!" (J93: 21-22)—or the unremarkable remarkableness of "A Difference—a Daisy" that highlights its own transience or diminutiveness as paradoxically immortal and significant, the way one still remembers an ordinary death a year later. It is through specifying this daisy—a regional *species*—that Dickinson's speaker sees and knows a difference that makes the provincial daisy capable of being equivalent to the ideal rose, and a figure for how "This humble Tourist rose!" (J93: 8). Yet while offering a demonstration of the difference that regionalist specificity makes, neither "The Robin's my Criterion for Tune—" nor "Went up a year this evening!" offer an explanation for how this is possible given the humble limits and narrow views of provinciality.

Dickinson's "By my Window have I for Scenery" explicitly considers the epistemological premises of her regionalist poetics and science in a way that moves beyond the simpler binary comparisons and overlays of the previous poems. Copied into fascicle 38 four years after the first *Atlantic* reviews of Darwin, the poem dramatizes the windowing of species while inquiring into the limits and conduits of knowing—the windows and doors through which to see New Englandly—by unraveling neat juxtapositions or equivalences and establishing a relational but also differential position of a speaker in view of others. The ostensible subject of this poem is a "Pine at my window" whose relation to the speaker prompts epistemological incertitude and speculation concerning the seeing of "species." To see a pine tree New Englandly suggests that seeing "species" occurs under diminished circumstances, one fraught with the limits of one's own perceptions to see the forest from the trees and with the impinging weight of considering other's perceptions.

By my Window have I for Scenery  
 Just a Sea—with a Stem—  
 If the Bird and the Farmer—deem it a "Pine"—  
 The Opinion will serve—for them—

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15 From "There's a certain Slant of light" (Poem #258).

It has no Port, nor a "Line"—but the Jays—  
That split their route to the Sky—  
Or a Squirrel, whose giddy Peninsula  
May be easier reached—this way—

For Inlands—the Earth is the under side—  
And the upper side—is the Sun—  
And its Commerce—if Commerce it have—  
Of Spice—I infer from the Odors borne—

Of its Voice—to affirm—when the Wind is within—  
Can the Dumb—define the Divine?  
The Definition of Melody—is—  
That Definition is none—

It—suggests to our Faith—  
They—suggest to our Sight—  
When the latter—is put away  
I shall meet with Conviction I somewhere met  
That Immortality—

Was the Pine at my Window a "Fellow  
Of the Royal" Infinity?  
Apprehensions—are God's introductions—  
To be hallowed—accordingly—  
(J797)

The view by the window presents to the speaker's eye the scenery of an inland sea (or forest) with a pine that is at first only a stem to her and is, however, a port to the jays that fly from it to their dances in the sky or to the squirrels that giddily leap from it to another branch, another peninsula. Like Dickinson's comparisons between the Robin and the Cuckoo, the Daisy and the roses, these juxtapositions of Pine and Stem and Peninsula also imply both difference and equivalence. In "By my Window," however, these contrasts lead to a consideration of how such differential equivalences, or relativities, are understood as forms of perception.

Each perspective is presented as a windowed figuration and specificity—relative and unique to each of the viewers, as well as metaphorically befitting. The quotation marks around "Pine" and "Line," and the troubling of "Port" and "Commerce," further suggest that these figures are the poetic speaker's window into speculation of the worlds beyond—not just the worlds of other species (the jays and squirrel) and other folk (the farmer), but also the world of commerce, the harvesting of New England's timber that sends its evergreen scent into the air<sup>16</sup>, the white pine that becomes ship masts in a seascape<sup>17</sup>, and the overseas freight line between

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16 See James Elliott Defebaugh's *History of the Lumber Industry of America* Vol. 2 for a history of the nineteenth-century New England lumber industry, with an interest in white pine. There are specific chapters on Massachusetts, on its forest legislation concerning the need to protect supplies of timber for ships, and on Boston as a major port for timber trade.

17 See William Carlton's "New England Masts and the King's Navy" for more background history on the significance of colonial New England white pines as ship masts.

Boston to other parts of the world or the imaginary "line" of the equator. Further, the routes of the jays suggest that there is more than one way to reach or see a destination, no single line nor fixed path, and without an objective, whole, unobstructed way of seeing, Dickinson can only "infer" uncertainly what is seen by others and even herself with "may" and "if." Giorgio Agamben notes such species differences in vision, following early twentieth-century German zoologist Jakob von Uexküll:

There does not exist a forest as an objectively fixed environment....Even a minimal detail—for example, the stem of a wildflower—when considered a carrier of significance, constitutes a different element each time it is in a different environment, depending on whether, for example, it is observed in the environment of a girl picking flowers for a bouquet to pin to her corset, in that of an ant for whom it is an ideal way to reach its nourishment in the flower's calyx, in that of the larva of a cicada who pierces its medullary canal and uses it as a pump to construct the fluid parts of its elevated cocoon, or finally in that of the cow who simply chews and swallows it as food. (*O* 41)

For Agamben, the perceptual worlds described by Uexküll each utilize a single signifier like a "stem" in radically different ways. Yet these worlds—of the girl picking flowers, the ant, the larva, and the cow—are not separate from one another; they are closed environments that function together in a reciprocal blindness with a serendipitous "musical" unity.<sup>18</sup> They all, in some way, rely on the stem which figures as a motif in each of their parts in a score. Likewise, Dickinson concedes to the bird and the farmer their opinion that what serves as a stem to her serves as a pine to them, that they each have their own perceptual world, their own partial and specific view. And just as Uexküll observes blind synchronicity between these worlds, Dickinson begins to pull together the threads that such an interconnected commerce implies. For if the pine will metaphorically whittle down to become a mast that will metonymically assemble to become a ship that will sail the seven seas, what is here beside her window as a stem brings the sea not just to her doors, but rushing through them, just as the window opens for both our eyes to see out and also the wind to see in. The windowed view of "species"—whether they are perceived as a stem or a pine—is a relation to the world based on a limited perception and uncertain speculation even if, or perhaps precisely because, that world is on the other side of a door or windowpane. The tangled transformations of the pine bring the outside indoors, and the "spice" the poetic speaker smells wafts from the evergreen scent of the tree, the wind she hears drifts in from scraping against bark and branches and leaves.

Yet these spices and voices remain partially closed to the limited senses of Dickinson's speaker; can one define Uexküll's musical unity with specificity? On one hand, no, "The Definition of Melody—is— / That Definition is none—" because like the pine, she is dumb and cannot define the melody except as indefinite. What the pine or bird says in its own world, is merely some trace of the wind or song—some sound—in her world. As in "This World is not Conclusion," the music or melody of another species is indiscernible except as sound: "A Species stands beyond— / Invisible, as Music— / But positive, as Sound—" (*J*501: 2-4). The Robin's tune is a criterion of unknown measure and key, and its definition splits its route—a species stands beyond, a species that rides the wind, flies, tracing lines of convergence and divergence, into and out of species. This melody of other species, whether it is the Robin's tune or the wind within the pines, might suggest a divine beyond that can only be affirmed on the

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18 See Agamben on "close functional—or, as Uexküll prefers to say, musical—unity" and "reciprocal blindness" (*O* 42).

other side of death once sight is "put away." However, Dickinson's use of the senses, and what "They"—the birds and pine and wind—suggest to our sight and hearing as actual and figural presences, returns as the final and only confirmation one can have in this world since they are apprehended by the viewer or listener while the "Melody" or "Music" is not. And so, on the other hand, the melody is neither defined nor heard, but apprehended via diminished species of sight and sound. The "Pine at my Window" or "that first Robin" is partially seen and heard, half-understood as "Apprehensions," a kind of knowing that is at once grasping and fearful, a tentative and curious knowing that has the budding ephemerality of "introductions." To apprehend a species—for Dickinson finally does call the Pine a Pine—is to know in a limited and contingent way—New Englandly—that assumes a specificity in its designation of "Pine" but actually encompasses many pines.<sup>19</sup> As Dickinson's variants of the last line suggest, such apprehensions are inscrutable and to be hallowed as they are—"Orchard sprung." Such an understanding of knowing as "apprehension" draws a separation and a connection between the speaker of the poem and the other creatures and folk she cannot fully see nor hear and whose opinions serve them and do not suit her. Each is half-blind to the others yet undeniably implicated in each other's perception.

Dickinson's speculation of the species beyond her window is a specular understanding of relative though not fully knowable consciousness, which takes shape amidst much contemporary discussion over species themselves. The Pine, as "species," is a figure that relies on its empirical existence as an actual tree even while it filters through a diminished perception of poetic and subjective figures. For nineteenth-century scientists, the very concept of "species" reflected this instability between empirical existence and subjective figuration. Asa Gray's 1860 *Atlantic Monthly's* articles on Darwin remind us of the species debates that preceded and accompanied the theory of evolution, where the very definition of "species" itself, not to mention a species' origin, is an unsettled matter.<sup>20</sup> Gray offers the apropos comment that "species...have only a relative, not an absolute fixity" ([August] 232-33) and follows it with a perceptive discussion of the contrasting positions of Agassiz and Darwin on evolutionary theory. Louis Agassiz was the preeminent Harvard professor of natural history and author of the multivolume *Natural History of the United States*, for which he once employed Thoreau in 1847 to obtain specimens. His theory of evolution saw morphological similarities between species in geographically disparate locations, or what he called "zoological provinces,"<sup>21</sup> as proof of the separate and multiple originations of species by divine plan rather than as genealogical relations between species descended from a common origin and differentiated by natural selection as in Darwin's theory. Further, for Agassiz, *species* are ideal or general "categories of thought" whose "permanence...[is] of a divine creator's design"; while for the secular scientific definition, species "have a direct objective ground in Nature, which genera, orders, etc., have not... [And] a species is the perennial succession of similar individuals in continued generations" (Gray [October] 421, 420). In trying to find a middle ground between these major theories of species that still confirms the predominant paradigm of natural theology, Gray, however, agrees in general with Darwin:

Admitting that species are only categories of thought, and not facts or things, how does

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<sup>19</sup> I mean "many pines" in both the sense of more than one pine tree and the sense of more than one kind of pine since "Pine," like "Robin," is not actually a scientifically specific name.

<sup>20</sup> Originally anonymous; Gray, however, later republished the articles under his name in *Darwiniana: Essays and Reviews Pertaining to Darwinism* (1889).

<sup>21</sup> Agassiz, *Essay on Classification*, 52.

this prevent the individuals, which are material things, from having varied in the course of time, so as to exemplify the present almost innumerable categories of thought, or embodiments of Divine thoughts in material forms, or—viewed on the human side—in forms marked with such orderly and graduated resemblances and differences as to suggest to our minds the idea of species, genera, order, etc., and to our reason the inference of a Divine original?...That is we do not perceive how these several "categories of thought" exclude the possibility or probability that the individuals which manifest or suggest the thoughts had an ultimate community of origin. ([October] 421)

Gray adapts Agassiz's theory of species as "categories of thought" to Darwin's genealogical theory of evolution so that various species "of thought" may have originated from the same Divine thought, rather than from many discrete originations; or so that various species of empirical thought from the human observer point to a Divine original. Yet Gray comes upon a fundamental paradox in the concept of species.

Species are not just ideas that one can know and think about, but made up of actual "individuals"; and individuals are both material things *and* exempla or suggestions of thought. The scientist or naturalist who attempts to define a species as a general type or description—an idea—must also deal with the fact that "species" are a very material self-reproducing and self-perpetuating succession of individuals; or as Gray puts it, "The common view of species is, that, although they are generalizations, yet they have a direct objective ground in Nature, which genera, orders, etc., have not....a species is the perennial succession of similar individuals in continued generations" (419-420). With this delineation of the abstract and material aspects of "species," Gray is not only defining species but also explaining *how* they are known. While one could completely know a species that is an ideal type because it is a wholly "thought" thing, one could never completely know a species that is also a material being because its beginning and end, its many individual constituents, and indeed its very material existence, are in many ways beyond human experience.

But species as thought *and* material thing is perhaps not beyond the poetic figuration of species in Dickinson, which manifests the very strangeness of species as embodied thought. Gray writes in his review that "[t]he origin of species, like all origination, like the institution of any other natural state or order, is beyond our immediate ken. We see or may learn how things go on; we can only frame hypotheses as to how they began" ([October] 406). It is this limit of "our immediate ken"—the limit of epistemological inquiry—that concerns Gray, as it does Dickinson; and it is a limit that is inherent to scientific empiricism—that we can only know what we see, but what we see is only what is discernible by us through our immediate senses and through the immediacy made available by mediated methods of technology. In Gray's language, species "suggest to our [human] minds the idea of species, genera, order, etc., and to our reason the inference of a Divine original," so that what we see is rationalized into knowledge. In Dickinson's language, "It—suggests to our Faith— / They—suggest to our Sight— " where "It" is the divine melody of absolute sensory experience that can be only partially heard as the sound of wind through trees, against flitting wings, carrying the scent of spices, and "They" the specimens of sight, of what we *can* immediately and partially see— "a Sea—with a Stem—", "the Pine at my Window—".

Knowledge, whether it is scientific or divine, is not so much rationalized as demarcated as a music beyond mortal ken, so that what we have is *not* knowledge but faith and sight. Dickinson's Pine, her Robin, and the other creatures of her poems, are such species of "Faith" *and* "Sight"—species that are partially subjective ideas of the divine and partially empirical

matter. Dickinson's "species"—partially idea and partially matter—accords with Virginia Jackson's description of her figures as "embodied abstractions." Jackson argues that for Dickinson, literary figures take the role of a mediating representation that interprets between what a word means and the word itself, translating between letter and anatomy, spirit and matter, such that rather than exposing the ground of the references as empirical matter, "Dickinson's writing tends to...expose the 'ground' of lyric reference as the oxymoron of an embodied abstraction" (189). The Pine, as species, is an embodied abstraction that exposes the narrow ground of its empirical existence even while it poses as other poetic and subjective figures. To see the pine through the window is to think only so far of the pine as to experience and imagine it as a stem, as a Pine, as a fellow, apprehended accordingly, not rationalized as objective fact.

Dickinson's difference from Gray might be described as a different interpretation of species or of epistemological limits. Species are not rationalized, but wondered at, dreaded, held in awe. In "The Life of Birds," an 1862 essay by Thomas Wentworth Higginson that Dickinson read closely and quoted in her letters<sup>22</sup>, a similar definition—or indefiniteness—of species is described:

But this bird that hovers and alights beside me, peers up at me, takes its food, then looks again, attitudinizing, jerking, flirting its tail, with a thousand inquisitive and fantastic motions,—although I have power to grasp it in my hands and crush its life out, yet I cannot gain its secret thus, and the centre of its consciousness is really farther from mine than the remotest orbit. "We do not steadily bear in mind," says Darwin, with a noble scientific humility, "how profoundly ignorant we are of the condition of existence of every animal." (368)

Higginson does not fear the bird as Dickinson might, but he, too, concedes to the epistemological checkmate that another's existence presents. Citing Darwin on our ignorance of "the condition of existence of every animal," Higginson illuminates a side of Darwin missed in Gray's critical reviews of his theory—the attendant wonder and curiosity that stimulates Darwin's observations of organic life.

Darwin, Higginson, and Dickinson present, then, a version of science that knows knowledge to be deficient and is animated with or alongside the multifarious and mysterious lives of others. This science strives to "bear in mind" the relation of oneself to another's relative existence; it is a science where one's center of consciousness perceives the orbit of its own attention in relation to the orbit of another's; a science that acknowledges the empirical ground in another species as a matter of both material and conscious existence; a science that accepts the limits of epistemological inquiry because it accepts the conditions of existence in oneself and of others. "Who can claim," Higginson writes longingly on the variety and complexity of bird song, "to have heard the whole song of the Robin?" (372). For him, from our position of ignorance, there is still so much more to know about the bird even though it is impossible to rationalize its existence, and he shares what Asa Gray calls "the delirious yet divine desire to know."<sup>23</sup> For Dickinson, however, "The Definition of Melody—is— / That Definition is none—." What there is to know is that nothing can be known. Her definition of a robin's song holds and hovers in the hearing of the song. While her Robin and her Pine have a wind—a respiration,

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22 See Capps 176. Quoted in letters 692 and 1034 in Dickinson, *Selected Letters*. Higginson's essay was published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in September 1862.

23 Perhaps erroneously quoted or adapted by Gray from Edward Bulwer Lytton's poem "Knowledge" in his novel *Falkland*: "...our feverish dream / The dream—the thirst—the wild desire, / Delirious yet divine—to know" (4-6).



a spirit, a life—within that cannot be heard, they also have a sound that *is* heard, the rush of wind through branches, the skittering of small feet or the flapping of wings in the canopy above, the creaks and thuds of timber.

"By my Window have I for Scenery" is not only a view of a pine tree, but a regionalist view of a pine tree with its many contingencies and among fellow inhabitants. Though that view is a diminished view that "cannot see the forest for the trees," it senses the forest via the poetics and empirics of a regionalist specificity that figures the pine tree into an extension of the world. Beginning with subjective and relative views of the pine that then carve around the absence (or invisible aspects) of the pine in the fourth and fifth stanza, "By my Window" proceeds to turn a hollow into a Pine with its joking rejoinder, "Was the Pine at my Window a 'Fellow / Of the Royal' Infinity?" (22-23). From stem to melody to fellow, shifting ideas on what Gray calls the "real, though narrow, established ground" ([October] 406) of a species, Dickinson's poem both establishes the Pine as a pine tree while also troubling its reception as a species, as a forest of pines, squirrels, jays, and farmers, as well as its reception as a mixed figure of science—a fellow of the scientific Royal Society of London—and divinity. If these are "introductions," Dickinson's "Stem" or her "'Fellow / Of the Royal' Infinity" seems to bow to her as the birds and bees salute her in "I dreaded that first Robin so." She senses the Pine's bending presence as species—as pine forest—as much as she senses her own diminishing view.

The capacity of this diminished view to telescope the world through a minute consideration of a "species" requires further tracing Dickinson's troping of the Pine as a species and as a scientific fellow of uncertain providence to "its Commerce—if Commerce it have—." In Dickinson's shifting view of the pine is a diminishing and apprehensive view that reflects, as well, the view of pines as a whole species growing smaller and smaller on narrower and narrower ground, as they most certainly did as a result of nineteenth-century timber commerce. In Massachusetts, for example, deforestation dipped to its lowest point during the 1850's and 60's<sup>24</sup>; and there was a general sense of forest depletion in New England. Popular women writers of the nineteenth century like Lydia Sigourney and Caroline Kirkland attended to the need to preserve forests<sup>25</sup>; George B. Emerson's "Report on the Trees and Shrubs Growing in Massachusetts" (1846) laments the loss of the "old woods" (2) while George Perkins Marsh's *Man and Nature* (1864) examines the effects of deforestation and suggests land management techniques; and Thoreau's independent observations on the harvesting of white pine in woodlots led to his lecture on the succession of forest trees. By the early twentieth century, the white pine was so depleted that it seemed to require memorialization as in James Elliott Defebaugh's *History of the Lumber Industry of America* (1907), which devotes its attention to the white pine because it, "until the close of the Nineteenth Century, furnished more than any other one species, or more than any group of related species, to the internal commerce of the country" (iii). And in Amherst, legislation established a nursery of forest tree seedling on the college grounds in order to support the state's forest resources beginning in 1904.<sup>26</sup>

What I suggest, then, is that Dickinson's Pine is a diminishing species—diminished into a stem in her speaker's view, but also diminishing into timber in a felled forest; timber, whose falling is their sound, "their unthinking Drums." Dickinson's speaker can only know on faith that

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24 See Roland Harper, "Changes in the Forest Area in New England in Three Centuries." Christine Gerhardt also notes this ecological context in her essay on Dickinson's environmental education and the proto-ecological principles in her writing.

25 See Karen Kilcup, *Fallen Forests*.

26 Defebaugh 221.

what may be immortal and infinite pine trees, but are in this world and in view of her window cut down to size, may yet grow from stem to pine again and may yet be a fellow of a different sort—a poetic-empiric species of infinite succession. The last stanza cuts many ways: the view of the pine, perhaps cut down, perhaps planted anew, is both a fellow that may yet flourish infinitely *and* a fellow of the Royal Society, uncertainly immortal and mortal, and measured indeterminately by a science that projects succession and selection of species or a science that condemns them to the calculated destruction or production of commercial forest management. Or as Defebaugh puts it more romantically and mournfully, any white pine forests that return will exist not in Nature, but "as a result of man's providence; their volume will be measured by the forester's calipers and staff; their rate of growth, tree by tree, will be kept in books, and they will be as prosaic as fields of cabbage or corn" (iv).

Dickinson's speaker is left, then, with her *own kind of science*, that is the speculation of various "windowed" views<sup>27</sup>—a specificity based on the diminishment of what she sees—the narrow empiric ground of the Pine—and the selective framing and figuration of her poetic view—the pine as a Stem, a Fellow. This is not a narrative of environmental catastrophe, but one of subdued and mutual depletion. As Christine Gerhardt writes of Dickinson's proto-ecologism, "Dickinson offered an ethics of careful observation and tentative conclusions that accounts for her lingering uncertainty as to how to 'read' nature" (75). What I'd like to stress, then, is an ecocritical reading of Dickinson that emphasizes what I've called regionalist specificity—a regionalism poetically figured and empirically specified by a diminishing sight.

### *Lines of Sight*

In his review, Asa Gray describes species as "lines of individuals coming down from the past and running on to the future,—lines receding, therefore, from our view in either direction" ([October] 406). He then describes the species in Agassiz's theory of origination as many parallel lines—each one a line running from beginning to end, straight out of its provincial roots, each species autochthonous and permanent. Such a theory lent itself to racist polygenist arguments that conceived of human races as separate species, giving pro-slavery advocates grounds to insist on an absolute and reified difference between whites and blacks.<sup>28</sup> Darwin's lines, however, are genealogical lines of convergence in one direction and divergence in the other, lines that ramify—that continue or terminate—as species find their way from one province to another, from one period to another.

In terms of the provinciality—or regionalist specificity—of species, Dickinson's Robin and Pine follow Darwin's lines—they "[cover] the earth...with ever branching and beautiful

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27 Nina Baym's study of Emily Dickinson's scientific skepticism provides a well-documented outline of the prevailing doctrine of Natural Theology in the Amherst of Dickinson's time. Baym argues that Dickinson refuted Natural Theology's use of science as empirical evidence of God's design, and instead employed scientific terms as any critical scientist would—in a discourse of skepticism that reaffirms the unprovable nature of faith, of heaven or hell or any other worlds. As Baym writes, Dickinson's "science, rather than pushing the boundaries of the unknown, only makes these boundaries more intensely visible: All we know is the "uncertain certainty" (149).

28 Although Agassiz himself claimed credence in the unity of mankind and its moral obligations, his polygenist insistence that animal species of close resemblance in remote regions were separately originated species fueled a pro-slavery conviction that Africans were of a separate and inferior human species. Agassiz's "Essay on Classification" cites his previous sketch, "Natural Provinces of the Animal World and Their Relation to the Different Types of Man," which correlated human species distribution with that of fauna and was published as part of Nott's and Gliddon's *Types of Mankind* (1854).

ramifications" (Darwin *O* 135). They are poetic-empiric species with a narrow, but real and indefinite liveliness of their own. The lineation or lineage of ramifying difference becomes enfolded in poetic form where the enjambment of lines and non-teleological grammar allows for the running on and falling off of lines without following the completion required by a sentence. Each stanza, in fact, seems to pick up from a different location (or angle of view) than where the previous stanza left off; and the series of analogies that set up comparisons for the pine simply diffuse away and are replaced by the suddenly manifest "Pine at my Window." Like the scenery beyond the window, Dickinson's poem "has no Port, nor a "Line"—but the Jays— / That split their route to the Sky— / Or a Squirrel, whose giddy Peninsula / May be easier reached—this way—." There is no "Line," then, but lines whose subordinate clause does not complete itself, does not follow subject with predicate, does not tumble along in complete sentences, but stops up, splits, leaves off, leaps elsewhere. The poetic form refuses to predicate—from *praedico*, to affirm. To see New Englandly has, in the end, little to do with being indigenous to New England; to see New Englandly is to see with a specificity that allows such crossing and dipping lines, the splitting of routes to the skies, the flit of wings, a Robin that is a robin and not a robin, a Pine that is a pine and not a pine, an eye that sees and does not see.

*We are accustomed to say in New England that few and fewer pigeons visit us every year. Our forests furnish no mast for them. So, it would seem, few and fewer thoughts visit each growing man from year to year, for the grove in our minds is laid to waste,—sold to feed unnecessary fires of ambition, or sent to mill, and there is scarcely a twig left for them to perch on.*

- Thoreau, "Walking"

In "Walking," published posthumously in the *Atlantic* a few months before Higginson's "Life of Birds," Henry David Thoreau also turns to birds and to pine trees, and he, too, senses their diminishment along with his own diminishing view. Just as the pine trees furnish masts for the birds, they also furnish a perch for human thought, and for poetics, that follow the routes of jays and the leaps of squirrels. Like Dickinson's Stem, Thoreau's mast refers to empirical pine trees and their figurative partialities; where Dickinson's Pine is a metonymic (and generic) stem, Thoreau's is a metaphorical (and proleptic) mast. These figures—these pines—are diminished "species" of thought with a "real, though narrow, established ground." For this reason, Thoreau finds that the woods, and the decomposition of these woods into wood-rot and muck that will become soil, are the grounds of human intellectual and spiritual health or what he calls "re-creation." He famously declares in this essay that "in Wildness is the preservation of the world":

Every tree sends its fibres forth in search of the Wild. The cities import it at any price.

Men plow and sail for it. From the forest and wilderness come the tonics and barks which brace mankind. Our ancestors were savages. The story of Romulus and Remus being suckled by a wolf is not a meaningless fable. The founders of every state which has risen to eminence, have drawn their nourishment and vigor from a similar wild source. (*W* 273)

In rooting out the wildness that makes humans "a part and parcel of Nature" (*W* 260) and their ancestors savages and wolves of all the same "wild source," Thoreau sounds strangely close to Darwin on the origin of species and the descent of humans. He even quotes Darwin—but an earlier Darwin from *The Voyage of the Beagle* (1839)—commenting on the tanned skin of a Tahitian native lying out in the sun as "a fine, dark green [plant] growing vigorously in the open fields" (*W* 274). Though Thoreau delivered "Walking" as a lecture at the Concord Lyceum almost a decade earlier in 1851, there are still resonances between his thoughts and Darwin's—

their methods of seeing and appreciation—that would lead them to similar preoccupations of "fitness" and "succession" or "health" and "re-creation," and also of epistemological limits. Unlike those with a "delirious yet divine desire to know," however, Thoreau staunchly refuses scientific knowledge in favor of a regionalist way of apprehending nature.

As with Dickinson, Thoreau is less concerned with knowledge than with the wonder of unknowing:

My desire for knowledge is intermittent; but my desire to bathe my head in atmospheres unknown to my feet is perennial and constant. The highest that we can attain to is not Knowledge, but Sympathy with Intelligence. I do not know that this higher knowledge amounts to anything more definite than a novel and grand surprise on a sudden revelation of the insufficiency of all that we called Knowledge before — a discovery that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy. It is the lighting up of the mist by the sun. Man cannot know in any higher sense than this, any more than he can look serenely and with impunity in the face of the sun: [original text in Greek] "You will not perceive that as perceiving a particular thing," say the Chaldean Oracles. (*W* 282-283)

Like Dickinson who refuses the Noon, Thoreau knows that his sight is limited and that he cannot look into "the face of the sun" because it is too much to distinguish into any "particular thing." Knowledge, then, is not something to strive for, except as a revelation of insufficiency, that is, as an obscurity, as indefinite mist that covers up the sun, but is lit by it. The illumination of mist is the empirical matter that *can* be seen; it is not knowledge, but perception specific to the mediations of human sensitivity and consciousness, what Thoreau calls "Sympathy and Intelligence" and Dickinson calls "Apprehensions." Though he seems to lack Dickinson's New Englandly sense of diminishment in his transcendental impulse to "bathe his head in atmospheres unknown," Thoreau shows his affinity to regionalist specificity in other ways—ways and by-ways of his meandering prose that intersect with species as Dickinson's poetics do.

In his lecture at a cattle show of the Middlesex Agricultural Society in 1860, Thoreau outlines his own theory of forest succession, in which a white pine grove would be succeeded by oaks or other hardwoods, and *vice versa*, by the labors of the very creatures that Dickinson, too, names in her poem on the Pine—the jays and squirrels (and, of course, the wind, the farmer, and their labors are present in both their pieces). Thoreau opens the lecture with a joke upon his self-chosen occupations as an out-of-the-way walker of woods and the town's surveyor: "So some, it seems to me, elect their rulers for their crookedness. But I think that a straight stick makes the best cane, and an upright man the best ruler. Or why choose a man to do plain work who is distinguished for his oddity? However, I do not know but you will think that they have committed this mistake who invited me to speak to you to-day" [1].<sup>29</sup> However odd and crooked Thoreau might be, he was a good surveyor and clearly recognized by Middlesex County farmers who regularly employed him to survey their farms. As a surveyor, then, with his surveyor's stick—a ruler—and as a naturalist reporting on his observations of jays and squirrels, Thoreau's view is as New Englandly as Dickinson's and his methods of alignment are diminished—they are as crooked and skewed as Dickinson's are slanted. Although Thoreau cites other studies, his hypothesis is based, by and large, on his own observations upon small creatures and plants—jays, squirrels, flowers, and weeds—whose activities perhaps few in his neighborhood have taken care to scrutinize with such length. The myth Thoreau is intent on dispelling is that a new species of trees springs up from long buried seeds rather than, as he reports, from actually

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29 Citations for "The Succession of Forest Trees" are paragraph numbers.

germinable seeds recently transported by the tireless to and fro of the winds and other wingéd or scampering ways. And like Dickinson's provincial, but queenly survey, Thoreau's work is the work of a ruler—a work of lines and measures, comparisons and equivalences—that is carefully and circumstantially within the specificities of his region.

"The Succession of Forest Trees" is very much a continuation of Thoreau's thinking on the pine trees in "Walking."<sup>30</sup> The earlier lecture notes the depletion of the forest and its ecological relation to the migration of pigeons, as well as the decline of thought towards a utilitarian reason, and is then proceeded by years of observation and surveys of woodlots and its denizens; while the later report remarks that "when we experiment in planting forests, we find ourselves at last doing what Nature does," and is, of course, preceded by the earlier thoughts on drawing from wild sources. As a meditation on species—and thought—and their succession or depletion, "Walking" and "The Succession of Forest Trees" present a lifetime of regionalist specificity—a limited and diminishing lifetime of limited and diminishing sight upon sights. It is true that the earlier lecture is more Emersonian as it begins to skim and skate the surface of epistemological limits, but it is also undeniably fascinated with the a layering that is not surface upon surface, but surface *and* ground, mist *and* light, a splitting and overlaying of one species and another species, each with their own undeniable "real, but narrow" densities.

What might have also drawn Thoreau to Darwin's passage on Tahitian natives is what follows after this description of sunbathing, a description of the fine tattoos following the curves of the body with one of the common patterns being the crown of a palm tree so that, in Darwin's words, "the body of a man thus ornamented was like the trunk of a noble tree embraced by a delicate creeper" (*J* 482). This sense of a tree inscribed and overlaid upon a man, becoming a writhing set of livid lines upon a living man, and the illusion of permanence that a tattoo might give, that are, however, lines upon an impermanent and permeable body, is an awareness of the existence of both the living tree and the living man, pulsing and curving with each other, one on top of the other, one adjacent to the other, in mutual reciprocity, so that each one's breath is also the other's respiration, each one's movement the other's sway. Thoreau would describe such a relation, a relation that Dickinson also accorded her pine tree, with a grove of white pine in Concord:

I took a walk on Spaulding's Farm the other afternoon. I saw the setting sun lighting up the opposite side of a stately pine-wood. Its golden rays straggled into the aisles of the wood as into some noble hall. I was impressed as if some ancient and altogether admirable and shining family had seated there in that part of the land called Concord, unknown to me; to whom the Sun was servant; who had not gone into society in the village; who had not been called on.... I do not know whether I heard the sounds of a suppressed hilarity or not. They seemed to recline on the sunbeams. They have sons and daughters. They are quite well. The farmer's cart path which leads directly through their hall does not in the least put them out, — as the muddy bottom of a pool is sometimes seen through the reflected skies. They never heard of Spaulding, and do not know that he is their neighbor, — notwithstanding that I heard him whistle as he drove his team through the house. Nothing can equal the serenity of their lives.... There was no noise of labor. I did not perceive that they were weaving or spinning. Yet I did detect, when the wind lulled and hearing was done away, the finest imaginable sweet musical hum, — as

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30 Thoreau's "Walking" was published when he gathered materials together for publication just before his death, but he also delivered the piece as a lecture as early as 1851.

of a distant hive in May, which perchance was the sound of their thinking. They had no idle thoughts, and no one without could see their work, for their industry was not as in knots and excrescences embayed.

But I find it difficult to remember them. They fade irrevocably out of my mind even now that I speak and endeavor to recall them, and recollect myself. It is only after a long and serious effort to recollect my best thoughts that I become again aware of their cohabitancy. If it were not for such families as this I think I should move out of Concord. (284-85)

This long passage is difficult to break. Its musing is long, lyrical, and sad; its length holds what Thoreau cannot hold because his vision of this "cohabitancy" fades even as he "speak[s] and endeavor[s] to recall them." Though there is no evidence that Dickinson read this essay when it was published in the *Atlantic*, I would like to imagine that she did and that she, too, turned to think upon the pine, its succession and its diminishment, with her own longitudinal, but limited view. Who is this "ancient and altogether admirable and shining family"; why do their halls seem empty and yet not empty—filled with sons and daughters, laughter, and serenity? They are, of course, not some elfin or divine family but the woods themselves, who have their own ground and occupy the same grounds as Spaulding and his team, and of whom, if "hearing was done away," one could yet hear, as with Dickinson's Pine, "the finest imaginable sweet musical hum." Thoreau allows for readmission into wildness, for toeing the line, for the apprehensive touching between differing species even as, or rather precisely as, they are appearing and fading. For when he, in *Walden*, "improve[s] the nick of time" it is by hearing each melody "taken up and modulated and echoed from vale to vale," an echo that is "to some extent, an original sound" partly the voice of the bell tolling time and partly the "voice of the wood" (*W* 87). That margin where civilization and nature meet and in fact overlay each other interchangeably like rainwater upon glaze, light upon mist, oak trees within pine grove, is the home that Thoreau tracks, a "border life" simultaneously part and parcel of the farms that he surveys and also of the stately pine woods. If the bounds that he measures and sets up "fade from the surface of the glass," then so, too, do the woods "fade irrevocably"—"[o]ur forests furnish no masts" (*W* 284, 285). Like Dickinson, Thoreau knows he cannot see all, but sees for a single time, a single life; and so, too, do the pine trees whose masts diminish to few and fewer each year. He stands finally with his finite eyes upon a windowpane, where somewhere Dickinson looks out from upon, too, a pang that separates the inseparable, hearing species of varying modulations and chronicities around them and seeing the bending outlines of sun-woven, fleeting shadows.

## Chapter 4

### *Labor as Life: Regional and Racial Subsistancy from Frederick Douglass to W.E.B. Du Bois*

*nudus ara, sere nudus* - Virgil, *Georgics*

Among the Isles of Shoals, between sea and land, combing the shore for wreckage and weeds, it is altogether fitting to pose regionalism as a minor form, self-diminishing, self-belittling, as a refusal for grander narratives, and further as a drifting form that casts up on foreign shores, freely taken up by one or another. Decomposition, its grotesque forms, and the various distortions of vision can be understood as a regional natural history, one shaped by processes of nature that erode or blandish like waves upon rocks unto a nudity that can be seen as purely indigenous or as ravaged as the seawrack; and apprehended with a specificity that cuts difference precisely between forms and kinds or one that touches and goes, wavers in perception and recognition of difference. The indeterminacy of decomposition, its seemingly diminishing capacities, may offer an acceptance of adulterations and transgressions, a commoning of all refuse and drift, that seems, however, a nearly impossible proposal when returned to the scene of the historical detritus that accumulates in the span of the natural history of regionalism I have traced, and especially in lifetimes of nearly all the authors I have placed in this history—Thoreau, Melville, Thaxter, Jewett, and Dickinson.

For what transpires within this natural history is the American Civil War, a war of secession, of the furthering of territorial regions and states in the United States, and a bitter struggle over economies, slavery, and rights of man that worries and ties knots in a regionalism that confronts a scene that may not allow it to retreat to its diminished role, that seems to require, in fact, a different mode of reception and agitation than one that submits to decay or burial, even if it is a heaping and composing of its own. The presence of that tension as a political one between submission to the status quo and the surging forward of an uprising or uplift is not absent from the works thus far mentioned. The body that haunts Thoreau, identified as that of Horace Sumner, recalls his brother Charles Sumner, who was then in the midst of beginning a political career ardently supporting abolition, as well as prison and education reform, and who would later become famous for escalating opposition between North and South over slavery when he spoke against the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1856, pitting free soilers against slavery advocates since it would allow settlers to vote on whether to allow slavery. He would continue to play a pivotal role in supporting emancipation and later the republican promises of Reconstruction.

Horace, however, was the youngest and most retiring of the Sumner brothers, and he had only ventured out from home on short agricultural experiments at the Brook Farm Association and a New Hampshire farm. Charles insisted that European travel might inspire the ambitions and improve the declining health of a brother that he once described as exhibiting "the absence of those energies which are essential to worldly success."<sup>1</sup> Returning from the last leg of his European tour on board the *Elizabeth* with the Ossolis, this most minor of brothers would fall to shipwreck. Thus, the body of Horace, bare bones and bits of flesh, almost disappearing into the heft of the sand, without the fervor of his brother, without that more vehement passion of agitation, becomes the sign of a brother's anguish for the death that has already come to pass and premonition of the many deaths that would come with the war. Alongside these bodies are the

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<sup>1</sup> As quoted in Anne-Marie Taylor, *The Young Charles Sumner: and the Legacy of the American Enlightenment, 1811-1851*, 133.

absent ones of Margaret Fuller and Ossoli, and their dedication to the failed Italian Revolution. And further, in the negative space filling in around what bones and bits of flesh remain, there is the body of slavery itself and the moribund Atlantic seascape of a different drowning, corpses of an already passed slave trade, sixty million and more. How can we relinquish these diminishing bodies—of slavery, the Ossolis, and Sumner—to the waves and sands?<sup>2</sup> Horace Sumner's body, its decomposition and premonition, suggests a motion that is neither submission nor a raising up for the "rights of man," but a subsumption into natural history that takes up its ongoing rotations to endure and subsist.

This *subsistency* is better illustrated if we turn to texts that addresses the issue on head—that of slavery itself, or what continues after slavery. If the insistence on nature and species—whether on a kind of nudity and specificity that would place Africans on the other side of an almost indistinguishable line closer to animals and away from the white man, or one that would view and re-view distinctions with more care—is the provenance of regionalism, then what follows is another study that moves from aspects and representations to the moving and working parts of the subject in view. In transposing the scene from New England shores to the deep South, we will not lose sight of those watery murmurs and roars, or rather we will loose the site and let the wandering isles go where they might. At the same time, in these new environs, certain processes and labors will be more apparent, and I turn to the black laborer and the South to examine how regionalism lives if it is to be something like weeds or grass turned, inured, manured—from the French *euvre* 'work' from the Latin *opera*—to operate, to put to *work*. The works of Frederick Douglass and W.E.B. Du Bois, representing philosophical concerns of humanness, on the one hand, and blackness, on the other, in the formulation of life during and especially after slavery present a version of subsistency that turns back to the Black Belt and the labor of black folk to measure that life. Labor is life, and life is labor; *nudus ara, sere nudus*; "plough naked...and naked sow the land"<sup>3</sup>; so the barest life is that which ploughs and sows with the turnings of the land and weather, that turns and returns itself.

### *Picture Making and Prichard's Natural History of Man*

I begin by returning again to natural history, but moving the scene toward the South from New England to Talbot County of Maryland. This is the site of Frederick Douglass' childhood homes on Col. Edward Lloyd's plantations in Tuckahoe and then by the Wye River; this is the site of one man's nativity which is also the site of regionalism. Douglass turns here, as I do, to consider what nativity—or natality—in a certain place, by a certain mother in slavery, means. By way of Douglass' natural history, we see what being of a colored race, defined by such a natural history, will come to mean for a region; and how a kind of human bondage—or human universalism—will form the basis for a version of regionalism. He opens discussion of his mother in his second autobiography published in 1855 with this odd aside: "But to return, or rather, to begin. My knowledge of my mother is very scanty, but very distinct" (*M* 42). This structure of memory—as return, futile return and vexed doubling back—is perhaps the structure of beginning for all slave narratives, for the search for ancestry and origins is impeded by a great swathe of ocean and the countless possibilities of the African continent. Furthermore, for slaves

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- 2 Horace Sumner's remains are not the only signs of how the minor politics of regionalism may not settle well. We might consider other reminders in the previous texts: Melville's attention to the coercions of slavery and ship life, Thaxter's Caliban skull, Jewett's Indian relics of Shell-heap Island.
  - 3 Dryden's translation: "Plough naked, swain, and naked sow the land" for line 299.



born into slavery, birth is a beginning tied by the lineage of one's mother who is a slave, but also a mother who is often absent; it is a natality of bondage, bound to turn back on itself because that beginning has no initial point of creation but is like an X marked upon the surface of water where one has dropped something and to which one returns, panning over and over, but finding almost nothing but water and more water. That X is, of course, nothing at all for nothing can be written on water, and Douglass himself describes his mother's grave as "the grave of the dead at sea, unmarked, and without stone or stake" (M 47). Yet if there is some kind of equivalence or parallel conjunction, rather than sequence or progress, implied by Douglass' title *My Bondage and My Freedom*, the nativity—and natural history—of slavery which makes this ceaselessly recursive turn allows for both the tethers and drift, bondage and freedom as involved and imbricated in one another.

Douglass had earlier written only very briefly of his mother in his previous autobiography *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (1845)—a briefness that emphasized his lack of memory of her and criticized the way slavery rent families apart, separating husbands from wives, mothers from children. In *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), Douglass writes far more of his mother—attempting to describe her, relating instances of her visits to him, and sharing what knowledge he learned of her after her death. This return shifts attention from the criticism of slavery's destruction of families to the problem of an unmoored nativity and the repeated acts of return that it elicits. What Douglass returns to, when he begins, is his mother—mother as beginning, as birth, as the figure for natality; or rather, he begins with the absence of his mother and fills that space with natural history. Describing his mother's appearance, he draws from memory for broad brushstrokes of a figure—"She was tall, and finely proportioned; of deep black, glossy complexion; had regular features...was remarkably sedate in her manners" (M 42). But then, to render the affections he would have had for such a "true and natural object" as his mother, but could not due to their early separation, Douglass cites a specific page from *Prichard's Natural History of Man*:

There is in "*Prichard's Natural History of Man*," the head of a figure—on page 157—the features of which so resemble those of my mother; that I often recur to it with something of the feeling which I suppose others experience when looking upon the pictures of dear departed ones. (M 42)

In place of the natural object of "Mother," Douglass diverts his readers to "Natural History," specifically the illustration of a bust of Ramses, an Egyptian pharaoh. What affiliation and what "feeling" does Douglass claim here? With this substitution, which fits his nativity into natural history, Douglass points to the issues of race and evolution in the mid-century slavery debates. At the same time, I would like to argue that he also defines a different kind of natural history that claims a vague and natural descent, and hence natural and inalienable rights, from a human species rather than immediate familial lineage. In claiming this bond, this bondage, Douglass marks an aspect of subsumption to natural history or naturalization that will continue to color the discussions that shape the character of American Negroes and their regionalized patria, the South, after slavery. Bound, bond, bondage, from the Middle English *bond* 'serf,' from Old Norse *bóndi* 'tiller of the soil,' based on *búa* 'dwell.'

The scientific description of species and the evolution or hierarchy of species in part shaped slavery debates in the early and mid-nineteenth century. English scientist James Cowles Prichard was a founding member of the anti-slavery Aborigenes' Protection Society, as well as the Ethnological Society of London, and a major proponent of the monogenist theory that saw all human races as originating from one species. His *Natural History of Man* (1842) lays out his

conjecture of the development and variations of animal species and the human species, and his work forms an important precursor to Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* and *Descent of Man*.<sup>4</sup> Although some monogenists interpreted the variations within the species under criteria of inferiority or superiority, Prichard believed in equality between human races based on this "unity of mankind."<sup>5</sup> His version of monogenism countered polygenist slavery advocates who, positing that the human races developed from multiple origins, argued that Negroes were a separate species from whites and were naturally inferior. James McCune Smith explicates Douglass' mention of his mother's resemblance to the image of Ramses in *Prichard's Natural History of Man* as a reference to this debate in his 1855 introduction to Douglass' autobiography:

The head alluded to is copied from the statue of Ramses the Great, an Egyptian king of the nineteenth dynasty. The authors of the *Types of Mankind* give a side view of the same on page 148, remarking that the profile, "like Napoleon's, is superbly European!" The nearness of its resemblance to Mr. Douglass' mother rests upon the evidence of his memory, and judging from his almost marvelous feats of recollection of forms and outlines recorded in this book, this testimony may be admitted.

These facts show that for [Douglass'] energy, perseverance, eloquence, invective, sagacity, and wide sympathy, he is indebted to his negro blood....The Egyptians, like the Americans, were a *mixed race*, with some negro blood circling around the throne, as well as in the mud hovels" (in Douglass *M* 23-24)

Unsurprisingly, McCune Smith counters the polygenist argument of the inferiority of Negroes by offering esteemed examples of Douglass' character as aspects of his African lineage. By claiming that Douglass both inherits his much admired intellectual powers from his Negro side and bears resemblance (through his mother) to Egyptian nobility because Egyptians also claim a mixed heritage of Negro blood, McCune Smith proposes the superiority of the Negro race above and over that of the white. Further, he sarcastically cites the claim of Caucasian or European features in Ramses—"like Napoleon's, superbly European!"—in *Types of Mankind* (1850), published by American proponents of polygenism Josiah Clark Nott and George R. Gliddon who aimed to provide scientific and historical background for the pluralist origins of human species, as well as the superiority of the Caucasian race. Nott's work, and that of other American polygenists, was supported by prominent scientist Louis Agassiz who, in his work on species identification and taxonomy, had come to believe that different species, including many human species, had been separately and specifically created in multiple zoological zones. Agassiz wrote the introduction to *Types of Mankind*, and also much admired the work of Nott's mentor Samuel George Morton, to which *Types* was dedicated. Morton's earlier *Crania Americana* (1839) provided analysis of a collection of nearly 900 human skulls, and his body of work in ethnography and archaeology posited species differences and a plural origin for humans.<sup>6</sup> However, Agassiz's own studies into species difference between human races would take a different form.

At the heart of all these studies of species difference is the unstable specification of difference itself. For this reason Prichard devotes a section of his introduction in *The Natural*

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4 Darwin was a member of the Ethnological Society as well and later explicitly countered the polygenist theory in *Descent of Man* (1871).

5 See Edward Lurie, "Agassiz and the Races of Man" for background on the unitarian (monogenist) and pluralist (polygenist) positions in the slavery debate; see also, John Haller, Jr., "The Species Problem: Nineteenth-Century Concepts of Racial Inferiority in the Origin of Man Controversy."

6 Nott was a student of Morton's, but was much more interested in substantiating social claims about Negroes and whites than a general scientific survey on species.

*History of Man* to the discussion of "species," concluding:

The adoption of a term partly of hypothetical meaning has obviously been the fruitful source of many long and intricate discussions. As the word species, apart from all hypothesis, means only what we express by kind, kindred...we might avoid a great deal of unnecessary trouble by declining the use of so disputed a term; but as we cannot banish from our vocabulary an expression so well established, we must be content to use it in its proper and restricted meaning as above pointed out.

Species, then are simply tribes of plants or of animals which are certainly known, or may be inferred on satisfactory grounds, to have descended from the same stocks, or from parentages precisely similar, and in no way distinguished from one another. (10)

What Prichard marks at this juncture of 1842 is the mid-century taxonomic debates, primarily issuing from botany but having ripple effects to all areas of the study of biological life. These debates would eventually adapt a Linnaean system of distinct taxa based on reproductive features of the specimen into a Natural System promulgated by Francophone naturalists whom Prichard himself references. Given the many anomalies produced by the Linnaean system, the Natural System was considered a new, and perhaps more accurate, organization of species that distinguished between branches of life according to a range of features.<sup>7</sup> Proponents include de Candolle who organized species according to a wider set of morphological resemblances, and Buffon and Cuvier who stipulated the succession of individuals who, in the words of Cuvier, "self-reproduce and self-perpetuate,"<sup>8</sup> alongside the accessory of morphological resemblance.

For Prichard, as with Asa Gray and Charles Darwin, *species* is a hypothetical term, its object of reference is, in other words, an unwieldy and flighty subject—or more to the point, an unreal and hypothetical subject. *Species* designates what we have attempted to capture, as though netting a slippery and inchoate ether or phlogiston, as a certain kind of living thing. Even if one eschews the taxonomic branches of life and resigns oneself to the disorder of living things, or a seamless spectrum of life, or even a rhizomatic merging of kinships and relations at various nodes of life—and so one resigns oneself to the inaccuracy of any conceptual organization—this does not obviate the problem of how species difference is used and manipulated. To distinguish humans from all others, to distinguish human races from each other, "we cannot banish from our vocabulary an expression so well established." By the end of the nineteenth century, species as a taxa was a stabilized category in the taxonomic "tree" of the Natural System, yet the question of racial difference, if not species difference, continued to be haunted by the history of biological classification and determination.

Douglass is, of course, not oblivious of the natural history of Agassiz, Morton, and Nott that conditions how views of slaves were presented and understood. Agassiz's own studies of species led him to commission daguerreotypes of slaves in 1850 in order to prove physical differences between the races. After a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Charleston, Agassiz toured plantations in Columbia, South Carolina with paleontologist Robert Gibbes and requested that daguerreotypes be taken. Photographed by

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7 See also Theresa Kelley, *Clandestine Marriage*, for background to this taxonomic turn especially with respect to botany and Romanticism's investment in botanical anomalies. It is probably also worth noting that the use of botanical tropes for the human species in the nineteenth century correlates with the fact that so much of the "species" debate took place within botany over any other field, as though turning greater attention to the more uncomfortable topic of the "human species" could only be approached by way of flowers and seeds. However, as Prichard also notes, the reproduction of plants and animals differs in important respects, one being that plant hybrid species, while rare, are viable, and that animal hybrid species though also rare are, however, sterile.

8 Translated from Cuvier ("la succession des individus qui se reproduisent et se perpétuent") in Prichard 10.

J.T. Zealy, these daguerreotypes show a selection of African-Americans photographed most frequently in two positions—the full face view and the side view—that represented a scientific comprehensiveness for identification purposes that would, of course, come to inform forensic techniques for crime investigation such as the mug shot.<sup>9</sup> And the subjects were often stripped naked or to the waist, recapitulating the fallacy of naked nature. Though these images were never published, the illustration that accompanies Agassiz's essay in *Types of Mankind* offers the comparison to which these images would have been employed. Here, a two-column set of illustrations juxtaposes Malay and Australian species, beginning with a head profile of an indigenous person of those provinces, then a side view of their cranium, followed with a series of more side view illustrations of other species not as evenly juxtaposed against one another as the examples of the human species and vaguely arranged in hierarchical fashion of the older Chain of Being model. Viewed in the light of this strident visual argument of species difference between races—a species difference on the same order that distinguishes the elephant from the numbat or marsupial anteater—Agassiz's daguerreotypes seem to serve a blatantly racist technique. Yet viewed on their own, as images that try again and again to see its subject—first from the front, then from the side—whose mute testimony is their own resonance, these daguerreotypes might also be reread as part of a natural history that unites humans. Whether it is one based on reproduction, as Prichard argues, or common origin, in Darwin's theory of evolution, natural history can become the sign of humanity. And this is the view Douglass takes. Rather than sublimate Negro ancestry to a lineage of Egyptian kings, he subsumes the Negro to its history of bondage to slavery and to humanity.

Douglass's reference to natural history in place of his mother, or rather, his mother *as* natural history re-interprets the scientific view as a different kind of specificity—not one that inferiorizes its subject, but rather one turns the filial and blood lineage of slavery into a deep "species affection" for the commonality or bond of humanity. When Douglass points to page 157 of a natural history book as a presenting someone who resembles his mother, what might have been expected? A picture of a woman from an African tribe? Or a figure of the Mother like Winold Reiss' "Brown Madonna"<sup>10</sup> (1925)? Instead we are given an image of Ramses, Egyptian king, to take the place of Mother. This claim of Negro mixture with Egyptian nobility, of African-American ties to an ancient civilization of Africa, is also a sublimation that morphs gender—merging mother with king, a patria that is both motherland and fatherland. Further, reading carefully about this Ramses in Prichard, as Douglass no doubt did if he saw in it the features of his mother, one finds that this image has been taken to represent the "Hindoo" or Indian variety of physiognomy found in Egyptian figures—not the "Ethiopian" or African. In other words, this image does not, as McCune Smith argues, refer to Negro blood and perhaps it does not refer to nobility either. In a way, Douglass could have cited any image from *The Natural History of Man*, for what we see in his autobiography is not his mother, nor this image of Ramses' head, but simply this: *Prichard's Natural History of Man*. For Douglass, natality comes from this almost impersonal, transgender, and more vague but also more racially inclusive—

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9 See Brian Wallis's "Black Bodies, White Science: Louis Agassiz's Slave Daguerreotypes" for further background and readings on the J.T. Zealy daguerreotypes for Agassiz. Wallis notes that the fifteen daguerreotypes may be divided into two series, the first showing front, side, and rear views of standing, naked subjects representing the physiognomic approach to study body shape, proportion, and posture, and the second showing the heads and naked torsos of the subjects in a phrenological approach to view the character and shape of the head.

10 Reiss' painting would serve as the frontispiece for Alain Locke's *The New Negro* (1925), showing that the search for Negro natality and nativity remained a preoccupation for the Harlem Renaissance.

Egyptian, Hindoo, African, European—"natural history of man," that is, common humanity. His affection for Mother is subsumed into a different natural object, that of the human species as one species—"of one blood."<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, Douglass's turn to a natural history image—and his imagining of his mother as this figure of natural history—instantiates this process of "picturing" as a specifying characteristic of self-reflection and imagination in the human species. As a number of critics have highlighted, Douglass was especially aware of how images underwrite perception.<sup>12</sup> His lectures on pictures<sup>13</sup> spanning 1861 to 1865 during the height of the Civil War foreground the significance of "picture making" as a distinctive trait of the human species as a way to reform racial perception. In stating that "Man is the only picture making animal in the world" (P 11), Douglass not only acknowledges the photographic and printing technology that enabled the cheap production of images in nineteenth-century America, but also correlates that development with a deep-seated "capacity and passion for pictures" (P 11) in human nature itself. Further, he directly contrasts this picture making capacity against the "non-picturing," but rather "delineative" documentation of anthropometrics:

A certain class of Ethnologists and Archeologists, more numerous in our country a few years ago than now and more numerous now than they ought to be and will be when slavery shall have no further need of these, profess some difficulty in finding some fixed and unvarying and definite line separating what they are pleased to call the lowest variety of our species, always meaning the negro, from the highest animal.

To all such scientific cavillers, I commend the fact that man is everywhere a picture making animal, and the only picture making animal in the world. The rudest and remotest tribes of men, manifest this great human power, and thus vindicate the brotherhood of man. (P 12-13)

This "certain class" of scientists might be distinguished by their insistence on separate categories and especially *ranks* of inferiority and superiority, rather than variety, in the human and animal species. Yet what Douglass leaves open is perhaps a different class of "Ethnologists and Archaeologists" like Prichard, and one might also say Douglass himself, that embraces all humans of all tribes as humans, as brothers, as picture makers.

This making of pictures is, in Douglass's formulation, an intellectual and imaginative process that borrows from Emersonian transcendentalism to, not see the ideal as the real, but to see the difference between the ideal and the real and thereby critique and close the gap between the two.

The process by which man is able to possess his own subjective nature outside of himself, giving it form, color, space, and all the attributes of distinct personality so that it becomes the subject of distinct observation and contemplation is at bottom of all effort and

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11 Motto of Prichard's anti-slavery Aborigenes Protection Society and a reference to Acts 17:26 "And [he] hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation." Pauline Hopkins' 1902-3 serial novel *Of One Blood* also follows African-American interest in monogenism.

12 See introduction and essays on Douglass in Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith, eds. *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity*.

13 Douglass gave a number lectures on pictures: "Pictures and Progress" (1861) reprinted in Blassingame, a revised "Pictures and Progress" (1865), and a lecture variously titled as "Life Pictures" and "Age of Pictures." Quotations are from the 1865 manuscript: Frederick Douglass, "Pictures and Progress," Frederick Douglass Papers at the Library of Congress: Speech, Article, and Book file, 1846-1894 and Undated; American Memory, Library of Congress Manuscript Division, available online at <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mfd.28009>.

germinating principle of all reform & all progress. But for this, the history of the [beach]<sup>14</sup> of the field would be the history of man.

It is the picture of life contrasted with the fact of life, the ideal contrasted with the real, which makes criticism possible. Where there is no criticism there is no progress, for the want of progress is not felt where such want is not made visible by criticism. It is by looking upon this picture and upon that which enables us to point out the defects of the one and the perfection of the other. (P 18)

Picture making is not the act of representing things as they actually are; it is not so much documentation and registration as it is the awareness of difference between things as they are and things as they are seen or seem. It is a representation of "seeming," of representation and relation themselves; that is, it is a form of reflection, an idealist version of self-consciousness that contrasts what is with what seems to allow for the space of critique. With pictures, Douglass explains that "[m]en of all conditions and classes can now see themselves as others see them and as they will be seen by those shall come after them" (P 7). That is, pictures allow people to shape and cultivate their own presentation and understand that presentation as shaping the perception of themselves by other people, or rather to see how other's perception might be different from what they had thought. Pictures are the visualization of how people see each other, how they recognize and relate to one another.

This gaze is not an objectifying one that measures and establishes the fact of an object, but one that separates out an object for beholding, for picturing. Crucially, Douglass sees picture-making as a form of rhetorical persuasion that appeals to nature—one's natural, even child-like, tendencies toward emotion, vivacity, and pictures—rather than to reason. As he puts it, "The few think, the many feel. The few comprehend a principle, the many require illustration" (P 21). Though feeling and illustration might usually be opposed to rationality as the baser emotions, Douglass here associates them with a higher, and distinctly human, capacity. Echoing Emerson's criticism that one must "marry" the "barren" facts of natural history with human history, he opposes scientific rationality and its methods of measurement and description to the more appealing techniques of aesthetics and sentiment:

Nevertheless with the clear perception of things as they are, must stand the faithful representation of things as they seem. The dead fact is nothing without the living expression. Niagara is not fitly described when said to be a river of this or that volume falling two hundred feet over a ledge of rocks, nor is thunder when simply called a loud noise or a jarring sound. This is truth but truth disrobed of its sublimity and glory; a kind of frozen truth destitute of motion itself and incapable of exciting emotion in others. (P 21-22)

In this picturing, one sees actuality and chooses to represent it differently as "living expression" with form, color, and motion. And in that reflection, whether of any object as "the picture of life contrasted with the fact of life" or of one's "own subjective nature outside of himself" is the process of picture making that forms *critical* subjectivity and the capacity for change. By comparing fact and picture, by imagining and picturing, one sees the difference between the real and the ideal and becomes capable of discernment.

Earlier in the lecture, Douglass directly references Emerson's calls for the Poet "who from the intellectual kingdom feed the thought and imagination with ideas and pictures" (P 14), but the entire lecture is shot through with Emersonian tones which not only paint Nature in the colors

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14 This text comes from a handwritten manuscript, and sections with question marks and brackets indicate places where the text was difficult to make out.

of the spirit but turns that transparent gaze inward to paint Spirit in the colors of nature.

For man, and for man alone, all nature is richly threaded with the material of art. Not only the outside world, but the inside soul may be described as a picture gallery, a magnificent panorama in which things of time and things of eternity are silently portrayed. Within and without, there are beautiful thought valleys, varied and far reaching landscapes, abounding in all the interesting and striking forms and features of external nature, mountains, plains, rivers, lakes, [?], woods, waterfalls, outstanding headlands, and precipitous rocks, have their delightful shadows painted in the soul.

This full identity of man with nature, this affinity for, and this relation to all forms, colors, sounds, and movements of external nature, that finds music in the slightest whisper of the zephyr stirred leaf and in the roaring torrent deep and wild, this all embracing and all sympathizing quality, which everywhere matches the real with the artificial, which [?] substances because of its shadows, is our chief distinction from all other beings on earth and the source of our greatest achievements. (*P* 12)

Emersonian panoramic nature is reflected inward to map the soul. Nature with the richness of height, depth, and color becomes the sublime complexity of human subjectivity; and a transcendental natural history might be said to color Douglass's optimism for progress and reform. What he hopes to excavate by diverting attention to this seeming small topic amidst the larger questions of slavery and emancipation is a kind of sculptural and composed unity of human nature, as though by raising up mountains and cupping out valleys, and generating a whirling centripetalism of an "all embracing and all sympathizing quality," he might encompass and bring together all of human nature, of all colors and heights and depths, in this dream gallery. As Ginger Hill writes, Douglass stresses not an "unassailable authenticity available to scrutiny and preservation" but a "creative, intuitive, almost mystical understanding that is all the more powerful because it is still reliant upon the interaction with the material world" (69). Picture making is a deeply self-reflective process, but it takes its material from nature.

In closing his reflections upon his mother in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass once more tries to grasp at memories that are not there and catches only a view of her from, as I will argue, that material history of bondage—a natural history of humanity:

The counsels of her love must have been beneficial to me. The side view of her face is imaged on my memory, and I take few steps in my life, without feeling her presence; but the image is mute, and I have no striking words of her's treasured up. (*M* 45)

It is the side view of his mother that catches my breath. It is more often that we have an oblique view of people, askance, as though questioning their existence or their motives or their hopes, than a full face view. Every time we turn to get a better view, people seem to turn away or shift their posture, and we are like sketch-artists too slow at their task when the models shift through their positions. We mourn with Douglass his mother's death, and the want of her presence that can only be evinced in this oblique side view, this whisper of a profile or outline of her cheek. Yet this is too sentimental a portrait for, as Douglass insists, he could not have the feelings for her that one would have for a mother and it is as though such a feeling is alien to him except as he approximates this other feeling directed at the natural history of man as a whole.

Instead, his view and the direction of his affection is one that is multiply stymied and obscured, and strangely neutralized or naturalized. He moves from the image of Ramses, itself a three-quarter view of the statue which, from a vantage between a frontal and side view, offers a rounded view of the face, to the side view of his mother, the most oblique. Full face, three-quarter, and profile are all portrait views, but the side view is the least common for portraits

perhaps because we expect to be able to see as much of the face as possible when meeting a loved one or any person. Further, a portrait is singular—it presents an individual person or personality in one view, not multiple. Douglass' recurrence to *Prichard's Natural History of Man* and then to this side view is a not, then, a portraiture—not a view of the dearly departed—but a kind of natural history view of additional angles like Agassiz's commissioned specimen shots of slaves which come in frontal view, but also additionally, side view. It may seem perverse and inaccurate to find affinity between the Zealy daguerreotypes and Douglass's picture making of his mother. Yet his picture making is part of natural history archive of the human, it cannot be separated from that history nor from that nature, and in the turning view of one's subject, which is the turning over of thought that is picture making, is the critical subjectivity of humanity. Though he has no substantial memories associated with his mother, Douglass has, instead, his picturing of her, his turning between silence and presence, three-quarters view and profile view, that turns the absent or negative sense of her love for him into a natural history of the human. Toward these images, of Ramses and the side view of his mother, Douglass has an affection that he finds unfamiliar and difficult to place—"a feeling I suppose others experience"; it is not love for his mother, but a "species affection" for the humans in general.

If, on the one hand, Douglass finds an encompassing and Emersonian unity in natural history and the human-made picturesque, his appellation of humans as "picture making animals" recalls, on the other hand, the lowly nature of humanity as animals bound to labor even as it attempts to raise up the "human animal." His multiple views of his mother are symptomatic of the conditions that reduce, block, or slant his view. The glancing views of his mother—that is, of the natural history of man—that Douglass shares are views of the human condition: of both his mother's humanity and her bestialization, of both human freedom and bondage. Douglass attempts to picture and sentimentalize his mother and her circumstances in order to censure the destruction of filial affection in slavery; but he has no sentiment to draw up, only one particularly vivid memory of a visit and this fact: "The bondwoman lives as a slave, and is left to die as a beast; often with fewer attentions than are paid to a favorite horse" (*M* 45). In place of his mother's aspect and "counsels of her love" at her deathbed, he cites "the bondwoman," "slave," "beast" (of burden), and (work) "horse"—all figures of a life condemned to labor, that is a life of simply maintaining biological life rather than a life of full human consciousness. Douglass's *discursus* on his mother must continue to return to these generalizations of labor—and the bestialization of the human in human *and* natural history—because he has few personal memories of his mother and certainly none of her death. Yet if this history is, in Douglass's picture making, also a history of common humanity, bondage may be constituted not only as labor but also as a natural contract that ensures natural and universal rights of all humans to "liberty and the pursuit of happiness."<sup>15</sup>

These rights merge what are typically separated by political theorists as natural rights and civil rights, and are rights guaranteed by the human condition. For Douglass, natural rights are ensured by birth as a human being, which is also bound to a certain kind of natality of nativity—birth in a native land whose laws ensure those natural rights, which are also, then, civil and political rights. After almost two years in Great Britain where he speaks on behalf of abolitionism and relishes being treated as a free man, Douglass returns to the United States and

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15 From *My Bondage and My Freedom*: "...I already saw myself wielding my pen, as well as my voice, in the great work of renovating the public mind, and building up a public sentiment which should, at least, send slavery and oppression to the grave, and restore to 'liberty and the pursuit of happiness' the people with whom I had suffered, both as a slave and as a freeman" (287).



its racial prejudices: "I felt I had a duty to perform—and that was, to labor and suffer with the oppressed in my native land" (*M* 277). The ties that bind Douglass to the United States are based on nativity, as well as a bondage defined by labor, especially a labor of suffering, of burdens, of bearing oppressive loads. These—to be born and to bear—are made the same thing in Douglass' calculation of his bondage as a free black American; nativity is a bondage as bondage is to be born. Departing from the Garrisonian abolitionists who promoted "No union with slaveholders" and saw the Constitution as document that protected slavery, he feels bound in his newfound freedom<sup>16</sup> to support the American Constitution:

My new circumstances compelled me to re-think the whole subject, and to study, with some care, not only the just and proper rules of legal interpretation, but the origin, design, nature, rights, powers, and duties of civil government, and also the relations with human beings sustain to it....[T]he constitution of our country is our warrant for the abolition of slavery in every state in the American Union. (*M* 293)

Here, Douglass refers importantly to the Constitution—and not to the Declaration of Independence, which is the traditional warrant of natural rights even though he quotes elsewhere the natural rights it declares. He effectively revises the civil rights that the Constitution as a civil document upholds into rights bound to all "human beings," to the entire species. He supports in *My Bondage and My Freedom* not an abolitionism that would endorse the North's acceptance of Southern secession so that freedom could be declared only in its own territories and thus segregating bondage from freedom; but puts his weight behind emancipation within the entire Union, upholding the Constitution of the United States, so that bondage and freedom are united in community, in a commons of human birth. Bondage is both the bondage of labor and nativity—man and woman are a beast, a human animal, condemned to labor, to bear, to be born—and bonds of commonality and community—the human races are all one species. As he writes of his manumission purchased by English friends:

Had I been a private person, having no other relations or duties than those of a personal and family nature, I should never have consented to the payment of so large a sum for the privilege of living securely under our glorious republican form of government. (*M* 277)

We see, then, how his relation to his immediate family, to his mother, is superseded or subsumed by his relation as a human being to a community or commonality he refers to here as "our glorious republican form of government." Instead of birth to a personal mother and family, Douglass celebrates a birth within what he calls elsewhere "the human family" or "one race"<sup>17</sup>, which is the natality or nativity of humanity upon which he believes a republic is based, and which even in its most sublime renderings cannot shed the shadows of its memories, the negative and muted reflection of its ideal nature, the bondswoman, the slave, the beast.

Side view: "the image is mute." Perhaps what drew Douglass to the Ramses image in Prichard's book was also its muteness—"calm and dignified" (in Prichard 157), "remarkably sedate" (Douglass)—and as an engraving of a sculpture, the eyes of the Ramses statue are blank, as though vacant, meant to be filled in. Agassiz's subjects are also mutes, and like Douglass' image of his mother, they garner something in their muteness that demonstrates the system, the

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16 From 1845-47, Douglass travelled and lectured in England and friends there raised funds for his manumission and to establish his press for what would be *The North Star* upon return to the United States. His "new circumstances" likely refers to his break from Garrisonian abolitionists after England and setting up his press.

17 See Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 279 for "human family," and John David Smith, "Introduction" for reference to Douglass' use of "one race" (xlvi).

lens, the angles that fix them onto plates. The southern black slave laborer is read as the lowest minimal existence of animal life, what Hannah Arendt calls the *animal laborans*, and also as the life that endures and subsists. In the life of the laborer are the drawn lines of human and animal species difference, and to their merging upon that line as the human animal, the human in bonds. His and her mutedness—Mother and Bondsman and Human—attests ambivalently to human bondage, the most brutal and peculiar institution and also the most humane and encompassing constitution that embraces all who bear and are born. The mute appeal of Agassiz's subjects and Douglass' mother is not one of absolute silence, but a mutedness that is unable to speak except by the means available to it, worn down and generalized as labor, as a human universality. Though Douglass's picture making is unable to adequately theorize the shadows in its interior and exterior landscapes of "woods, waterfalls, outstanding headlands, and precipitous rocks," I will turn to W.E.B. Du Bois for his "pictures" of humanity, of human labor.

### "Essays and Sketches"

In Du Bois's writings of the turn-of-the-century, black life is everywhere conditioned by labor, and it is also conditioned by a particular kind of regional consciousness in labor. Du Bois's essay "The Negro As He Really Is" was published in the magazine *The World's Work* in June 1901 with the subtitle: "A definite study of one locality in Georgia showing the exact conditions of every Negro family—their economic status—their ownership of land—their morals—their family life—the houses they live in and the results of the mortgage system." It was also accompanied by photo-illustrations by A. Radclyffe Dugmore. Later revised into two chapters in *The Souls of Black Folk*, the essay and its revision in *Souls* form part of the implied narrative of Du Bois's narrator taking the Jim Crow car to the South and lifting the Veil for his reader to see Negro life there. There, his formulation and representation of the double consciousness of the Negro is also inextricably tied to the laboring life he finds there.

With its eclectic, yet loosely connected form of "essays and sketches," *Souls* has been read as a counter-narrative to traditional, authenticating slave narratives and autobiographies, as well as, to progressive and developmental narratives of national and racial history.<sup>18</sup> In charting the movement of the text from the white world and into the Veil, Robert Stepto sees the revisions and development of Du Bois's narrator as a kind of *bildungsroman* of a man and a race where "[t]he narrative voice that becomes one with that 'we' has indeed achieved an affirmative posture against the nightmare and travels, weary but not forlorn, above the Veil" (64). Priscilla Wald sees this development as intermeshed with the always unfinished project of a nation-building narrative of the United States where "the process of analysis required by an inclusive 'we' would be ongoing and that there would always be untold stories—that those stories motivated [Du Bois's] writing and generated his analysis" (235-36). What these critiques move toward is the ideal of life beyond the Veil and of racial and cultural pluralism that Du Bois's narrator announces as the sunlit, color-blind dream in the text.

However, I consider how Du Bois's narrative expresses a regionalist disposition of diminishment, rather than a national or racial uplift, through its local-color sketches about the Southern black laborer. As the subtitle to the *World's Work* essay suggests, one locality in certain illustrative detail—socioeconomic, physical, and pictorial—has the capacity to represent

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18 For a comparison of *Souls* to the autobiographical narratives (especially slave narratives and Booker T. Washington's own autobiography), see Robert Stepto, *From Behind the Veil*; and for comparison to dominant narratives of race and nation, see Priscilla Wald, *Constituting Americans*.

a much larger black population. And further, as the essay's revision into *Souls* shows—it has the capacity to represent specifically the Negro farmer in the South at the same time that it represents all Negroes. The "black folk" of the title and, indeed, for most of his chapters refers to what Du Bois also calls the "black peasantry" of the South, not to the black middle class or the urban migrant worker. As Eric Sundquist notes, especially of *Souls*, "folk" in Du Bois's lexicon "moves toward a more specific geography, a stronger sense of soil and place not encompassed by 'nation'—the geography of the black folk of the South, which could be the cradle of the black American nation...but could not be synonymous with it" (T 459). In other words, there is a way in which this cast of black folk is regionally specific to the South, to Du Bois's sense of the South which centers upon "the crimson soil" of Atlanta, its "straggling and unlovely villages," its "pine and clay," and the Black Belt where "the world grows darker" (S 74, 75, 76); and yet is still somehow representative of a "nation" that is not only the black American nation, but the entire nation. If, as Du Bois, claims that "there are to-day no truer exponents of the human spirit of the Declaration of Independence than American Negroes" (S 16), then this "spirit," this *soul* of black folk, which is also a consciousness borne out of the consciousness of the black laborer of the South, represents a more general American regionalism.

Du Bois's writings in *Souls* attempt this picture, but it is one that is limited—overcast and obscured—by a certain diminishment of its own subject and its subjectivity that Du Bois names double consciousness. Du Bois's concept of Negro consciousness has always been understood as racial; however, read within the context of *Souls*, double consciousness is an overlapping of the racial and the regional. Its darkened resemblance to Douglass' picture making consciousness, suggests a consciousness of diminishment, that is, a consciousness that makes pictures but does not necessarily aspire to picture making idealism or reconciliation, but holds semblance and doubleness in critical tension. This is the doubly regionalized and racialized consciousness whose seeing and laboring behind a veil is a seeming that registers the discrepancy between rosy sunshine and dusky shadows out of which is borne, not a transcendent consciousness, but a consciousness of diminishment, deformation, and modulating vitality. Rhetorically, however, Du Bois *does* hold up an ideal of racial uplift and a color-blind world where Negro consciousness does not have to always see itself through a degrading prejudice. He imagines an ideal consciousness that can shed the clinging shadows of inferiority and shine "[f]ree, free as the sunshine" (S 163). And yet *Souls*, as Wald notes in her stress on the ongoingness of development and its generation of untold stories, never achieves this ideal. As a regional text, *Souls of Black Folk* formally presents a double consciousness that never becomes unobscured and clarified, and that nevertheless makes pictures.

For Du Bois, as it is for Douglass, despite this capacity to make pictures, Negro consciousness carries an undue and yet indissoluble burden of seeing itself through the distortion and belittling gaze of a white world—a white world with certain notions of the natural history of humans. The famous passage where he defines this emphasizes the way in which black consciousness must always contend with racial science:

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. (S 11)

By placing the Negro among divisions of the human species into different racial origins, Du Bois claims common humanity but also signals a continuing preoccupation with natural history at the heart of any representation of "black folk." The sequence of racial types recalls the typology and mythology of a racialist science that has been associated with pro-slavery and abolitionist debates concerning the hierarchy and succession of races and species. The tape the black man must use to measure his soul recalls the anthropometric methods of phrenology and physiognomy, which attempted to measure indices of human intellect and character via morphological features. The entire history of natural history that draws the line between human and animal, or between the white human races and the so-called inferior races, colors the relations between humans and animals, and humans and humans. And it points to the continued conundrum (of hierarchy) or feeling of "at loss" (to represent another) which accompanies those situations which require one to speak to these relations, political and ecological; for how does one, ultimately, relate to and speak to and picture living things, especially living things that seem to live at only a subsistence level, living things that only *seem*?

Concerned with representing the consciousness of black folk, Du Bois's performance of double consciousness or distorted picture making manifests as regionalist sketches expressing his own contradictions, and his self-checking and self-conscious forethoughts and after-thoughts. On one hand, the "second-sight" or "double consciousness" that marks the Negro as with the color of his skin and that "only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world" resembles Douglass's picture making consciousness that allows men to "see themselves as others see them" (*P* 7). Yet where Douglass's formulation is empowering, Du Bois's registers the debilitating effect of such a picturing when blotted out and covered over everywhere with racial prejudice. The Negro's double consciousness is one that Du Bois admonishes as "yield[ing] him no true self-consciousness." The capacity to see oneself as others see one, which Douglass lauded as the germ of critical subjectivity, is here shaded over by a white world's seeing that is too discordant and too belittling an "ideal" to be compared and contrasted with resolution. This view that sees the Negro as inferior and ignorant, as lowly people, is one that overwhelmingly colors both the white world and the black world: "the very soul of the toiling, sweating black man is darkened by the shadow of a vast despair" (*S* 14).

On the other hand, if self consciousness *is* the very "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others," and picture making *is* this very self-imaging and reflecting, is there a form of double consciousness that *is* a true self consciousness. Is not double consciousness a form of conscious labor that allows one to see oneself in the world—through its toiling and sweating and through its diminishment? Must two thoughts and two strivings always be reconciled or transcended? Does not this dogged strength, though dogged and tailed, divided and panting and woebegone, have also a dogged will and soul? Is this not, after all, Du Bois's entreaty, to see in this yearning and striving the human soul itself?

It is easy for us to lose ourselves in details in endeavoring to grasp and comprehend the real condition of a mass of human beings. We often forget that each unit in the mass is a throbbing human soul. Ignorant it may be, and poverty stricken, black and curious in limb and ways and thought; and yet it loves and hates, it toils and tires, it laughs and weeps its bitter tears, and looks in vague and awful longing at the grim horizon of its life,—all this even as you and I. (*S* 94)

Even as he tries to describe the conditions of "a mass" in terms of "units," Du Bois also appeals to a sentimental hierarchy of sympathy that looks down upon the "ignorant" and "poverty stricken." If there is a certain disconnectedness, limitation, or even caricatural simplicity in Du

Bois's portrayal of his black brethren, the "black peasantry" as he calls them, it is due to the very dusk of veil that overshadows even his own ability to picture them. Du Bois's essays and sketches are informed by his own double consciousness, his own training in sociology and economics, which is colored over by the delineative metrics that measure superiority and inferiority, knowledge and ignorance, in the types, masses, and units of mankind. Even when shifting to a more qualitative rather than a numerical casting of Negroes, he figures these people as strange and other—"black and curious in limb and ways of thought"—a tone that does not change even when *Souls* shifts from viewing the Negro from within the white world and into the black world. Du Bois's *Souls* present a picture of the Negro still subject to a natural history of species and racial typologies and hierarchies, still doubly conscious of the ranks of status that delineate human from animal, black from white.

However, this double consciousness is still able to register the throbbing of that diminished life. Looking "in vague and awful longing...all this even as you and I," the black peasantry appeals as a form of life no different from others, strictly mundane and limited by the same horizon that limits all life. Particularly, I want to highlight how he takes up the figure of the Negro as a laborer to represent that life in *The Souls of Black Folk*, and especially in the chapters already mentioned. Labor, particularly agrarian labor, becomes the mode of life at stake in the representation of the African-American because it is the process or life-activity that holds in itself the tension of the difference between human and animal that informs racial and species typologies.

The striations made by certain theorists of modern labor reveal a reliance upon a prehistory separating human from animal. In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt distinguishes between work and labor, with work associated with the concept of the *homo faber* who builds the world of political formation and human artifice; while labor is associated with the *animal laborans* whose worldless labor constitutes the lowest minimal existence of animal life, that is, of biological reproduction and maintenance. These divisions can also be thought of in terms of Giorgio Agamben's description of the biopolitical selection that excludes *zoë* or the bare life of the *homo sacer* in order to mark the boundaries of the political life of *bios*. His distinctions are based on how ancient Greeks divided categories of life into the *polis* (or politics) and *oikos* (or economy), as are Arendt's concepts.

A similar delineation between human and animal may be seen in Karl Marx's early philosophical writings on the species-character of man in terms of his labor. He delineates between an active life and a biological life, writing:

For labor, *life activity*, and *productive life* appear to man as first only as a *means* to satisfy a need, the need to maintain physical existence. Productive life, however, is species-life. It is life begetting life. In the mode of life activity lies the entire character of a species, its species-character; and free conscious activity is the species-character of man. Life itself appears only as a *means of life*. (*W* 294)

Marx's attribution of a reproductive and physical maintenance of life to "species-life" corresponds with the general scientific definition of species as a succession of similar individuals. His separation of a "free conscious activity" from all other labor as the life activity of the human species reflects the same desire as racist science to distinguish humans from animals, the superior from the inferior. Carrying through this distinction into his critique of capitalist labor, Marx articulates a concept of conscious activity that closely mirrors Douglass's picture-making:

The object of labor is thus the *objectification of man's species-life*: he produces himself

not only intellectually, as in consciousness, but also actively in a real sense and sees himself in a world he made. In taking from man the object of his production, alienated labor takes from his *species-life*, his actual and objective existence as a species. It changes his superiority to the animal to inferiority, since he is deprived of nature, his inorganic body. (*W* 295)

By defining human life activity as seeing "himself in a world he made," Marx also emphasizes a visual analogy of picturing oneself for a special "species characteristic" consciousness that is self-consciousness. This activity of seeing oneself, or objectifying oneself, is, however, is what Marx generally considers *labor* with an object or, perhaps, labor with nature, with the material that is not one's own body, which is akin to Arendt's idea of artifice. In *Capital*, Marx calls the labor process the "universal condition for the metabolic interaction [*Stoffwechsel*] between man and nature, the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence...common to all forms of society in which human beings live" (*C* 290). Marx sees in this labor process its consumption of materials, objects, instruments, and humans themselves in an ever transformative, Phoenix-like fire. Indeed, labor *is* this fire of sensuous transformation that constitutes life in matter and time, and in the *Grundrisse*, he describes that "[l]abor is the living, form-giving fire; it is the transitoriness of things, their temporality, as their formation by living time" (Marx in Foster 168). The self-reproduction of oneself, which is the basis of labor, is also the "animal" basis of the human species that depends on succession, or the self-reproduction of its individuals. When this labor is riven from its object and from nature, in what John Bellamy Foster has called "metabolic rift," it becomes the alienated labor.

Interestingly, Marx's remark that "Life itself appears only as a *means of life*" suggests that life appears at first only to be a life of labor, that is merely a productive, biological life, but is actually a life of labor that should also be, for humans, a labor of conscious life activity. In other words, what we mistake to be mere animal labor as a means for physical maintenance and as a metabolic relation between man and nature, may also be the artifice of free conscious activity. Yet it *appears* as that labor so menial and repetitive that we liken it to animal labor. Marx's thinking upon labor, even as it aims to separate the human from the animal, conscious labor from unconscious labor, returns labor to an indistinguishable and unsegregated labor.<sup>19</sup> In this general concept of labor, human and animal labor are separated and yet inseparable, and it also singles out a particular labor that is a physical labor working with nature as that strange labor that appears most animal, but is by that very appearance as mere appearance revealed as a more than animal, as human. This opening of the animal into the human in the act of *seeming*, and of literary figuration, might be understood to take place in the portrayal, of the Negro farm laborer.

In the transition from slavery to emancipation, the Negro is a figure where the association of labor with the animal or slave must come up against the association of work with the human, and indeed modulates animal labor into human labor. In the figure of the Southern black laborer, Du Bois brings together an interest in labor and a more conscious work as it exists under a double consciousness informed by a racialized natural history. With his litany of conjunctions to describe the black body and mind—"loves and hates," "toils and tires," "laughs and weeps"—Du Bois gives black life, that is, the life of diminishment itself, an ecclesiastical resignation of

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19 In her critique of Marx's theory of labor in "Thinking through Things," Rachel Banner also notes how these different forms of labor as articulated in *Capital*, Vol. 3, are both separated and attached to each other. Labor of necessity forms the basis of the labor beyond necessity that is freedom; mundane labor is necessarily a part of and apart from human freedom. She describes how James McCune Smith's presentation of labor in *The Heads of Colored People* allows for that coexistence of labor and freedom through a circulating and emancipatory relationship with objects (as a form of self-objectification), rather than a possessive one.

humanity that emphasizes that commonness and coming-togetherness of humanity in its varied activities, that are so commonplace as to be menial and routine. Southern black labor, particularly agrarian labor, comes to signify the lowly life of that *animal laborans*, the life closest in metabolism with nature that *appears* to be only a means of life. The diminishment of double consciousness is one that is able to register and render the vitality of that life amid these conditions of difference and segregation between black and white, higher work and lowly labor. And it is through this double consciousness that a black life is registered as *seeming* to be human, as seeming as being indeed human.

Regionalism in Du Bois's writing is, in other words, a mode of double consciousness. His regionalist and racial depiction of the Southern black laborer necessarily presents a form of diminished life through a sociological double consciousness that offers a way to recognize and articulate that life. Labor is not only an issue of economics, but also of epistemology, of ways of knowing the human, the animal, the human animal. Further, by negotiating the relation between Du Bois's literary methods and the photographic methods of Dugmore, who was more widely known as a wildlife photographer, this examination of Du Bois's writings bring to the surface the striations of human-animal relations that labor elicits in its regionalist and racial formulation.

### *Labor as the Negro Condition*

In Du Bois's writings at the turn of the century, the problem of racial relations and difference expresses itself as a biopolitical problem of population and labor. In early chapters of *Souls*, Du Bois evokes a cloud that weighs upon the mind when he describes both Negro life amidst the color-line as dark cumulus masses. He calls the fugitive slaves that gathered around Union armies during the Civil War "that dark human cloud that clung like remorse on the rear of those swift columns" (S 20) in "Of the Dawn of Freedom," while later in "Of the Sons of Master and Man," he characterizes the relations between Negroes and whites as difficult to fix in terms except as the intangible terms of the "atmosphere of the land," of "a storm and stress of human souls, as intense a ferment of feeling, as intricate a writhing of spirit" (S 115). The earlier chapter from the white world section of *Souls* gives an indication of the way these dark masses took shape as, if not a problem of the color-line, then certainly a problem of a seemingly sudden population of African-Americans who needed basic services, a means for livelihood and civic life. Speaking with the white world, Du Bois narrator calls this "a labor problem of vast dimensions" (S 20), and thus engages with the discourse of black labor that spurs Booker T. Washington's pursuit of economic progress before intellectual, political, and social progress, but also a national conception of African-Americans as merely a population that must transition from coerced labor to voluntary labor. In fact, the United States Labor Department, as well as the Census Bureau, funded many of the studies, such as *The Health and Physique of Negro Americans*, that came out of the Negro conferences organized by Du Bois at Atlanta University, including the Lowndes County study that would inspire *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*. Du Bois thus echoes the anxieties of effecting this biopolitical transition of subjects from the status of chattel, or live property, to the status of citizen.

Booker T. Washington, too, saw labor as a particular problem of Negroes, though he framed it as less a biopolitical issue and more a moral one. Narrating a history of the degradation of labor through slavery, Washington accepts the view that depicts black laborers as unwilling to work, but advocates a reformation of labor into dignified labor. By putting all labor into the hands of slaves who had little inspiration to work for themselves, slavery removed all

labor from the part of slaveowners whose own maintenance of life was taken care of by slaves and had little to do but distract themselves with recreation—or politics. Washington sums up this commonplace understanding, which continues to have currency today, writing in his autobiography *Up From Slavery* (1901), "The whole machinery of slavery was so constructed as to cause labour, as a rule, to be looked upon as a badge of degradation, of inferiority. Hence labor was something that both races on the slave plantation sought to escape" (14).<sup>20</sup> Labor as a vital metabolism has been degraded into a fitful and dyspeptic process, not necessarily only through capitalist exploitation from the North, but through these different systems of labor endemic to the South. It is not out of laziness that a black worker refuses to work, but out of scorn for labor itself. As Washington reveals, his Tuskegee Institute students wanted education "so that they would not have to work any longer with their hands" (60).

In response, he sought to transform labor into a work of dignity, a work of the hands informed by modern education and aesthetics. In his Atlanta Exposition Address, he famously admonished, "No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem" (100). Washington's uplifting of labor is a form of uplifting the race. His comparison of "tilling a field" to "writing a poem" suggests that farm labor has the potential to be as cultured and learned as literary pursuits, a project that his Tuskegee Institution sought to carry out. Yet the temporal threshold of coming up can only be crossed at "till," which stalls with its repetition of "till," to wait and till, to wait and till. Washington's delay of political progress might be understood as delayed by an economic prosperity that goes hand in hand with intellectual training, and in this sense, his plan for racial uplift is not so different from Du Bois's.

Du Bois's history of the labor problem, however, stresses the economic system which conditions the quality of black labor and life. In his monograph *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*, which was published later in 1935, he presents a history of the exploitation of black labor that remains constrained by the biopolitics of labor and fraught with the species distinctions of a racial science. After the War, after slavery, after Reconstruction, and after Douglass, the bondage of the black slave became the bondage of the black laborer of the South. In looking back on this period, Du Bois critiques the problem of modern labor from the posterior view of a capitalist economy, and in doing so, slips back and forth, merging slavery and wage labor under Labor, that is, the exploitation of labor:

They [of the North] and he [the Southern planter] were all exploiting labor. He did it by individual right; they by state law. They called their labor free, but after all, the laborer was only free to starve, if he did not work on their terms. They called his laborer a slave when his master was responsible for him from birth to death. (B 51)

Reviewing the status of the worker and of the economic systems of the North and the South prior to the Civil War, Du Bois diagnoses exploited labor in light of the post-Reconstruction moment from which he writes. The laborer who is "free to starve" is little different from the laborer who is a slave, for both are cases of exploited labor. From Du Bois's contemporary standpoint, the failure of Reconstruction was apparent in broken economy of the South where Northern

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20 This understanding of the American history of the degradation of labor is also found in the works of contemporary Southerner, farmer, and poet Wendell Berry: "Out of contempt for work arose the idea of the nigger: at first some person, and later some thing, to be used to relieve us of the burden of work. If we began by making niggers of people, we have ended by making a nigger of the world. We have taken the irreplaceable energies and materials of the world and turned them into jimcrack 'labor-saving devices.' We have made of the rivers and oceans and winds niggers to carry away our refuse, which we think we are too good to dispose of decently ourselves. And in doing this to the world that is our common heritage and bond, we have returned to making niggers of people: we have become each other's niggers" (*The Unsettling of America*, 12).



investors often swept in and bought land cheaply and then employed Negro workers on a tenant system that bound them to repay credit advanced to them with their entire harvest, leaving them if not destitute then certainly without hope for advancement in their conditions.

The South was merely the place for the production of cheap raw materials that the North used for a higher profit margin on manufactures and exports. In her evaluation of the black laborer in Paul Laurence Dunbar's poetry, Margaret Ronda describes this system as "the postbellum entrenchment of a liminal form of labor balanced between the slave economy's totalized oppression and modern capitalism's exploitation, a condition defined by segregation, immobility, disenfranchisement, dispossession, wagelessness, and arbitrary violence" (872-873). In terms of capitalism, labor is only "labor" if it produces capital. It assumes, further, an underlying status and relationship between employer and worker where a worker is free to sell his labor to the employer who pays him a wage that, however, allows the employer to make a profit. Slavery, by definition, cannot be part of a capitalist system because its workers are not free to sell their labor, nor are they, theoretically, paid a wage. The labor systems after slavery also elude a purely capitalist formulation since they bound laborers by older feudal economic models based upon tenancy, rack-rent, and debt. Thus, both antebellum slavery and postbellum black labor existed unevenly and simultaneously alongside capitalist models. If this labor understands itself to participate in a capitalist economic system—of wage work and service—then the "typical" work of Southern black laborers might be termed superproductive labor since it is labor that primitively accumulates capital, that is, it steals labor from the worker without fully paying for it at all. Du Bois points out that such a system that puts the South to work for Northern manufacture is continuous with the pre-Civil War era; it was in fact this general exploitation of the South that pushed the nation into war for Southern planters could only continue to sustain their lifestyle by pushing to acquire more territory open to slavery and thus more crop yield since their current production yields, though immense, still garnered low prices.

Including slavery and post-slavery labor within the capitalist system of labor is both a way to recognize the exploitation of labor it entails and the humanity of the workers. In his discussion of the South's economic system, which as he notes, was a feudal system being broken into service for the North's modern capitalism, Du Bois consistently slips into naming the Negro slaves as laborers or workers. After marking the sense of inferiority to which slaves are reduced, he then compares them to laborers: "...it is just as true that Negro slaves in America represented the worst and lowest conditions among modern laborers" (B 10). Again and again, Du Bois describes black labor according to modern labor conditions, perhaps because, as he says, "we simply cannot grasp [slavery] today" (B 10) and can only understand it through modern labor. Because he considers black slaves also black workers, Du Bois calls the phenomenon of slaves escaping to Northern armies during the Civil War as, in effect, a "general strike" where Negro laborers refused and left their work on southern plantations.

Labor is the defining characteristic of the black condition; and as Du Bois' history shows, it is one inextricable from the history and biopolitics of the South. Although Du Bois is careful to mark the difference between the slave and the laborer, and is indeed eloquent of the psychological degradation of slavery and what he also calls the double consciousness of the colored man, he is also intent on conflating labor with color, so that the black laborer, whether slave or worker, is the figure of the general exploitation of labor. He insists on looking upon slavery as a condition of labor, and labor as the condition of the black worker: "...we must remember the black worker was the ultimate exploited; that he formed that mass of labor which had neither wish nor power to escape from the labor status" (B 15). His insistence on defining

both black slaves and black workers as laborers points to the contested difference between species and races that labor enfolds into itself and that the transition from slave to worker, and animal to human, raises up. By calling slavery a form a labor, Du Bois insists on the humanity of black laborers; but by calling labor slavery, he also accedes to how labor is both alienated from the worker, in capitalist terms, and inescapable, in biological terms. As we will see, this double consciousness of the Negro laborer in Du Bois is, however, the only consciousness available in *Souls*.

In many ways, the problem of the twentieth-century was as much defined by labor as it was by the color-line, as African-Americans joined the labor force along with new immigrants of Eastern European and Asian backgrounds, while rapid industrialization, mechanization of labor, and capitalism eventuated poor working conditions that motivated union organization and strikes throughout the North and South. The contemporary moment of *Souls* marks the crescendoing issues of race and labor as they became interrelated with one another as contentious masses vying for work and life. However, these stormy clouds are also, as Du Bois notes in the Veil section of *Souls*, "vast social forces...at work,—efforts for human betterment, movements toward disintegration and despair, tragedies and comedies in social and economic life, and a swaying and lifting of human hearts which have made this land a land of mingled sorrow and joy, of change and excitement and unrest" (S 115). For Du Bois, to match laboring body with writhing spirit is to define a biopolitics that marries together social *and* economic life as Life, as the only life that subsists. The problem of labor is none other than the problem of labor as a subsistency that is both labor and work, both biological maintenance and conscious activity.

### *Making Figures: Units and Souls*

The life of subsistency manifests in the sketches of *Souls* as the black Southern agrarian laborer. We get, in Du Bois's Jim Crow car chapters, a local-color tour of a string of types and figures for the Negro farmer—tenant farmers with landlords of varying degrees of rapacity and oversight, freeholders of their own few acres and those with a few hundred acres and their own tenants, in different shelters and trappings of life. At the same time, Du Bois's view is informed by his own training in sociology and economics, and colored over by the delineative metrics that measure superiority and inferiority, knowledge and ignorance, in the types of mankind. The double-consciousness with which he sees the Negro laborer is what modulates the life seen into what *seems* to be life, what resembles life, a picture of life, that is, a regionalist diminishment, that *is* life, the life of labor. In this labor, material and economic processes are also implicated in epistemological and psychic processes; Du Bois's sketches present the picture of how body, labor, consciousness, and scientific knowledge are thoroughly interwoven with one another. Further, double consciousness is precisely the diminishment and veiled form of picture making that *makes* the literary form of *The Souls of Black Folk* into local-color sketches.

One form of double consciousness in *Souls* expresses itself in Du Bois's narrator's own troubled sociological view of his African-American subjects as ignorant, and in a way, subhuman. In "Of the Black Belt," he concedes:

Looking now at the county black population as a whole, it is fair to characterize it as poor and ignorant. Perhaps ten per cent compose the well-to-do and the best of the laborers, while at least nine per cent are thoroughly lewd and vicious. The rest, over eighty per cent, are poor and ignorant, fairly honest and well meaning, plodding, and to a degree shiftless, with some but not great sexual looseness. (S 93)

The narrator's tone here feels sociological, and the statistical breakdown of the black population impersonally groups them into more qualitative ascriptions: "well-to-do," "lewd and vicious," or "plodding, and to a degree shiftless." Though these are seemingly human characteristics, they also decline down toward a less-than-human gradient by describing the majority as "plodding," that is, as simple-minded and dull. This evaluation of the cognitive or intellectual capabilities of the black population subtends Du Bois's theory of the Talented Tenth—the intellectual leaders that may guide the rest of the population—and the upper ten percentile of the Dougherty County black population as "well-to-do" corresponds ideally with that statistical theory of racial uplift.

Yet Du Bois's narrator also acknowledges that the lines drawn between categories of intellectual capability are not fixed in biological terms, but rather a product of culture and history. At the same time, though, the lines he draws between the laborer and the intellectual circles back to biopolitical distinctions.<sup>21</sup> In "Of the Sons of Master and Man," he delves into the commonplace language of social darwinism, writing:

What the black laborer needs is careful personal guidance, group leadership of men with hearts in their bosoms, to train them to foresight, carefulness, and honesty. Nor does it require any finespun theories of racial differences to prove the necessity of such group training after the brains of the race have been knocked out by two hundred and fifty years of assiduous education in submission, carelessness, and stealing. (S 108)

He repudiates, in fact, racial theories of inferiority that would condemn the black laborer as incapable of learning; and instead suggests that education and training may counteract the legacy of racial prejudice, that nurture, not nature, shapes the conditions of the black population. And yet, at the same time, he cannot help but acquiesce to acknowledging a kind of racialized inferiority or handicap<sup>22</sup> with "the brains of a race...knocked out." Eventually, he concludes, "We must accept some of the race prejudice in the South as a fact,—deplorable in its intensity, unfortunate in results, and dangerous for the future, but nevertheless a hard fact which only time can efface" (S 110). Though he does not agree to biologically based racial inferiority, he accepts the prejudice that assumes such an inferiority. As with the racist science that draws a species divide between white races and animal species, leaving the black race somewhere "between men and cattle, [where] God created a *tertium quid*, and called it a Negro" (S 62), so Du Bois's sociological racial uplift also draws an intraracial divide between the black laborer and black intellectual leaders.<sup>23</sup> Dependent on the same biopolitics that motivates national management of labor and the population, Du Bois similarly wishes to transition and "train" the *zoë* of the black laborer into the *bios* of the black intellectual.

And yet if sociology overshadows Du Bois's narration, it also offers the methods with which to contradict itself. Du Bois's narrator also opposes his own consciousness shaded over by a white world's prejudice with a different form of double consciousness. This is not a double consciousness that draws the line between white and black and sees black thoroughly through standards that separate labor from work. Rather it is a doubled over consciousness that sees black life mixed up and confused by the Veil that obscures it. This is the double consciousness that does not just call the black population ignorant or inarticulate, but one that registers an unconscious consciousness, an articulation of the inarticulate, the telling of an untold story. A

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21 For a contrasting argument that emphasizes the cultural and sociohistoric, rather than biological, production of racial identity, see Priscilla Wald in *Constituting Americans*.

22 See Todd Carmody's "'In Spite of Handicaps': The Disability History of Racial Uplift" on the intersections of racial uplift and disability studies, particularly through the discourse of race as a handicap.

23 See Daylanne English's *Unnatural Selections* for another strand of biopolitics in turn-of-the-century America concerning the eugenic thought underpinning Du Bois's "Talented Tenth."

moment when Du Bois marks this different kind of sociological consciousness comes when he self-reflexively criticizes the "car-window sociologist" even as he himself passes through the South as a sociologist.

By marking his ironic similarity to and differences from the car-window sociologist, Du Bois defines his own scientific-literary approach in *Souls*. As noted before, Du Bois's chapters "Of the Black Belt" and "Of the Quest of the Golden Fleece," are revised from an essay originally published as "The Negro As He Really Is" in the June 1901 issue of *The World's Work*. Though primarily a sociological report, the original essay is also not without its animating moments, its appeal to see each unit as a "throbbing human soul." These include brief portraits of tenant farmers like Sam Scott beholden in debt to the local merchant and two young field-hands drowsily driving past on the road. The illustrations here offer moving or serial images that chart out an entire timeline of Sam's deeper and deeper debts to a shrewd merchant willing to provide rations, supplies, and even buggies, as long as it keeps the farmer bound to him by crop and chattel mortgage, and indeed, everything he owns.

The moment that I was to concentrate on, however, is with the field-hands when Du Bois's narrator re-ventriloquizes the notion of the black population as "to a degree shiftless," but here also counteracts that view with another sociological, doubly conscious view, a *double take*. Recounting a moment of glancing paths with two black fellows driving a mule-team who do not notice that their cartload of loose corn is gradually diminishing itself ear by ear with each jolt in the road, Du Bois takes a second longer look in his literary extension of this moment:

To the car-window sociologist, to the man who seeks to understand and to know the South by devoting the few leisure hours of a holiday trip to unravelling the snarl of centuries,—to such men very often the whole trouble with the black field-hand may be summed up by Aunt Ophelia's word, "Shiftless!" Shiftless? Yes, the personification of shiftlessness. And yet follow those boys: they are not lazy; tomorrow morning they'll be up with the sun; they work hard when they do work, and they work willingly. They have no sordid, selfish, money-getting ways, but rather a fine disdain for mere cash. They'll loaf before your face and work behind your back with good-natured honesty. (*S* 100)

Highlighting once more the biopolitical problem of the recalcitrant black body in moving from coerced to voluntary labor, this brief encounter becomes a moment for Du Bois to differentiate his sociological methods. If the car-window sociologist is one who will let those boys pass on (because he is no longer concerned with work, but on his way to his vacation after all) and draw up his conclusions with one emphatic, yet cursory word of judgement, Du Bois's narrator repeals and re-invokes that judgement. "Shiftless! Shiftless?" In that second intonation, shiftlessness shifts from a moral criteria to an economic one, an economics where these boys have no shifts and no breaks either, but simple one long day of work over and over. Towards the end of this passage, he comments: "They are careless because they have not found that it pays to be careful; they are improvident because the improvident ones of their acquaintance get on about as well as the provident. Above all, they cannot see why they should take unusual pains to make the white man's land better, or to fatten his mule, or save his corn" (*S* 100). Du Bois locates the quality of labor not in moral estimation but in the economic system that stipulates the conditions and cheats the black laborer by not paying him for his work. Why work if one is not rewarded for it? Both "The Negro As He Really Is" and its revised form in *Souls* make explicit the swindling machinations and cycles of debt that bind the Southern black laborer to a life of seemingly futile striving.

At the same time, Du Bois's method also highlights its doubling over of this moment

which overlays the car-window sociologist's pronouncement of "Shiftless!" with his own redoubling back to this scene, that is, his own sociological *labor* to picture this scene. With the young field-hands, Du Bois's narrator telescopes out to show how "[t]hey'll loaf before your face and work behind your back with good-natured honesty" (N 864), and in revising this passage emphasized a temporal inclination to "follow those boys" and look again. If his illustrations counter that passerby viewing, they also engage and modulate that viewing since Du Bois's narrator is also, in his carriage-ride, a passerby though one not on a holiday trip but doing his own work—of double consciousness. At the same time, Du Bois's acknowledgement that these boys are the "personification of shiftlessness" also reminds one that even this description of the black field-hands is not "reality," so to speak, even though it does strive to give their portrait a texture and movement that a cursory glance cannot. Instead, the boys are "personifications"; they are *figures* for something else, that is, for the shiftless, for the biopoliticized economic system that Du Bois's sociological double consciousness registers. Indeed, I want to pay particular attention to how Du Bois revised "The Negro As He Really Is" because he sharpens and heightens the effects of his own sociological-literary method to represent black folk—not as persons, nor as portraits of persons—rather through doubly conscious sketches of persons, as personifications, as figures typical and characteristic of labor.

Those chapters in *Souls*, where Du Bois serves as a tour guide of the South, subtly different from that "car-window sociologist," perform this doubled viewing as its very premise. And the sketch-form offers an appropriate lens through which to perform this viewing as a conventionally self-doubting and self-belittling form that admits its incompleteness and rough outlines. In the "Forethought," Du Bois asks his audience to "receive [his] little book in all charity" and describes the work as an attempt to "sketch, in vague, uncertain outline, the spiritual world in which ten thousand American live and strive" (S 5). This humble opening recalls prefatory remarks for local-color sketches that consistently apologize for their own presentation, such as Caroline Kirkland calling *A New Home—Who'll Follow?* (1839) "stragglings and cloudy sketches of life and manners in the remoter parts of Michigan" and a "rude attempt" (3, 4) and Augustus Baldwin Longstreet excusing the "coarse, inelegant, and sometimes ungrammatical language which the writer represents himself as occasionally using" (v) in his *Georgia Scenes* (1835).

Du Bois's harkening to this form, however, is less about apologizing for the form than it is about taking up sketchiness as the very criticality and crux of the form. As Kristie Hamilton notes in *America's Sketchbook*, the American sketch in the antebellum period represented a bourgeois, narratorial authority with the leisure to travel or digress and claimed generic affiliation to the traveler's "crayon sketch" with its sense of movement and ephemerality, as well as a roughness and on-the-road quality that denoted its authenticity of transcribing from raw materials. For Kirkland, the sketchiness of her sketches may be accounted for by their true "unimpeachable transcript of reality" (3), perhaps lifted whole from her journal; while for Longstreet, his coarse language is supposedly an accurate rendering of dialect.

While for Du Bois there is still a claim for authenticity in his representation as one who "stepped within the Veil, raising it that you may view faintly its deeper recesses" (S 5) it is with a different kind of authority than one who stands *outside* the Veil.<sup>24</sup> If both Kirkland and

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24 As a contrasting example, one might consider Charles Wilsson Peale's self-portrait *The Artist in His Museum* (1822), which shows him lifting a red curtain to reveal his natural history museum, as a demonstration of an epistemological and aesthetic authority over those objects. See Christoph Irmscher's *Poetics of Natural History* for a different reading of Peale's self-placement in these natural history aesthetics.

Longstreet mark their bourgeois difference and higher authority over their literary subjects, Du Bois places himself with his subjects—"bone of the bone and flesh of the flesh of them that live within the Veil" (S 6)—and stresses instead the formal quality of self-doubt and self-reflexiveness that underlies both the sketches and the subjectivity of his subjects. Though he is strikingly *not of* the socioeconomic and familial background of the Southern black peasantry of which he writes, Du Bois claims a common consciousness—of double consciousness—with them. This double consciousness is not only manifest in Du Bois's doubling over of himself with his subjects *within* the Veil, but also the structuring of his preface and afterword as "Forethought" and "Afterthought," that is, as a writing that cannot help but think again and again, with that sense of doubt and double-take both prior to and after the fact.<sup>25</sup> Here, the sketch is not truth because it represents its subject masterfully and transparently but is truth because it *cannot* represent its subject except as a sketch, a figure, a personification.

The tension of Du Bois's sketches of mixed sociology and local color is that they yearn to represent and "picture" Negro life even as they step back from that picturing; and yet this presents the very picture of a life that is, in Du Bois's words, "a half-awakened common consciousness, sprung from common joy and grief, at burial, birth, or wedding; from a common hardship in poverty, poor land, and low wages; and, above all, from the sight of the Veil that hung between us and Opportunity" (S 50). This reflection comes from "Of the Meaning of Progress," which displaces his summers teaching in Virginia to the hills of Tennessee and tells the story of his brief membership in the provincial world of his students and their families. It is possible to read this sketch as the narrative of the limits and declines of lives conditioned by a passage out of hundreds of years of slavery that leaves them with little to nothing to survive upon, barely any land in this vague Southland, the rudiments of agriculture, and a range of bitter emotions on both sides of the color-line from unease to cruel violence. The young "child-woman" Josie whom Du Bois's narrator meets and teaches, who he praises for "a certain fineness," her "unconscious moral heroism," and her "longing to know" (S 47, 48), ends up giving up her dream of going to school in Nashville while around her her siblings fall to ruin—her brother jailed for allegedly stealing from his employer, then fleeing jail, never to return home, with her other brother; her sister, conversely, coming home, but alone and with child—and she works to support her family, works and works and then spurned in love, she "crept to her mother like a hurt child, and slept—and sleeps" (S 51). Du Bois's tone here and everywhere in *Souls* is sentimental and often cadenced with Biblical overtones. It is measured to elicit sympathy, but also a passionate kinship for these black folk, these lowly people. Its appeal is the appeal to a higher ethics and sentiment, a higher ideal, and a higher class of people to guide and aid the lower classes that structures Du Bois' political, intellectual, and economic ideology for racial uplift.

And yet the narration is not conclusive. How are we to read this tale of Josie and her world? How are we to make out, with Du Bois's narrator, the denouement of ten years later when he returns to visit this world and finds all changed, not just by death, but also marriages, leavetakings, arrivals, and Progress in the form of a new schoolhouse, new farms, new families, more rooms added to cottages, more acres added to land, though still in debt. What is this "half-

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25 Du Bois takes up the form of thought and afterthought more stridently in the chapter "Of the Training of Black Men" where he speaks the many self-checking voices of the white and black world, and then concludes: "So here we stand among thoughts of human unity, even through conquest and slavery; the inferiority of black men, even if forced by fraud; a shriek in the night for the freedom of men who themselves are not yet sure of their right to demand it. This is the tangle of thought and afterthought wherein we are called to solve the problem of training men for life" (S 63).

awakened common consciousness" if it takes the varied and motley forms of complacency, indifference, or yearning that leads to deferred or pending life, fugitive life, bastard life, indebted life, but life, life, life all over? "How hard a thing is life to the lowly, and yet how human and real!" laments Du Bois's narrator, "And all this life and love and strife and failure,—is it the twilight of nightfall or the flush of some faint-dawning day?" (S 54). The indefinite gray that cannot distinguish between dusk and dawn undoes the possibility of a moral conclusion to the tale and instead leaves it in a state of half-awakenedness—and passive movement. The sketch ends with the narrator taking his leave again: "Thus sadly musing, I rode to Nashville in the Jim Crow car" (S 54). As though moved forward by the implacable churning of time and mechanics, the tale seems to end, but does not after all. The train ride continues in other chapters of *Souls*, and its mechanical progression, carrying within it a deep turmoil of thought and emotion, demonstrates another form of double consciousness—of compulsion coupled with meditation—that is sustained rather than transcended.

Those other chapters are the ones already mentioned, "Of the Black Belt" and "Of the Quest of the Golden Fleece." Beckoning his readers onto the Jim Crow Car and a ride into and through the South, Du Bois sets up a regionalist framework in which to see the life of Southern black laborers as the life of labor in general. Du Bois not only borrows the sketch form of local color fiction, but also theorizes its applicability to all geographies—country districts *and* city blocks—where one toils neglected and downtrodden. His tour of dilapidated plantations, struggling tenant farms, and neat villages clustered around hard-won agriculture and industry serves as snapshots of what he calls the "country districts" of Georgia:

Once upon a time we knew country life so well and city life so little, that we illustrated city life as that of a closely crowded country district. Now the world has well-nigh forgotten what the country is, and we must imagine a little city of black people scattered far and wide over three hundred lonesome square miles of land, without train or trolley, in the midst of cotton and corn, and wide patches of sand and gloomy soil. (S 77-78)

Ascribing the task of "illustration" to this kind of narration recalls the local-color aesthetics of the "sketch" form as a literary attempt to render pictures of life into words. More particularly a form of regionalist diminishment, Du Bois's sketches belie his "plain, unvarnished tale" (S 106) as atmospherically shaded with the double consciousness of race. Further, invoking the context of industrialization and urban migration that precipitated interest in the rural life left behind and its relation to city life, Du Bois demonstrates the regionalist impulse to describe that "well-nigh forgotten" country people and landscape. And yet they are only forgotten in the sense of a metropolitan or capitalist consciousness for these "black people scattered far and wide" and these "lonesome square miles of land" are as vitally and presently there as they have ever been, not only sowing and harvesting the cotton and corn that feeds the voracious industries of the North, but *living*—eking out a life in whatever patch of land they have. If they escape straggling to city streets and factories, they meet conditions no less dismal than that among the rows and acres of agriculture.

What Du Bois describes is the literary reversal of imagining the country as the city, to see the country with the contracted temporality and space of the city, aided by the speed of the train car and horse carriage covering great distances to see many as many sights and folk in Georgia as willing in the confines of one tale "once upon a time." Kristie Hamilton also points to the "modern" effect of the local-color sketch, writing, "The reading of sketches actuated, therefore, while it appeared only to imitate, the sensation of speed—even in repose—with which nineteenth-century authors repeatedly associated 'the age.'...By constructing brevity of parts as a

literary norm, writers foreshortened the time it took not only to relax but also to know" (134). Yet, Du Bois does not yield knowledge to his readers in shortened form, but rather highlights the obscurity and obstructions of knowledge which this shortness can only offer. What is regionalist about his narrative is not only this contraction and its illustration, but the impetus and opacity of the picturing that Du Bois's *Souls* presents—the darkness of that atmospheric ground of subsistent life eked out, scattered, and gloomy, hovering as massive and vague clouds upon the narratorial consciousness.

This life of subsistency manifests in the sketches of *Souls*, not as workers in the North, nor as factory workers or as railroad workers and porters, though these are all constituents of the labor movement, but as the black Southern agrarian laborer. This regionalizing figure comes to represent the conditions of life for the majority of African Americans, but also, more subconsciously, the life of labor in general. We get, in Du Bois's Jim Crow train ride chapters, a local-color tour of a string of types and figures for the Negro farmer—tenant farmers with landlords of varying degrees of rapacity and oversight, freeholders of their own few acres and those with a few hundred acres and their own tenants. Contrary to a racial uplift narrative that might portray a middle-class, well-to-do black family, a family album that Du Bois did, in fact, provide in much of his other work, the scenes in *Souls* remain trained upon the lowly life of agrarian laborers.<sup>26</sup> As I have suggested, Du Bois's interest in agrarian labor as that lowest of lowly and manual labors registers the biopolitical problem of labor itself as both menial labor and conscious work, and labor that is the semblance of the work in actuality. According to double consciousness, however, what the superficialities represents is not an interior, contemplative life, but the subsistent and mixed condition of life where labor is never purely actively conscious, free work, but is always also shaded by and based upon necessary and material labor.

Likewise, Du Bois's narrator hesitates from telling a full tale and prefers superficial gloss. His description of Dougherty County has the glancing by view of a tour guide:

How curious a land is this,—how full of untold story, of tragedy and laughter, and the rich legacy of human life; shadowed with a tragic past, and big with future promise! This is the Black Belt of Georgia. Dougherty County is the west end of the Black Belt, and men once called it the Egypt of the Confederacy. It is full of historic interest. (S 81)

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26 Du Bois's studies published in the *Bulletin* of the U.S. Labor Department from 1897 to 1901, as well as the essay on "The Problem of Housing the Negro" (1901) in *The Southern Workman*, all show a range of class differentiation within the Negro population with an interest in highlighting the "better classes" (*Southern Workman* 65). In the Farmville study (1898), Du Bois explains: "A study of a community like Farmville brings to light facts favorable and unfavorable and conditions good bad and indifferent. Just how the whole should be interpreted is perhaps doubtful. One thing however is clear and that is the growing differentiation of classes among Negroes even in small communities. ... Bearing this in mind it seems fair to conclude after an impartial study of Farmville conditions that the industrious and property accumulating class of the Negro citizens best represents on the whole the general tendencies of the group. At the same time the mass of sloth and immorality is still large and threatening" (38). In these studies, Du Bois's sociological method (different from that of *Souls*) shows variation in classes among the Negroes, rather than a double-conscious view of them as undifferentiated masses and as individuated types of one class only—the black peasantry. And it specifically holds up the bourgeois, middle-class African Americans as representatives of the race's potential or "tendency" for uplift. See also Daylanne English for a discussion of Du Bois's intraracial elitism, especially with respect to what she calls the "family album" photographs of "Men of the Month," the "Children's Number," and the "Homes Number" in the *Crisis* of the 1920s. Du Bois tailored his method in the *Crisis* and the *Bulletin* toward racial uplift, while in *Souls* his method retreated from that propagandistic imperative with a much more troubled and doubly conscious portrayal of black folk. These publications, one might note, are more or less concurrent from the 1890s through the early 1900s, reflecting an inconsistency in Du Bois's approaches, which criticism attempting to historically narrativize Du Bois usually elide. See next note.



He points toward story, but leaves it untold. Part of the narrative tension of *Souls* is its refusal to tell an entire story, and what Wald calls its "implied narrative" is not one that is easily picked out of its seemingly many aspects and attitudes, beginnings, dead-ends, and stories within stories. A text that *does* tell an entire story is his first novel *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* (1911), which Du Bois drafted during the same years that he was working on *Souls*. The novel is a study and critique of the larger economic and sociopolitical machinations that drove the Southern cotton industry, told through the story of a black community's agrarian success against those odds. Modeled on an actual black rural community in Lowndes County, Alabama, the success of the novel's own utopian farm collective and school community are linked to the individual intellectual development and collectivist organizing of its heroic leaders Zora and Bles Alwyn.<sup>27</sup> If *Quest* follows from beginning to end the labor struggle that rises out of the Veil; *Souls* hesitates from the full story and gives only gestural indications of a story *not* told, of a richness and fullness only sketched out rather than filled in.

Yet the sketches offer their own version of an implied narrative of life that matches the clouds that beset the conditions of labor and life. Du Bois's narrator in *Souls* indicates and punctuates with deictic markers a landscape of obscure yearnings and promises, coursing through a human history of dispossession, displacement, struggle, and labor, to arrive at "This!":

It is a land of rapid contrasts and of curiously mingled hope and pain. Here sits a pretty blue-eyed quadroon hiding her bare feet; she was married only last week, and yonder in the field is her dark young husband, hoeing to support her, at thirty cents a day without board. Across the way is Gatesby, brown and tall, lord of two thousand acres shrewdly won and held. There is a store conducted by his black son, a blacksmith shop, and a ginnery. Five miles below here is a town owned and controlled by one white New Englander. (S 83)

When taken as a mass, this is a land overshadowed by weather and atmospheric pressures whose moods shift, brighten, and darken rapidly with the price of cotton or corn; yet it is also a land of individualized people with these moods. Du Bois makes the land an exemplary or representative anecdote to give us the types and figures of the different categories of black folk and their conditions, while also giving them a hint of complex individuality. By casting them as "rapid contrasts," Du Bois's sketches work by a method of "weathering"—it gives tone and shade, renders its objects not by precision but by blurring. The spatial and deictic picturing actualizes each person and place as it calls them up even if it does not give them full flesh and blood and story. "Of the Black Belt," from which the quote comes, is an audacious performative act that brings to life the sights as they are passed by upon a carriage ride; that is, brings them to life in a limited way, to a limited life. This carriage-ride tour constitutes the largest revised addition to the original *World's Work* essay that expanded it to the point that Du Bois chose to break up the essay into two chapters, with the prior chapter ending right after this section.

Yet both chapters, both in the revised addition to "Of the Black Belt" and in edited sections of "Of the Quest of the Golden Fleece" that are present in the original essay, demonstrate this animating, if incomplete, act of the regional sketch. After getting off the train in *Souls*, Du Bois's narrator sets on a carriage-ride that begins at Albany, Georgia, complaining

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27 See Maria Farland's "W.E.B. DuBois, Anthropometric Science, and the Limits of Racial Uplift" for background on the Lowndes County study. Farland sees the loss of this study as registering the obstacles hindering the publication of work by minority sociologists, and as marking Du Bois's shift from sociological to literary work. However, I see Du Bois's engagement with sociology and literature as concurrent and mixed together, less a linear narrative of transition and more a ferment of transdisciplinary work in Du Bois's multi-talented, multi-directional, and multi-modal oeuvre during the turn-of-the-century.

of the hot, soporific July weather before finally starting on the road at ten in the morning, where they soon come upon an old plantation:

There is the "Joe Fields place"; a rough old fellow was he, and had killed many a "nigger" in his day. Twelve miles his plantation used to run,—a regular barony. It is nearly all gone now; only straggling bits belong to the family, and the rest has passed to Jews and Negroes. Even the bits which are left are heavily mortgaged, and, like the rest of the land, tilled by tenants. Here is one of them now,—a tall brown man, a hard worker and a hard drinker, illiterate, but versed in farmlore, as his nodding crops declare. This distressingly new board house is his, and he has just moved out of yonder moss-grown cabin with its one square room. (*S* 78)

The encounter with "tall brown man," as with all the other folk, is one in passing, and he is briefly illustrated in snapshot-fashion; that is, we are given an illustration of the man that gives a few details beyond a mere outline, and yet its brevity and sparseness suggests that the picture, given as entirely as it is, is somehow only a sketch. In general, the narrator gives a steady stream of cursory introductions, noting the names and owners of places like "Joe Fields," which are briefly elaborated with descriptions of the dwellings and fields—here "straggling bits" and "nodding crops." Each of these farmsteads, furthermore, are focalized around its tenant or owner who rises up to meet the narrator, sometimes exchanging a few words, or, as in this passage, merely pointed out from the view of the carriage but with a certain casting of history and personality that can only be available to one who is familiar with the man.

Du Bois's method of description also extends beyond the person to his dwelling—from the "distressingly new board house," to "a neat little cottage snugly ensconced by the road, and near it a little store" (*S* 79), to a Big House "in half-ruin, its great front door staring blankly at the street, and the back part grotesquely restored for its black tenant" (*S* 79)—so that each person is paired with his dwelling, made interchangeable and representative of each other. Commenting on Du Bois's description, in the following chapter, of the one-room cabin that so typifies the dwelling of these folk, Robert Stepto writes, "The glory of this description lies not so much in its photographic attention to detail as in its insistent contextualization of fact" (88). Likewise, Du Bois's descriptions of tenant farms and parcels show a similar contextualizing that gives human personality to the facts of Negro life, a face for each outer facade. These descriptions of houses as stand-ins for the economic conditions of their inhabitants reflect the logic of the superficialities as representative. What these men and their houses represent is what Du Bois also more sociologically divides into percentages of the economic classes among Negroes—"a submerged tenth" of croppers, an "Upper Ten" of freeholders like Gatesby, and the remaining forty per cent tenants and thirty-nine per cent semi-tenants and wage-laborers (*S* 101).

The figures we encounter through his snapshots are, then, statistics, they are "types" of American negroes, and yet they are also a "throbbing human soul"; they are souls who are ever seen through a veil of statistics, of science, of race, of historic interest and historic tragedy. They are curiously hybrid figures of half-number, half-men and women, half-articulate, half-inarticulate, that *seem* almost human. This inarticulateness and halfness is in part due to the problem of a sociological methodology, which, as Du Bois notes, "but partially expresses the fact" (*S* 93). However, it is also due to what is perceived as real inarticulateness and lack in the people, when Du Bois's narrator characterizes Negro life thus: "Ignorant it may be, and poverty stricken, black and curious in limb and ways and thought." *It* expresses in "all but words," that is, in word-pictures-numbers, in picture making, the consciousness that *is* there, the untold story, the unconscious consciousness. This sociological double-consciousness is one that both defers

to science and also defers from science; that is, it is a sociology that engages with aesthetics. Du Bois's sketches sustain, in its regionalist frame, its train and carriage ride into the Veil and the shade of the Black Belt, a double consciousness of sociology and spirit, a double consciousness of human striving as seen and as seeming.

As some critics have argued, Du Bois reevaluates scientific methods to reverse their conclusions of whole races ranked as inferior and instead uplifts the Negro race as human, as varied as humanity is varied. Addressing the racialist science of anthropometrics head-on, Du Bois's own work and compilation of reports in the 1906 Atlantic University publication *The Health and Physique of the Negro American* shows that so-called anatomical peculiarities and corresponding mental capacities of Negroes are multifarious and similarly distributed across other races, as well as visually similar to other races. In *Photography on the Color Line*, Shawn Michelle Smith argues that Du Bois's own collection of photographs for the 1900 Paris Exposition of Georgia Negroes, many of which were republished in the 1906 pamphlet, follows the scientific methodology of "mug shots" of both full-face and profile views of one subject to reveal race as, in fact, indistinct.<sup>28</sup> However, these photographs also insist on portraying a specific demographic of middle-class Negro Americans to represent, as Smith stresses, respectability, nobility, and individuality, with an intimate or even sentimental relation to the viewer. The men and women are, on the whole, well-dressed, well-groomed, with hints of individuality in the smiles, calm gazes, and sidelong glances captured by the camera. These photographs are, in the context of *Health and Physique of Negro Americans*, "mug shot" and "family portrait" at once; they strive to present the subjects with both an impersonal anthropometric slant and a personalizing attentiveness to expression and dress. This picturing of the "Talented Tenth," which combines science and aesthetics, measurement and sentiment, reveals a particular methodology of double consciousness that sees in every view of a person both a science and a humanity, that is, a natural history of mankind shaded by the history of racialist science and the appeal for recognition and representation.

Although Du Bois' commitment to racial uplift is undeniable, he also leaves double consciousness unresolved and un-uplifted, so to speak, in his picture making in *Souls*. And indeed, his sociological approaches leave room for, not indistinct races, but indistinctness—the weathering indistinctness of a regionalist sketch—as a method of view. It is as though the doubled over viewings of his subject (and his subjectivity) result in a picture of so many overlays and revisions that the lines have muddled over. Du Bois's text accompanying *Health and Physique* also advertises its difficulty with scientific determination by emphasizing its own indeterminateness: "The types are only provisionally indicated here as the lines are by no means clear in my own mind. Still I think that some approximation of a workable division has been made, so far as is possible without exact scientific measurements....I have sought roughly to differentiate four sets of American Negro types" (in Smith 56-57). The language here is everywhere qualified by a sense of provisionality and roughness that also characterizes the prefatory disclaimers of regionalist sketches. If, on the one hand, the subjects are too varied to exactly differentiate into "sets" and "types"; on the other hand, Du Bois also stresses a

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28 See also Farland, "W.E.B. DuBois, Anthropometric Science, and the Limits of Racial Uplift." Farland places Du Bois's sociological work in context with his shift to literary projects, and argues that the corresponding adaptation of Negro types to his domestic fiction *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* re-values these types, particularly the mother figure, into a powerful figurehead for racial uplift. Farland uses the anthropological term *transvaluation*, which is the process "in which marginalized groups employ the categories of the dominant scientific discourse, but work to change the valuations attached to them," to describe this shift where "ideas of racial science are transported out of science and into literature" (1020).

corresponding indistinctness and obscurity in his ratiocination that cannot draw the lines of difference clearly. This is, then, another version of double consciousness that, even as it attempts a scientific view, dissolves that view into a scientific approximation or uncertainty due to self-consciousness of its "own mind." In other words, Du Bois both qualifies and disqualifies his studies of the American Negro with science and with his own views.

This sketchiness takes literary form, as we have seen, in *The Souls of Black Folk* as Du Bois's own picture making—a picture making that takes up a scientific, sociological method to make a local-colorist's sketch. Near the end of *Souls*, Du Bois locates indistinctness and indeterminability as inherent to science when he counters the racial prejudices and fixations that inform the social darwinism of the times:

The silently growing assumption of this age is that the probation of the races is past, and that the backward races of to-day are of proven inefficiency and not worth the saving. Such an assumption is the arrogance of peoples irreverent toward Time and ignorant of the deeds of men. A thousand years ago such an assumption, easily possible, would have made it difficult for the Teuton to prove his right to life. Two thousand years ago such dogmatism, readily welcome, would have scouted the idea of blond races ever leading civilization. So woefully unorganized is sociological knowledge that the meaning of progress, the meaning of 'swift' and 'slow' in human doing, and the limits of human perfectability, are veiled, unanswered sphinxes on the shores of science. Why should Aeschylus have sung two thousand years before Shakespeare was born? Why has civilization flourished in Europe, and flickered, flamed, and died in Africa? (162)

As Du Bois points out, the cultural logic of Progressivism assumes that racial fitness and training will ensure survival and yet history has not borne this out. Instead, this human-natural history reveals an arbitrariness that, rather than be accepted as a rule, is understood by Du Bois to be a sign of science's own "veiledness." Du Bois's rhetorical questions reinforce the sense that there is no answer to these seeming contradictions and inconsistencies. Instead, scientific knowledge is indiscernible and "unorganized," and the very standards of "progress" and "perfection" by which one attempts to make measurements are variables not meant to be solved. This is a science that trades not in facts and formulas, but in riddles and chimeras—sphinxes, figures, half-men and half-women; and what it yields is not knowledge, but semblances. "So long as the world stands meekly dumb before such questions, shall this nation proclaim its ignorance and unhallowed prejudices by denying freedom of opportunity to those who brought the Sorrow Songs to the Seats of the Mighty?" (S 162): Du Bois's final retort suggests that semblances of song and shadow, of human and animal, are the very basis upon which we would acknowledge a meaningful life. Riddle, from Old English *raedels*, which shares the root and related meaning with "read." Life seen through reading and riddling.

### *Of Birds and Men*

The sphinx of Du Bois's rendering of life into *The Souls of Black Folk* is how to contextualize its uneasy pairing with the the actual photographs that accompanied "The Negro As He Really Is." The essay that became "Of the Black Belt" and "Of the Quest of the Golden Fleece" was originally published with photographic illustrations by A. Radclyffe Dugmore. A wild bird photographer who specialized in birds and their nests, as well as fish and aquariums, Dugmore's involvement in Du Bois's publication attests to the continuing through-line of the natural history gaze that frames, positions, and colors the presentation of African-Americans.

Literary criticism on the photographic illustrations and their captions have pointed out their reliance on black minstrelsy stereotypes such as the captions that label children playing as "learning to shuffle" or "pickanninies" doing the "cakewalk" and an older African American man as deluded in his belief that he is "a friend of George Washington."<sup>29</sup> In his essay on Dugmore and Du Bois, George Dimock sees Dugmore's photography as an example of unexamined photorealism that confirms Jim Crow era stereotypes and the mainstream views and Big Business rhetoric of *The World's Work* that saw African Americans as mainly economic resources for American industry. According to Dimock, the photo-illustrations were "type-compatible, low-grade photo-engravings [that] served as pedestrian, economical, mass-reproduced talismans of the real. Displayed within the confines of the text, they were intended for hasty perusal in the midst of reading to see what an exotic and low-rent part of the world looked like in all its superficial immediacy" (42).

Yet the seeming superficiality of Dugmore's photographs must also be understood within the context of his wildlife photography, which presents an anxious and even sentimental relationship with its animal subjects. Dugmore had earlier published his own essay with photographic illustrations entitled "A Revolution in Nature Photography" in the first issue of *World's Work* in November 1900. By turning to Dugmore's own photographic work, we can consider how the racialist science that draws and determines lines of difference between the species and races also finds itself in the position of translating between those lines and finally contradicting them. The documentary aspect of Dugmore's photo-illustrations come through in the blurry grain and sense of passing through a moment with its African-American subjects in the midst of daily work or routine in and around Albany, Georgia. At the same time, this documentary view is an ethnographic one that treats its human subjects as scientific objects, and thus blurs the distinction between its human and nonhuman subjects. While the techniques that Dugmore used in taking photographs for Du Bois's essay and for his own nature writings may not have been the same, his contribution to "The Negro As He Really Is" raises the question of how to understand the techniques of early wildlife photography in relation to literary sketches of rural Negro life. In other words, Dugmore's natural history angle on depicting African-Americans is one that also informs Du Bois's sociological view in his writing, that is a scientific view that at the same time must translate itself into human terms, so that the problem that Du Bois's *Souls* raises is not merely one of difference and segregation, but also of the collapse of those differences through translation and representation.

As a wildlife photographer, Dugmore's specialty in nature photography was in capturing shots of birds, especially fledglings and their parents. Seeing himself as very much following in, but also improving, the tradition of Audubon's natural history illustration, Dugmore contrasts his photography in his own essay in *World's Work* as taken "from life" against older, inaccurate natural history illustrations specifically those in Buffon's "The Natural History of Birds," as well as taxidermic models. Describing his first attempt to take photographs of birds by relying on taxidermic models as subjects, he complains:

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29 The editors of the Norton Critical Edition of *Souls*, for example, states that "[b]ecause of the racist nature of the captions, it is safe to assume that Du Bois is not their author" (195). Stepto sees the three photographs mentioned above as offensive and argues that Du Bois's revisions as a way to wrestle back authorial control over the text and expunge the text of Dugmore's photographic deformations (see especially 59-61). George Dimock's essay follows the critical consensus on the photographs' racialized presentation, but also offers ways to critically reread the photographs with a contemporary understanding of *their* revisions of black stereotypes. Dimock also sees Dugmore's photography as an example of unexamined photorealism that confirms Jim Crow era stereotypes and the mainstream views and Big Business rhetoric of *The World's Work*.

The pictures were unsympathetic; it was as though one had photographed the wax model of a friend. The likeness was there, but the *life* was lacking, and there was another objection: although to the casual observer the specimen may appear well mounted, how rarely is shown the characteristic pose so subtle and delicate in its infinite variety! (Dugmore 34)

Like Audubon, he cherishes the live specimen over the dead, and the naturalist's familiarity with creatures over the taxidermist's removal from the field, but his photographic technique allows, supposedly, his specimen to stay alive while Audubon's still required the birds to be shot down and arranged with wires and skewers. Dugmore idealizes the camera's ability to exploit animal life without harming it, disregarding, of course, the material basis and violent renderings of his own photographic processes and equipment.<sup>30</sup> The birds are described as his "friends," and the ability to capture its "subtle and delicate" poses requires having the naturalist's skill and knowledge to obtain close enough proximity to the birds in order to take pictures of them. These pictures, further, offer not only a "characteristic pose" of the bird, but a view of the bird that expresses its most typical or essential character as an "infinite variety." As he explains, "The human eye itself is scarcely quick enough to take note of these things, and it is to the camera we must turn, and use it as eye, notebook, and pencil" (34). Where Audubon's medium of representation emphasized the blurring of paint and pencil to capture the feathery details of his subjects, Dugmore's photography emphasizes the birds' infinite positions and characteristics that are made available by the camera's ability to see in a split-second. The bird, in other words, is no long definable by a single attitude, but must be understood in its infinite varieties of attitudes. What the camera allows, in other words, is not only a multi-angled view, capturing the bird as it turns, but also a serial view that captures the bird as it flies, dips, and cocks its head.<sup>31</sup>

Further, by placing his work among the general category of natural history book illustration, and especially in that of ornithological art, Dugmore insists on understanding his photography as having scientific value. Lauding the camera's technological role in empirical science, he writes:

Then, as a means of really becoming acquainted with birds, the camera is without equal; for to be even a moderately successful bird-photographer one must have an intimate knowledge of the subjects; and the camera, in teaching us to know the birds, must of necessity stimulate our affection for these useful and defenceless creatures. As a recorder of facts it is of great scientific value, for it cannot lie, and it records in an unmistakable form every detail presented, whether it be the daily growth of a nestling or the exquisite detail of the bird's nest. (36)

In the realm of natural history, photography or nature documentary has a distinct pedagogic and epistemological value in "teaching us to know birds." Yet Dugmore's claim for the accumulation of knowledge and facts is also fraught with his anxiety to make clear the special advantages of the camera's eye in that pursuit. It is not merely "knowledge" that the camera allows, but "intimate knowledge"; and not just "every detail" that the camera records, but "exquisite detail." Scientific value, in other words, blurs into affective and aesthetic value. In highlighting a need to "stimulate our affection for these useful and defenceless creatures," Dugmore also marks his

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30 However, Nicole Shukin in *Animal Capital* has shown how the symbolic rendering of animal capital remains inextricable from its violent material rendering.

31 Audubon, of course, also took pains to display a bird species in different positions and angles if the picture had room for more than one of the birds. Many of his drawings of smaller bird species show this technique. The camera, as Dugmore points out, makes these multiple views possible for the same exact bird.

project as explicitly sentimental in a way that is far more self-aware and self-acknowledging, as well as far more idealistic, than Audubon's was. While his natural history view of vulnerable creatures reveals an intrusive, male scientific gaze, it also reveals an emotionally involved "scientist."

Dugmore's photographs are primarily interested in stimulating a sentimental relation to the subject though he stresses the "scientific value" of his work. Sentimentality here reveals the difficulties that attend the desire to sympathize with and represent a subject, human or nonhuman. The photographs of fledglings and adult birds coming to feed them are, as he explains, accomplished by removing the babies to a branch or stalk of vegetation more suitable for photography and thus luring the adults to follow. Dugmore's photographs capture this moment of mother and child, and his sentimental captions even narrate their circumstances. He describes the movement from fear to confidence of the birds he interacts with, and his photograph captions also ascribe emotion to the subjects. For a series of photos showing wild Indigo fledglings waiting to be fed, Dugmore gives this sequence of events: "Waiting for Lunch," "Expectation," "Number Three Becomes Anxious" (34). These captions ask readers to read the bird's positions and attitudes for these emotion, and even offers a narrative context for the scene. A caption entitled "Anxious for His Turn" is also further narrated with "[The little field-sparrows in this picture have been away from the nest only a few hours. The mother bird has brought them a huge grasshopper, and the wild flapping wings by which the youngster tries to keep his balance is amusingly indicated by the camera, as is also the vigorous protest of his less fortunate brother.]" (36). Dugmore evidently feels the need to narrate the emotions and expressions of his subjects, suggesting that he also fears for the illegibility of his subject.

And as his explanation of his methodology suggests, he is also interested in showing his hand, that is, showing his narratorial intrusion in the staging of a photograph. His essay also reads, in part, like a how-to-guide for taking photographs of wildlife, and he explains how he devised a method to familiarize birds with his presence and then lure adult birds to him by placing their fledglings in settings more conducive to photography—a stalk of vegetation, a branch, or even his own hand—where the adults would then go to feed them. For example, he describes the pangs taken to capture these photographic moments with a nest of worm-eating warblers, visiting parents and fledglings, eventually picking up fledglings to pose them perched on a branch while their parents "hopped about *on the camera* while I was arranging it" (39). In other words, Dugmore's project of photographing wild birds is not an unhampered photorealist project, but one that he wants to expose as difficultly staged. The end of the essay includes the following photos of a brood of sparrows and mother bird on Dugmore's hand and the aforementioned photograph of mother worm-eating warbler feeding a fledgling on his hand, much like the revelation of a magic trick that shows the magician's hand. By dramatizing the methods of staging and his participation in making this presentation and encounter happen, the figure of the photographer is as present for Dugmore as the figure of the narrator is for Du Bois. Each reveals the uncertain premises of their roles—their need to articulate for their audience what is seen, but also revealing their role in orchestrating the encounter or tour and in translating the photo-subject's expressions.

At the same time, considering the situation for the birds or the subjects themselves, Dugmore's photographic moments are made available in moments when sentimentality overlaps with biological duress. Here, it is the maternal and metabolic urgency of a mother bird needing to feed her fledglings—which is the only way that the adult bird allows itself to be exposed to contact. This moment of labor, of biological necessity, of a bird risking its life to feed its

children, is also the moment when different species become legible to one another, and it is also the moment when a life, in this case, the life of the adult bird, is aware of its exposure; that is, when a life is aware of its exploitation, and allows itself to be captured.

We could consider the similar processes at work in Dugmore's photographs for Du Bois's "The Negro As He Really Is." His photographs of the children playing, on the one hand, and then in a schoolhouse, on the other hand, dramatizes the differentials of awareness in their not looking and looking at the camera. The posing implicit in these photographs suggests a similar self-consciousness of the subject's exposure taken under duress, and in some cases, taken in the very midst of labor (such as photographs of women and men working that are to some degree posed). At the same time, many of the images are, even if composed, often very blurry and indistinct (such as the focus on the students' faces).

I would like to end by suggesting that Du Bois's writing confirms and critiques the technique of Dugmore's photographs. In revising his essay, which includes adding the carriage-ride mentioned earlier, Du Bois may have considered Dugmore's photographs and modulated their methods and effects to suit his version of a doubly conscious picture making. Commissioned to take photographs for Du Bois's essay, Dugmore met with Du Bois in Albany, Georgia sometime just between February and April 1901. Although this does not coincide with Du Bois's account of a summertime carriage ride in *Souls*, the carriage ride with a white visitor starting from Albany, Georgia roughly fits what might have been Du Bois's meeting with Dugmore, and the July heat that emanates in "Of the Black Belt" would be about the time when Du Bois might have seen the June 1901 issue of *World's Work* and looked at Dugmore's photographic illustrations as he considered revising his own "illustrations" for *Souls*.

For both Dugmore and Du Bois, the work of translating, or of speaking for and picturing others, is presented not as a transparent task of merely snapping the shot (and indeed, Dugmore contrasts his work against the "snapshot"), but as a difficult task. For Dugmore, this has more to do with technical arrangement and sentimental presentation, and is perhaps less of a shaded affair, but it lends an ecocritical angle by which to see Du Bois. For Du Bois, the difficulty is one of double consciousness (of being both the bird and the photographer; and of the bird being both merely the bird in the photograph and the bird with feelings and thoughts and so on). This shadedness (diminishment) with which we translate others haunts the translations and representations; it can never be that ideal of transcendence above the Veil, that is, of complete transparency of representation. For how can one ever know what is necessary (or sustainable) for others, and even for oneself? And it is the acknowledgment of that discrepancy, that we cannot be transparent, that we will have to not rely on fact, but instead make pictures—that is, we have to make critical choices amidst and with these shadows and obscurities.

Du Bois's sketches, and even Dugmore's photographs, demonstrate that the photographic tour is insufficient and inaccurate, rather than empirical, full-proof realism, and also take up that diminished view to show how the picture of the laboring subject, as insufficient and indistinct as it is, exposes an active consciousness under duress. Du Bois's sketches register not full ignorance nor full consciousness, but that unconscious consciousness of a life aware of its exposure and exploitation under the rubrics of science, economics, as well as aesthetics, even if it does not know how to change its conditions, a laboring consciousness. Finally, unlike Dugmore's wizardly revelation of his technique, Du Bois's relationship to his own sociological methods, as we have seen, is much more vexed and hesitant. The double consciousness of Du Bois's sketches, which is his regionalism, *records* and *reads* but does not "capture" both its subject's striving and its own striving to live, to seem, to seem to live.



If we return to the "tall brown man" tenant-farming at "Joe Fields place," we see consequently an unconscious consciousness expressed in his multiple contradictions—"a hard worker and a hard drinker" so both diligent and dissolute at once, and "illiterate, but versed in farmlore," that is, illiterate in letters, but literate in agriculture. At the same time, Du Bois's sketches also require its readers to conceive of this other kind of literacy, to be able to read this "tall brown man" and his "nodding crops." Though the man has just moved into a new board house, the narrator's pointing out of his former one-room cabin give us, also, a figure who straddles this divide, this ambiguous location of being in both the one-room cabin and the new boardroom at once, being both an unconscious and conscious laborer at once, whose ambiguity is made legible *as* ambiguity. Like the photographic subjects from *Health and Physique*, this brown man also straddles a double consciousness of scientific approximation—but he also suggests the slant of another form of figuration of Negro vitality. If the concerns of Negro health and physique point to an overall concern Negro life, especially its material and biological life, the focalization of Du Bois's sketches in *Souls* into the lives of black farmers suggests a particular kind of that life embodied in agrarian labor. Labor is conscious life activity where a person "sees himself in a world he made," and it is also appears as the most necessary and basic kind of subsistence labor; man is, to recall Douglass's phrase, a "picture making animal." Du Bois's depiction of the souls of black folk through the poor black farmer radically revises "labor" into "work," black laborer into Worker, and leaves in tension the contradiction or *sphinx* within work of mechanical, alienated labor and conscious labor, animal labor and human work.

## Chapter 5

### *Vitality: Gertrude Stein's Work Again*<sup>1</sup>

*Three Lives is in some respects a remarkable piece of realism. The author, Gertrude Stein, has given expression to her own temperament, to her own way of seeing the world. The style is somewhat unusual; at times it is a little difficult to follow, and sometimes it becomes prosy. It is only when one has read the book slowly—not as a story, but as a serious picture of life—that one grasps the author's conception of her humble characters, their thought and their tragedies.*

- *Boston Evening Globe* (December 18, 1909)<sup>2</sup>

Much of what superficially marks Gertrude Stein's *Three Lives* as regionalist literature is generic features. The narrator locates the text's regional setting in the "South" in a city named Bridgepoint, and while this industrial port town is not rural, it is also not an epicenter of cosmopolitan, urban life the way New York and Chicago are for that era. *Three Lives* also follows the regionalist sketch form as a series of short stories loosely connected by their common geographical setting; and it relies, too, on regionalist techniques of characterization like dialect, flat characters, or racial types. However much these details might confirm *Three Lives* as literature of the regionalist genre, they do not necessarily and automatically suggest a regionalist disposition.

Instead, Stein's regionalism is in how *Three Lives* works out time and presence—exhibits a certain philosophical attitude toward life—through what I will call *motion studies* after the photographic series of Edward Muybridge. These studies of motion are expressed in the serial representations of lives and the athletic linguistic work of the text, which stem from and alter nineteenth-century discourses on the nature of life and labor. In *Three Lives*, for example, Stein presents Melanctha as a troubling stereotype of African-American servility and promiscuity, and the motion given to her—of going, falling, breaking—if it has any value, if it moves at all, comes from Stein's artistic labor (her technique). Crucial to these animations of Stein's "mechanical servants," whether that servant is a literary character like "Melanctha" or a car like her Ford automobile "Aunt Pauline," is how her very technique of enlivening machines depends upon mechanisms of cinematic stop-motion and the uncanny, yet iconic "signs of life" generated by these mechanisms. Taking Muybridge's motion studies as analogous to Stein's technique, I am interested in both Stein's labor—how *it* works—and the quanta of life it mechanically and imaginatively generates in the form of icons, which reify life but in broken—breaking—parts. I use the term "icon" not to mean a resemblance to life, but a series of discrete and partial signs that *live* and *go* in the way Stein conceives of the "vitality of movement." The misalignment of the icon with nonmimetic life is deliberate, and it is a way to call attention to Stein's own troubled restlessness with that vital motion which is "life in and for itself" and yet resembles life—the way a Botticelli flower resembles a summer flower in the Italian countryside or the way a portrait or photograph of someone resembles that person—such that Stein cannot but be bothered since "one still does like a resemblance" (L 80, 79). This restless movement, this posing and going, a stop-motion kind of motion, is the subject of this chapter the way motion is the subject of motion studies.

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1 Portions of this chapter have appeared in "Motion Studies: Gertrude Stein's Vitalist Work," *Arizona Quarterly*

2 Anonymous newspaper review reprinted in Stein, *Three Lives and Q.E.D.*, 252.

At stake in motion studies is a certain inexplicable fascination with the human, animal, mechanical, and aesthetic power to move—to be animated, to be alive—and so motion studies are inherently vitalist even when they may not intend to be. In mechanist terms, life might be reduced to power or the rate of energy transfer, often denoted by the formula of work done over time, as when Karl Marx determines labor power—a congealed quantity of abstract and homogenous human labour, a commodity which the worker sells in order to maintain himself—by the labor-time necessary to produce it. In vitalist terms, however, there is no precise formula for life; for Edward Muybridge, the "horse in motion" is photographed in approximately and seemingly serial intervals of time; for Henri Bergson, life *is* the continuous movement and accumulation of time; and for Gertrude Stein, vitality is, I will argue, a kind of motion study and the living labor or personality that emerges within its series production.

Motion studies, in other words, realize what is thematized in philosophical vitalism—life, motion, time—in ways that draw out its relevance to work. Because Bergson is vitalism's most popular philosopher during the turn of the century, I will look most closely at how Stein's vitalism differs from Bergson's due to her recognition of the link between life and work. Much criticism has drawn similarities between Stein and Bergson through their shared modernist commitment to creative novelty or through their conceptions of non-standard time.<sup>3</sup> Yet to consider Stein as paralleling Bergson's anti-mechanist vitalist philosophy seems counterintuitive in relation to her extensive background in the psychological and neurophysiological sciences.<sup>4</sup> Although the vitalism of that era sets itself against formulaic mechanisms, it embraces the concepts of power (and its variables) if not the method of using such terms in measurements, determinations, or rationalizations. Vitality, whether one calls it life, labor power, horsepower, vital energy, or the essence of going, is intimately and indistinguishably woven into concepts of time and motion. In that sense, theories of *work* are crucial to what life is.

Work as a kind of motion and especially a vital and diurnal motion is, of course, imbricated in but not limited to capitalism, and I want to move beyond that circumscription in order to address valuations of work. In her critique of Marx, Hannah Arendt distinguishes between labor and work according to their association with Aristotelian divisions of life. For Arendt, labor is the rude, biological maintenance of life and enslavement to necessity (*zoë*) while work is that which makes a durable world of human artifice upon which a meaningful politics can be based (*bios*). What Arendt deplores is modernity's complete subsumption of work into labor so that:

[w]e live in a laborer's society because only laboring, with its inherent fertility, is likely to bring about abundance; and we have changed work into laboring, broken it up into its minute particles until it has lent itself to division where the common denominator of the simplest performance is reached in order to eliminate from the path of human labor

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3 On experimental language, see Joseph Riddel's "Stein, Bergson, and the ellipses of 'American' writing" and Julian Murphet's "Gertrude Stein's Machinery of Perception"; on time, see Priscilla Wald's "A 'Losing-Self Sense'" in *Constituting Americans*. Mentions of Bergson's possible influence on Stein rely primarily on their common milieu, or Bergson's influence on James who was Stein's professor at Harvard, though his influence could also be traced through Alfred Whitehead.

4 For a brilliant exposition of the relation of scientific work to Stein's writing, see Steven Meyer's *Irresistible Dictation*. Meyer sees Stein's departure from both mechanistic science and psychic mysticism akin to Whitehead's idea of organic mechanism. Organicism, however, is also a version of vitalism, and Meyer seems to me to be studying Stein's vitalism at the microscopic scale—life in terms of the basic unit of life—the cell and lively words as cells.

power—which is part of nature and perhaps even the most powerful of all natural forces—the obstacle of the "unnatural" and purely world stability of human artifice. (126) Labor of "inherent fertility," which includes domestic, service, and even bureaucratic work, is often considered feminine (or effeminate), taken for granted, and has no lasting economic value except to serve immediate necessity and engender biological abundance—what is called "unproductive labor" by Adam Smith. But, as Arendt points out, it also includes "productive" factory work that has been broken down into Taylorist tasks, which share the relentless urgency and futility of biological life, and it seems to be the only source for abundance when the active and political life that makes worldly artifice has been resigned. Unlike the productive work or labor that results in an object (or in capitalist terms, a commodity) into which value is fixed and which can be exchanged and (for Arendt) endure in a human-made world, unproductive labor cannot be fixed nor stabilized because it is by nature ephemeral and cyclical. The productive project of making a table, which is a one-time affair, leaves a piece of furniture that will stand on its legs and hold up weight without having to be built and assembled anew each day, and this fixed value in the table allows it a durability that will outlast the lives of its builders so that it may be exchanged and used by others.<sup>5</sup> This is Elaine Scarry's interpretation of the permanence that human-made objects afford, which derives from Arendt's insistence on the reification and remembrance that is necessary for the making of a human world.

On the other hand, the everyday tasks of making breakfast, doing laundry, cleaning, showering, eating, and caring for the body must be done over again almost as soon as they are done. Although this kind of labor seems far from the labor of factory workers, what domestic and industrial labor share with one another are their dailiness—the endless biological replenishing of a body tied to the necessities of subsistence. Our attention to these labors is perfunctory and almost mechanical, and the only thing that matters is to "go through the motions"—to say hello or wave in greeting, to turn knobs or push buttons. It is not that one mimes, but that the iterative and straightforward movements have a strange, unbearable lightness. Nothing is really accomplished except the motion, and what is left on a scant record of operations are some sweeps of a hand, a body curving, elbows jerking, and a mouth opening and closing without explanation or sound. Such is hand-waving—an everyday task, an ordinary greeting, an action purely of motion. This "going through the motions"—so light and so heavy at once—is the abundance that Arendt aligns with nature. Understanding these motions as rolled about in diurnal turnings clarifies domestic and factory work as counterparts to one another in our "laborer's society."

While unproductive labor produces no reified objects, it does serve and sustain the lives of others—its mistresses and masters—beyond its own maintenance. The hand that runs stitches down a seam, that folds clothing into neat pleats and stacks, may sew and fold more clothing than it needs for itself. Indeed, one person may be the seamstress, laundress, caretaker, nanny, maid, cook, or chauffeur for not just herself, but her family and many more besides. For that reason, Marx, called this process the "reproduction of labor-power," where labor primarily produces, not objects or consumer goods, but the means by which a worker sustains herself to work another day, *as well as* a surplus that serves to sustain another's life. As Arendt succinctly puts it, "[human 'power'] never 'produces' anything but life" (88). On the one hand, this "life" is

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5 See Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, on objects, and compare to Arendt on the dependence of human life on durable human-made (artificial) objects: "Human life, in so far as it is world-building, is engaged in a constant process of reification and the degree of worldliness of produced things, which all together for the human artifice, depends upon their greater or lesser permanence in the world itself" (96).

the merest motion, a kind of bare subsistence life; and on the other, it is a motive impulse that can take that mere life and multiply or generate it into more life.

*Three Lives*, by bringing to life *labor* in its most unproductive and stereotypical form as German immigrant servants or a promiscuous African-American woman, is a literary exercise in the reproduction of labor-power; that is, it is a study of vitality itself. In this chapter, vitality is viewed primarily through the lens of *motion*, that is *work*, as a transfer of energy. For physiologists who measured, studied, and recorded this energy as a science of work, "everything," in the words of Étienne-Jules Marey, "is subject to motion" (in Rabinbach 92). Motion is the expression of energy whose conversion and exchange can only be observed by its movement or gesture through space and time. How *Three Lives* studies motion is how it attempts to pin down and express vitality itself, which is at once the most abstract and particular form of a way of life.

### *A Life A Life A Life*

Each of the stories in *Three Lives* present a particular instantiation of a way of life, but these lives also come to be read generally and stereotypically as the *work* of life. The first, "The Good Anna," is the life of a German immigrant who works for a Miss Mathilda who seems to serve as Stein's doppelganger with her pleasant plumpness and inclination for country romps and collecting paintings. The good Anna is a thrifty, devoted servant who manages her underservants, dogs, mistresses, and doctors with all the same strict standard of morals. She is "a small, spare, german woman" and "a medium sized, thin, hard working, worrying woman" (T 8, 20). Setting a precedent that is followed for all the characters in *Three Lives*, the narrator's descriptions are alternately presented as if each time were the first introduction. We are, for example, again introduced to "our good Anna with her spinster body, her firm jaw, her humorous, light, clean eyes and her lined, worn, thin, pale yellow face" (T 29). Also a German immigrant working as a servant is gentle Lena of the last story who is brought to America by her aunt and married off to the Kreder family who are "very saving" (T 156). She is "always sort of dreamy and not there" as she goes along with work, marriage, suffering, birth, and death (T 153). In the negro world of Bridgepoint is the "complex, desiring" Melanctha of the middle story for whom the narration asks:

Why did the subtle, intelligent, attractive, half white girl Melanctha Herbert love and do for and demean herself in service to this coarse, decent, sullen, ordinary, black childish Rose, and why was this unmoral promiscuous, shiftless Rose married, and that's not so common either, to a good man of the negroes, while Melanctha with her white blood and attraction and her desire for a right position had not yet been really married. (T 54)

As a summary of the stories in *Three Lives*, this question is quite apt. In a way, love, service, work, marriage, family, race, and gender are the very substance of each story, that is, the substance and definitive conditions of each woman's life. Stein sums up the simultaneous particularity and ubiquity of living a life when she explains the resemblance between the family life in the French provinces and in Baltimore:

I used always to say to French people who lived in the provinces that I perfectly understood their family life and their feelings of difference and what happened to everyone because that was the way they lived in Baltimore. They still do nothing really can stop any one living and feeling as they do in Baltimore. (E 200)

As the fictionalized Baltimore of Stein's years in medical school when she lived with her German Jewish aunts, Bridgepoint is the setting of a particular yet ubiquitous way of living. What happens to everyone that was the way they lived in Baltimore is the story Stein tells in *Three Lives*.

In some readings, *Three Lives* is a critique of Life. For the reproduction and production of Life, a woman's labor wears her away and sacrifices her life to this Life which is in every way structurally biased against her whether it is by gender, class, or race. Daylanne English has commented on how the presentation of *Three Lives* as clinical histories relies on determinist narratives of ethnic and racial types dominant in the late nineteenth through early twentieth century. These narratives especially consign the working-class immigrant or mulatto woman to a life of menial labor and fecundity that ends tragically in lifelessness. The stories of the good Anna, Melanctha, and gentle Lena are all life stories in both their conception—they recount a life—and their content. Each one worries over the bearing of life whether it is Mrs. Lehntman's midwifery practice, Rose Harden's infant whose birth and death begin and end "Melanctha," or Lena's slow death by giving birth to a succession of children in squalor. The good Anna, for example, "work[s] and work[s] all day and [thinks] all night how she could save, and with all the work she just manage[s] to keep living" (T 50). The repetition of "work" and "work" and "work" becomes the mechanical motion that Anna performs over and over. She is, then, an exemplary figure of unproductive labor who works to maintain the lives of her boarders, cooking and doing for them even below market-price, and just barely making enough to keep herself alive. The conditions of unproductive labor are not just poverty, but the inequalities that govern the production of Life which burden women and favor men and which attribute fertility to blackness and goodness to proper respect of the "masterhood of men" (T 29).<sup>6</sup> Each of the women attempts to live out the racially determined roles that their position in life gives them—lives of subjugation, melancholy, and abjection that lead to death. Stein both participates in what Daylanne English calls a "specifically medical version of eugenic anxiety" and criticizes its toll on women as a way to ironically inscribe the "American genius" of her own literary experimentation "over and against the unfit immigrant and African American women of *Three Lives*" (199, 206).

And yet the narrative itself is oddly negligent in its own telling—euphemistic in its wording, disordered in its temporal sequences, lackadaisical concerning the injustices of life's conditions, and inconsistent in its narratorial authority. There is a life and a genius at work in *Three Lives* that is not so regular and sure in its footing. Its narration follows a different rhythm or practice, what I call the athleticism in Stein's prose, that tells the lives and deaths of her characters in a way that leaves us with their working and its working. The service and domestic work that each woman represents is the most abstract and alienated form of labor—unproductive labor that produces nothing but the labor power that sustains the continuation of life. Yet it is still unique to each woman—the way the good Anna "[leads] an arduous and troubled life," the

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6 More goodness in *Three Lives*: The goodness of the good Anna is also in her strict sexual regulation. The propriety of her conservative manners and the goodness of Melanctha—to Jeff Campbell—is when they are regular in their loving and conform to certain gender roles. At the same time that women are expected to be good and chaste, they are also expected to be bear children; hence the good Anna's prohibition of Sallie's flirting and then her encouragement of the Drehten girls to ornament themselves with ribbons. This is also evident in Melanctha's complexity as a mulatto: both an intelligent girl who is dutiful to her mother and friends, but also a reckless and bold girl given to sexual exploration and wandering. Stein, here, draws on stereotypes of black and white femininity to cast Melanctha as the tragic mulatto character who cannot survive the incongruent desires and binds of her mixed race heritage.

way Melanctha is "so blue" she cannot go on living, and Lena is "always sort of dreamy and not there" and "[does] not know that she was always dreamy and not there" (*T* 7, 54, 153-54). How does their working, that is, the working of the text, reinfect subjugation, melancholy, and abjection, not toward the finality and immobility of life and death, but into the pulse of a life both particular and abstract?

In *Pure Immanence*, Deleuze posits *a life* that flickers or flashes into visibility in that moment between life and death—an indefinite and impersonal but singular life. Pointing to a moment in Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend*, he writes:

The life of the individual gives way to an impersonal and yet singular life that releases pure event freed from the accidents of internal and external life, that is, from the subjectivity and objectivity of what happens: a 'Homo tantum' with whom everyone empathizes and who attains a sort of beatitude. It is a haecceity no longer of individuation but on singularization: a life of pure immanence, neutral, beyond good and evil, for it was only the subject that incarnated it in the midst of things that made it good or bad. The life of such an individuality fades away in favor of the singular life immanent to a man who no longer has a name, though he can be mistaken for no other. A singular essence, a life..." [ellipses original] (29)

Like Agamben's *homo sacer*, Deleuze's *homo tantum* (from the Renaissance concept of "mere man" or "a man without qualities") depends upon a category of purity or absoluteness. For Agamben, that category is one of exclusion and the *homo sacer* marks the category of bare life excluded from political life, a category of the "other." For Deleuze, the category is one of indefiniteness or innocence (a kind of prepubescence or adolescence). *Homo tantum* marks the category of a life in abeyance rather than exclusion, a category of *becoming*, in the process of differentiation or multiplicity. It seems to me that in accounting for life, both Agamben and Deleuze seek to account for a life that is not counted (whether because it is excluded or held in abeyance) and for this reason, they find life in the no-man's-land of refugee camps or in the interims of individual life and death. They harbor, in other words, an idea of the unaccountable, which is, in itself an awesome category for the remainders of intellectual and social calculus—what is leftover or overlooked as vital essence or immanence. As a critique of the social contract and the world of laws (restrictions and conventions), Deleuze finds in Hume's philosophy a "positive model of artifice and institution" like Arendt's—one that asks "how can we *invent artifices*, how can we create institutions that force passions to go beyond their impartialities and form moral, judicial, political sentiments (for example, the feeling of justice)?" (46-47). Rather than possessive individuals with selfish egos and natural rights that must limit themselves under contract, Hume's society is based on "extended generosity" (46). For Deleuze, this extends beyond the partiality of an individual into an impersonality that "with whom everyone empathizes."

Yet is life really a singular yet impersonal life? Isn't *a life* not only singular and indefinite, but also partial and discrete? This is what I see Stein posing in *Three Lives* for although the stereotypicality of the lives of the Good Anna, Melanctha, and Gentle Lena lend them a kind of banal abstraction and anonymity, they are nevertheless named and cannot be mistaken for any other. They are *not* beyond good and evil (and they have their loves and hates), and yet their abjection displaces them from the subjectivity and objectivity of what happens. Perhaps they are simply human? Stein complained once that she did not pursue medical research because it pursued the study of pathologies and abnormalities, and she found normal phenomenae "so much more simply complicated and interesting" (see *A* 83). For Stein, *a*

*life* is not a state of beatitude, but a natural state of normal human conditions (singular, typical, partial, and yet generous).

Stein's first novel, the one she called "the eldest but a daughter,"<sup>7</sup> is about work, and specifically work the way Marx describes it as a means to reproduce oneself and writing as a kind of reproductive work. This is work as a part of domestic and industrial labor and apart in its own ontology. The pulse of life in each "folding itself inside itself" (*L* 200), as Stein spoke of her literary portraits, is the "working"—"work without necessarily becoming a work"—that I see in each life of *Three Lives*. This life is the merest motion, a kind of bare subsistence life; and on the other, it is a motive impulse that can take that mere life and multiply or generate it into life for others. However, by characterizing *her* work as this kind of reproductive labor, and further one that ensures the carrying over of that labor in a *daughter*, Stein places art-work nearer the bounds of labor, thereby discomposing Arendt's categories. Art, which should be part of human artifice as a durable *work*, is transposed into unceasing, relentless *labor* as a process of nature and biological life. Describing her own writing practice, Stein said, "I write practically every day, to be sure not long but practically every day and if you write not long but practically every day you do get a great deal written" (*L* 200). The everydayness with which she approaches her "business as an artist" shares labor's diurnal grind and insistence—writing a little bit every day over and over—but it does lack the long hours and the grim urgency that characterizes the good Anna's work, work, work. Nevertheless, Stein's repetition of "practically every day" makes her writing *practically* into labor in the paradoxical senses of "practically" as virtually *and* realistically because her writing practice *is*, in a very practical way, of going through the motions or setting oneself into motion. Labor's—and art's—value *is* that it is "unproductive" and reproductive, and this is the nature, or perhaps "second nature," of its vitality.

Arendt's separation of labor and work, with domestic and factory work as forms of labor, is a delineation shared, in fact, by a contemporary and compatriot of Stein's, Christine Frederick. In her Taylorist proposition of *Household Engineering* (1920), Frederick irrepressibly likens home economics to industrial manufacturing, where the "the real object in saving time and effort in the work of the household is to enable the homemaker to have leisure time to devote to interests which are more important than the mere mechanics of living" (504). Similar to Arendt, Frederick upholds a philosophical and political life, though one that is now hilarious in its idealized proprieties for a woman of the turn-of-the-century, writing, "[homemakers] have broken their backs dusting and sweeping and scouring their own individual hearths and chairs and garbage pails—but they have neglected to keep the schools, and the amusements, and the city garbage pail up to a high and safe standard" (505). The civic duties that Frederick advocates for women and the "mental and spiritual wellbeing" (504) that she imagines women pouring out to their family and community are a shallow and circumscribed version of Arendt's *vita activa*. However, it delineates the same line between "the mere mechanics of living" and leisure (which includes civic duties) that Arendt makes between *zoë* and *bios*. This juxtaposition of Arendt and Frederick reveals how Taylorism actually underwrites the separation of work and labor rather than the subsumption of work into labor, and is a reminder that slaves and servants—human, animal, or mechanical—are the basis of that separation. In other words, Stein's overturning of the separation between work and labor offers a different valuation of labor and a different view of life and its many forms.

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7 In a letter to Carl Van Vechten (August 1925), quoted in Meyer, "Introduction" xiv.



The aesthetic labor of *Three Lives* has been most often compared to that of a painterly composition, especially in relation to Cézanne's portrait of his wife upon a *Madame Cézanne à l'éventail*, which Stein noted herself viewing while composing *Three Lives*. Certainly, each short story in *Three Lives* is a kind of portrait of a working woman, but it is only a portrait in so much as Muybridge's photographs are portraits. One would have to line up Cézanne's many portraits of his wife in a red armchair, as well as Picasso's portrait of Gertrude Stein in a red armchair, to see what kind of portrait each story in *Three Lives* is. The working or pulse of life of Stein's work is in its serial nature. In Cézanne's *Madame Cézanne à l'éventail* and Picasso's *Gertrude Stein*, the angle of their figures and face, the way their left arms rest on the side of the chair with their hand spread on their leg, the stern set of their lips and uneven eyes are startlingly similar. Flipping between the two has a cinematic effect as though Madame Cézanne sits up, leans forward, her right hand falling closer, or Gertrude Stein sits back, rearranges her hands, and turns her stare to you.

This kind of portraiture, or rather serialization, is the internal principle of Stein's prose. Take the following sentences which repeatedly describe Melanctha Herbert:

Melanctha Herbert was a graceful, pale yellow, intelligent, attractive negress...

Why did the subtle, intelligent, attractive, half white girl Melanctha Herbert love and do for and demean herself in service...

Sometimes the thought of how all her world was made, filled the complex, desiring Melanctha with despair. She wondered, often, how she could go on living when she was so blue. (*T* 54)

At the beginning of a series of paragraphs early in the piece, these sentences seem to each begin a story about Melanctha Herbert, then stop abruptly and try again from another angle, another "Melanctha" and another "Melanctha." The first is graceful, pale yellow, intelligent, and attractive. The second is similar, almost as if the lens had shifted only a degree or two, to view a subtle, intelligent, and attractive girl. A story of Melanctha is told by the strings of adjectives: graceful, pale yellow, subtle, intelligent, attractive, complex, desiring, half white negress girl. Each adjective is another face, another perspective, on Melanctha, even within the same sentence. "Pale yellow" does not correspond with "graceful" anymore than "intelligent" with "attractive" or "complex" with "desiring." The slight incongruities of the terms is made more visible by kaleidoscopic shifts in color: the first Melanctha is pale yellow, the second Melanctha is half white, the third Melanctha is blue.

If one were to laminate all these views of Melanctha one on top of each other, one would get something more like Étienne-Jules Marey's motion study photographs and Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*. It would be a cubist approach to portraiture—Melanctha's face as one of multiple planes and colors at angles to one another. However, I find that Stein's descriptions lack that compositional effect of a cubist portrait. The discontinuity between the terms renders the portrait into bits and pieces the way a cubist portrait intentionally refracts its subject, but the successive descriptions seem to refuse lamination due to their absolute and prosaic discreteness from one another. Every portrait, including a cubist portrait, has a total effect—an emotional appeal—that does not have to be composed in the calm and harmonious sense, but can also be dissonant or dynamic. Yet the words here are insufficient to explain the despair Melanctha feels or the subtlety she is capable of. They lack that crucial objective correlative that would match emotions to circumstances, objects, and people. The narration itself

does not understand Melanctha—why does she do what she does?—and its attribution of despair to Melanctha is premature without first establishing what it is she desires or what it is that makes her complex, or whether the complexity has to do with her desires.

The adjectival and emotional discontinuities are matched by broader characterological discontinuities in the portrayal of Melanctha. There are mismatches in roles between the real Melanctha with “real sweetness” or the bad Melanctha who wanders around town with men of all sorts or the sentimental “poor little, sweet, trembling baby” and “Melanctha, darling” that her lover Jeff Campbell idolizes, but eventually leaves to her inconsistencies (*T* 129, 88, 100). And yet, the mismatches are as much in Melanctha’s own performance of roles as they are in the narratorial portrayal of her many roles. Melanctha “[does] not [find] it easy with herself to make her wants and what she had, agree” nor “[does] she know how to tell a story wholly...for when it came to what had happened and what she had said and what it was that she had really done, Melanctha never could remember right”—and this is the same difficulty the narration has when it, too, does not tell the story wholly and chronologically (*T* 56, 63). What story of Melanctha do we have, then? What portrait, what life?

The life that we are left with is a pulse that connects discrete pieces, one to the next, through the work that Stein’s sentences do by relying on description and serializing adjectives and presentations of Melanctha. This is Stein’s theory of a cinematic mechanism that makes the portrait move, though the movement itself is within the portrait, not an aspect of its external manipulation. In other words, the mechanism that creates movement in and about the portrait is discontinuity itself; portraiture as a series of parts and partialities, portraiture as motion studies.<sup>8</sup> Stein writes in “Portraits and Repetition”:

...if it were possible that a movement were lively enough it would exist so completely that it would not be necessary to see it moving against anything to know that it is moving.

This is what we mean by life and in my way I have tried to make portraits of this thing always have tried always may try to make portraits of this thing. (*L* 170)

In other words, Stein’s serial descriptions which present, as it were, portraits or still lifes of her subjects are, indeed, stereotyped snapshots—they are stultified in the way motions captured in mid-gesture look awkward and foolish, and do not move against anything—but they exist so completely that their movement is internal to them. In this way, Stein’s narration is an experiment in recording that motion.

### *Motion Picture: Language in Motion*

To call *Three Lives* a motion study is to put it in relation to the time and motion studies of the turn-of-the-century (and not just the cinema and series production of the 1930s when Stein gave her lecture): Muybridge’s serial photographs, Taylor’s work-efficiency time studies, Frank and Lillian Gilbreth’s applied motion studies, and moving assembly lines or the method of continuous flow production used in many industries at that time including flour milling, canning, the manufacturing of sewing machines, and the disassembly of animals.<sup>9</sup> A part of this

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8 This is radically different from Bergson’s thesis that continuity creates liveliness. Bergson’s reliance on analogies and metaphors is also apt in that they take one whole to produce another whole by means of comparison. Stein’s descriptions, on the other hand, are a series of parts and partialities.

9 These all refer to American technologies and methods. In fact, the armory system, a precursor to the mechanized assembly line, using machines and unskilled labor to make standardized, interchangeable parts in armories in the nineteenth century was more widely adopted in America than it was called the American system

obsession with time, motion, and technical innovation, *Three Lives* is certainly a cousin to Taylorism and Fordism, and it is very much about work and the reproduction of life, but in a clearly different way. Immediately, one can say that the mechanized, repetitive labor that results from scientific management diverges deeply from the technical, insistent athleticism of Stein's prose, but they share a common genealogical background and historical moment. How do the related ways that they conceive of time and motion inform each of their pictures of life (or of cars)? As Stein put it in "Portraits and Repetition," "...my ultimate business as an artist was not with where the car goes as it goes but with the movement inside that is of essence of its going" (L 195).

In the standardization of work in Taylorism and Fordism, time measured in abstract, universal units becomes the currency into which labor dissolves. This is, in critiques of capitalism, the moment of the real subsumption of labor into capital. Through his time studies with the ever more precise stopwatch, Taylor pioneered a "scientific management" of work—every movement, gesture, posture, and distance was dissected and calculated to yield the most efficient, least fatiguing operation. Through his assembly line, Ford broke these operations into multiple parts could be completed within the same standard quota-time according to the period of the mechanical line. By making each movement equivalent to another, that is interchangeable within an interval of time, Taylorism and Fordism completes labor's alienation from the personal and social handiwork of each person and defines labor as a commodity. Work becomes alienated labor.

Concerning the car, the innovation of Henry Ford's method was the *moving* assembly line, which moved car parts on a belt at a continuous flow timed to allow workers at different stations along the line to repeat a set task within a quota of time. The assembly line is based on a logic that, while it assembles products, *breaks* human workers, animals, and other forms of life to the forced march of its operations while internalizing and smoothing the violent fractures into the artificial rhythm, breath, and hiss of the machine. This same logic is at work in the arts, especially those related to cinema, whose motion pictures depend upon film technology where serial snapshots break a motion down into frozen, immobilized, perhaps we might even say, slaughtered parts.<sup>10</sup>

The "taming" of the worker (or of life more generally) in making American products—Ford cars, roast beef, Hollywood, and so on—follows the mechanistic and disciplinary attitude advocated by Frederick Winslow Taylor's "scientific management." Based on an ideal of efficiency where the "greatest prosperity can exist only when [an] individual has reached his highest state of efficiency; that is, when he is turning out his largest daily output" (Taylor 11), Taylorism reduced and brutalized its workers. Taylor's time-motion studies on the most efficient ways to do and manage work, and the research of his many followers, strove to determine units of movement that constituted the quickest execution of a task such as handling pig-iron, laying

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of manufacturing even though it did not originate there. However, European countries were very much interested in adopting the "American system," Taylorism, and Fordism.

10 Nicole Shukin, in *Animal Capital*, lays bare the complicity of cinema with industrial slaughterhouses' disassembly line which broke down animal carcasses into "cuts," rendered animal remains for photographic gelatin, and spectacularized animals or "raw presence" through their slaughterhouse tours (102). Also connecting the the assembly line to the arts, Barrett Watten sees the relationship between Stein and Fordism as a mutual analogy in which Stein's poetics of repetition is a Fordist mode of production, and Ford's mode of production is a modernist poetics (see the chapter "The Bride of the Assembly Line" in *The Constructivist Moment*).

brick, and washing dishes.<sup>11</sup> The reduction of the individual to his output and the reduction of tasks into concise, minute operations exemplify the mechanistic approach which reduces its objects to simple, two-dimensional variables (height, length, stack, spread, lift) and common denominators (time) in order to make calculations. If the shrill capitalism and mechanism of Taylor's alignment of prosperity with productivity is not already off-putting, then the social darwinism principal to this method is certainly so. Productivity, via efficiency, is Taylor's criteria for the fittest, and his willingness to break down and hierarchize the mental capacities of workers so that they do what best fits them instrumentalizes natural selection. Where Stein's anthropomorphic Aunt Pauline assumes a generally—and not specifically human—positive vitality, Taylor's "man of the type of the ox,—no rare specimen of humanity, difficult to find and therefore highly prized" (62) tends in the opposite direction of animalization and assumes a gradient of vitality from the brute worker at the bottom to the condescending manager or engineer at the top.

Stein is, of course, explicit about her own engagement with these technologies and "mechanical servants"; the shuddering, muted violence and centrifugal forces of the assembly (or disassembly) line cannot be ignored in her work. In speaking of her own cinematic technique, she writes:

I of course did not think of it in terms of the cinema, in fact I doubt whether at that time I had ever seen a cinema but, and I cannot repeat this too often any one is of one's period and this our period was undoubtedly the period of the cinema and series production. And each of us in our own way are bound to express what the world in which we are living is doing. (*L* 177)

She describes her technique as equivalent to "a cinema picture made up of succession and each moment having its own emphasis that is its own difference," and attributes a vitality to it, concluding, "so there was the moving and the existence of each moment as it was in me" (*L* 198). Her technique is not about smoothness with streaming images appearing as seamless movement, but the discontinuity of individual moments; not about repetition but what she considers "insistence," whose difference is made by emphasis. What Stein has in mind is perhaps both the assembly line and Muybridge's serial photographs of motion, which it is possible she *did* see at that time and which shows that the turn-of-the-century conception of cinema remains grounded in its nineteenth-century origins and a consciousness of its mechanical apparatus. If there is as much "breaking" in Stein's cinematic technique as Ford's assembly line, is there as much brutality as there is vitality? Following her remark on the historical boundedness of our expression allows us to understand her work in relation to cinematic and mechanical technologies, and to begin to constellate the incongruous and mixed terms of life—violence, creativity, mechanism, assembly, motion, discontinuity, vitalism, sexuality, technology, pictures, power—of Stein's moment and the American milieu.

The machine includes not only mechanical parts, but also, as we have seen, human parts—human bodies and subjectivities intimately coupled with and also submitted to the mechanized process—what Mark Seltzer calls the "American body-machine complex" (4). The ambiguity of mechanism and vitalism, and the blurring between what we consider animate or inanimate, person or thing, in the body-machine is precisely Seltzer's argument in describing the mechanical mediations of life introduced by turn-of-the-century technologies. Motion can be read as a kind of automatism where volition has been completely delinked from motion, or as a

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11 These examples refer, respectively, to Taylor, Frank Gilbreth, and Christine Frederick, all proponents of a Taylorist system of work.

kind of autonomy and agency made possible by the machine's prosthesis and the market's fetishization. As he puts it, "the uncertain status of the principle of locomotion precipitates the melodramas of uncertain agency and also what amounts to the erotics of uncertain agency" (17-18). For Seltzer, life is uncertainly and ambiguously mechanical *and* vitalist, but specifically in the context of the machine and the market. Within this argument, however, there is no animation except the animation tendered by the market and there is no labor except labor within the industrial machine; the uncertainty between animation and automatism is an uncertainty built into capitalism. For Stein, however, the claim of animation against automatism, as in her negation of having done any automatic writing, in her college studies on motor automatism or in her later work, is not uncertain but also does not repudiate her techniques' closeness to mechanical processes. I would like, then, to put Stein unambiguously in the context of a vitalism that is certainly a part of capitalist modes of production but also *apart* from it.

*Three Lives*, though it can be read as a narrative about alienated labor and especially that of women's work, is not exactly about three women caught in the treadmill of their gender, their reproductive failure or sterility and demise. For that story, one could turn to Herman Melville's maids of Tartarus.<sup>12</sup> In other words, I do not see *Three Lives* as a precursor to the Fordist assembly line or as a representation of mechanized and alienated labor, though that may be its subject. To understand the time, motion, labor, and the reproduction of life in *Three Lives* requires going back to the motion studies of Muybridge in the 1880s and understanding the "Fordism" in Stein's *Three Lives* as a vitalistic movement—a motor.

From 1877 to 1879, Muybridge took countless serial photographs of motion on the racetrack at Stanford's Palo Alto ranch, making innovations in shutter-speed technology, photochemistry, photography methods, and projection. A set of 12 and eventually 24 cameras were lined up to take photos in timed or triggered sequence of animals and humans as they moved across the whitened track and white backdrop marked with numbered lines like a giant ruler. Using the wet-plate method, these "instantaneous" photographs were also exposed and developed on glass slides on the spot. Later on, Muybridge experimented with new photographic technologies and camera angles, but he always took serials of photographs. Of Muybridge's work, Rebecca Solnit writes:

He was...preoccupied with how photography could capture time—not a single moment of time already past, as a single photograph does, but the transformations wrought by time's passage. He was trying to change the tense of photography and the true subject of the serial photograph is change itself. (53)

Muybridge photographed ephemeral things, things dying and dying over and over again. His studies of clouds and water and his name changes (Muggeridge to Muygridge to Muybridge, Edward to Eadward) are signs of his interest in transience, phases, as well as aesthetic forms rather than technical accuracy. As individual photographs of distinct subjects—clouds and ripples in different locations and times—they emphasize variation and present the variations as what Solnit astutely describes as a "scientist's specimen collection or a painter's sketchbook" of forms and shapes (50). Serial photographs, however, track the same subject in the same place

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12 Beryl Rowland writes in "Melville's Bachelors and Maids" that "[w]hen we perceive the figurative meaning, we find that the hell with which the diptych is concerned is not only that of woman in her service to the machine and to biology but that of man in his relationship or, rather, his *service* to woman." What Melville's "Maids of Tartarus" reveals is, perhaps, a dark version of Adams' Virgin. Both male writers attribute generative energies to women and in doing so reify the maid or the virgin into an idol of life. While Stein's *Three Lives* plays to these gendered denotations, it also un genders life by drawing other associations—namely with non-human forms of life like animals and machines—through its motion studies.

over time. They record subtle and incremental shifts in a subject and emphasize the shift rather than the "specimen" or "sketch." All of Muybridge's serial photographs, whether they were of animals or humans, register a particular kind of change—that of motion, which participates in that constellation of synonyms for life as a physiological movement of energy. And so the true subject of Muybridge's serial photographs is not merely change, but life.

That life is Muybridge's motive is evident in both his fixation on serial photographs and in his inventive applications of the photographs. Although he did not study motion the way a physiologist did, Muybridge's work emulated and inspired the precise measurements of physical movements.<sup>13</sup> He had attained notoriety by claiming to take the first instantaneous photographs of Stanford's fastest horse the Occident at full speed in 1872 and again in 1877, but it was not until 1878 that Muybridge photographed *and* published the first successful serials showing horses trotting, running, walking, or cantering. *The Horse in Motion* photographs reproduced in the December issue of *La Nature* that year elicited an enthusiastic response from the French physiologist Marey who wrote to the editors:

I am impressed with Mr. Muybridge's photographs published in *La Nature*. Could you put in touch with the author? I would like his assistance in the solution of certain problems of physiology too difficult to resolve by other methods. For instance, on the question of birds in flight, I have devised a photographic gun for seizing the birds in an attitude, or better, a series of attitudes which impart the successive phases of the wing movement....It would clearly be an easy experiment for Mr. Muybridge. Then what beautiful zootropes he could make! One could see all the imaginable animals during their true movements; it would be animated zoology. (in Mozley xvii-xviii)

Inspired by Muybridge, Marey would dedicate much of his research to inventing and refining photographic mechanisms for recording physiological movement. Their careers parallel and dovetail one another both in their lifetimes and in retrospectives of their work and contributions to cinematography. Like Marey, Muybridge recognized both the scientific and artistic value of the motion study photographs, and like Marey, he eventually photographed not just animals in motion but also humans in motion. Their photography is obsessed with motion—movement that was not particular to a bird, a horse, or a man, but movement abstracted from the subject—life itself. However, Marey's scientific precision excelled Muybridge's. Unlike Muybridge who never attempted to standardize the intervals of time between each photograph, he rigorously timed the intervals of his snapshots, in some cases placing a clock in the photograph itself to

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13 The cross references between Muybridge and Marey are multiple. Although Marey was inspired by Muybridge's 1878 serial photographs, Muybridge had been inspired to take serials rather than stand-alone instantaneous photographs by Marey himself a few years earlier. Both Stanford and Muybridge read Marey's *Animal Mechanism, a Treatise on Terrestrial and Aerial Locomotion* which appeared in English translation in 1874, and Anita Mozley suggests in her introduction to *Muybridge's Complete Human and Animal Locomotion* that their decision to move to serial photography came from Marey's mention of the zoetrope, an optical toy that creates the illusion of a figure in motion by presenting the figure to the eye in successive positions. However, only Muybridge appears to have taken up this suggestion as the impetus and culmination of his oeuvre whereas Stanford's interest in motion studies remained primarily orthographic in the sense that he limited his sponsorship of the results from Muybridge's photographs to scientific description of the horse's motion. Taken together, Muybridge's and Marey's independent work reveal the multiple points of intersection between science and the arts, as well as the interconnections between motion, life, animation, work, athletics, performance, and time in their choice of subjects for motion studies which ranged from horses, birds, and lions to gymnasts, blacksmiths, and actresses.

confirm the homogenous passing of time.<sup>14</sup> Further, Marey preferred photographing on one multiply exposed negative or using a mechanism like the photographic gun he mentions above to establish the continuity of the movement whereas Muybridge's individually exposed and serialized shots allowed him to manipulate the order of the series and often replace or otherwise alter the order or position of the photographs to preserve the effect (or create the illusion) of continuity rather than actual continuity.<sup>15</sup> These details suggest that Muybridge was far more interested in what Marey called "animated zoology" or the making of "beautiful zootropes" than a purely scientific study. He eventually named the device he used to play and project his motion studies a "zoopraxiscope," which combined the technologies of photography, zoetropes, and magic lanterns. Broken down etymologically, the zoopraxiscope is an instrument for viewing the doing of life or the viewing of life-work. In other words, what Muybridge wanted to see and show was not accuracy or continuity, but simply motion or the work of life. And while Marey was also interested in life, his work and inventions emphasize the techniques for recording life, not practicing or making life.

In Muybridge's 1878 cabinet cards of *The Horse in Motion*, there is one set that depicts the horse Sallie Gardner galloping across a section of Stanford's Palo Alto track. According to the caption, the negatives were taken at intervals of "about the twenty-fifth part of a second of time" and "exposed during the two-thousandths part of a second, and are absolutely 'untouched.'"<sup>16</sup> Arranged in a three by four set of twelve photographs divided and outlined by black borders, each image shows the figures of the horse and jockey centered against a white, vertically lined background. The only way to tell that they have moved in each successive photograph is by the ascending numbers measuring their displacement on the top bar. It is as though Muybridge tried to hold all other variables at bay and let fly only the motion. His meticulous arrangement of the serial photographs into grids, the stark silhouettes of the figures repeating across and down the grid—these have a scientific spareness to them, a kind of simplification to the barest outlines needed. At the same time, this bareness imparts to the photograph an iconic quality. It is not a horse in motion but the icon of a horse in motion.

This was, no doubt, the effect Muybridge wanted, for the "Sallie Gardner" series betrays a number of his sleight-of-hand techniques. Muybridge's caption even puts the word "untouched" in scare-quotes, suggesting that his usual methods of retouching photographs was at work. Both Marta Braun and Anita Mozley have noted the retouching of the photographs, if not of the negatives, in order to outline figures and heighten the contrast between background and figures. William Rulofson of the *Philadelphia Photographer*, for example, criticized the series "as diminutive silhouettes of the animal on and against a white background or wall" and concluded, "Photographically speaking, it is 'bosh'" (in Braun *E* 146). Looking at the "Sallie Gardner" photographs, the purposeful silhouetting of both the horse and her jockey is betrayed by the final image of the horse at rest. In order to preserve the uniformity and continuity of the movement in its grid format, Muybridge inserted a twelfth image at the end of the gallop sequence to fill in for an imperfect or missing photograph in the twelve-part sequence. Like an optical illusion, the twelfth image completes the grid and makes it appear as though Sallie Gardner ran and came to rest. However, the numbers across the top bar clearly show that the

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14 See photograph [E.J. Marey, *Locomotion du cheval: gros plan sur les jambes*, vers 1895, Musée Marey, Beaune] in Marey, *Pionnier de la Synthèse du Mouvement*, 18.

15 Marey was not the only one who both admired Muybridge's work and criticized its lack of scientific accuracy. Thomas Eakins and other committee members overseeing Muybridge's photographic motion studies for the University of Philadelphia also took issue with Muybridge's methods. See Mozley.

16 See reproduction in Braun, *Eadward Muybridge* 144-45.

horse is standing still a number of paces back on the track and at a different time of the day since its shadow stretches in front of it rather than directly below it as in the previous photographs. Further, given the lack of movement in the final photograph, the minute details of the horse and her jockey should be visible. However, their figures have been filled in with black to match the previous images, which suggests that even those images have been retouched or filled in to render the images continuous with one another. Muybridge did not hide his efforts—they are plainly visible after all; and nor did he falsely present them as having the scientific integrity and continuity of Marey's photographs—the intervals are not exactly one twenty-fifth of a second, but more or less that amount, and the untouched quality of the photographs are not actually "untouched." Rather than detract Muybridge's work for its scientific and photographic "bosh," I would like to claim that *The Horse in Motion* is a rendering of the iconic status of motion.

Photographed in a split second, a motionless motion, Muybridge's horse has become for us an icon—not just of the technology and speed of mechanical reproduction, but also the human, animal, and mechanical materials and labor that produce motion pictures industry and its idol-worship of Hollywood stars. In the still frame of a serial photograph, here is something that is real and not real, something that the camera's eye captures but the human eye cannot see without this technological device. Here is something that is working and working over and over, so that its exercise of insistence is not so much about standard intervals and efficient, continuous movement as it is about the quality of the experience that expires and respire, that is given and lost, in each moment. The spirit photographed in these iconic, broken moments might be understood in relation to a theory of labor and of life that parallels Taylor and Ford, but is not the same.

Like Muybridge's photographs which lay out its figures in an almost repetitive and silhouetted sequence of positions, *Three Lives* insists over and over on the lives of its characters. The stereotyped quality of these figures is abstract and ungainly but yet lively in a way that Taylor's workers were never allowed to be. There are many oft-noted insistences in *Three Lives*—that "Anna [leads] an arduous and troubled life," that Mrs. Lehntman is the romance of her life, that Melanctha is complex and desiring, that Rose has a baby, that Lena does not know oh so many things (*T* 7). As regionalist characters Anna, Melanctha, and Lena represent "simpler ways of life"—simplified, that is, to the primitivist racial stereotypes of the "the earth patience of the working, gentle, german woman" or the "earth-born, boundless joy of negroes" (*T* 150, 53). Yet by placing their earthiness, which is also their vitality, in a serial mode, Stein's text shows how retrospection is not a remembering that reifies its characters through the gradual congelation of fixed types in the past. Instead, her text refreshes, as it were, each time, and regionalist retrospection does not divide the past from the present but insists each time on the past as present.

Anna's own brand of earthiness is certainly one of the regionalist aspects of Bridgepoint's geography in that she adheres stringently to the ways of the "Old World" even though she lives in the New World. She comes from "solid lower middle-class south german stock" and has a "firm old world sense of what was the right way for a girl to do" that accords a "kind of ugliness appropriate to each rank in life" (*T* 15, 25). This fixedness on *place* that is at once temporal—old versus new—and social—what a *girl* should do and what the lower-middle class should do—is unmoored by the narrator's ironic awareness of the "ugliness" of such a hierarchy. The solidity and firmness of Anna's goodness—what makes her hard in the sense of obduracy—is at the same time what makes her life hard in the sense of difficulty, unpleasantness, and ugliness. The repeated insistence on Anna's way of life is less a method to compare the old to a new and



modern way of life though such comparisons can be made with the Lehtman's alternative family arrangements. Instead, the arduous and troubled life is at each instance of its insistence made present as a new and different kind of arduousness and trouble. For Anna goes from having an arduous and troubled life to finding that "[t]he only trouble [is] that Anna hardly [makes] a living" (*T* 50). The timing of such a movement, the metamorphoses from one sentence of a hard life to another sentence of hardly a life, is less about memorializing (or fixing) the former or past version of hardness than about registering the changes and different inflections of hardness at each next instance. Likewise, the "troubled life" of one sentence that shifts into the trouble with life, and life shifts into living, so that each new version of the sentences troubles any fixed syntax or form. To borrow from Fer, life in *Three Lives* is living without necessarily becoming life.

Thus the work in *Three Lives* is not just its representation in the lives of three women; the work is also its working, that is, its working in language. What makes Stein's work analogous to that of physiologists and other recorders of motion is that she, too, studied the mechanics of life and attempted to represent it in the medium available to her. For inventors like Muybridge and Marey, it was photography; for Stein, it was language. And it is this language that makes Stein difficult to approach. It is not difficult—it is very simple—its difficulty lies in its mechanics. Almost like children's nursery rhymes in their repetitiveness and singsong cadences, Stein's sentences work with words the way a physiologist works a muscle; she exercises language as though it were a tensile filament or material that can be stretched and strengthened. Rhymes are, after all, linguistic exercises for children where one category of rhymes called tongue-twisters captures the highest degree of technical acrobatics—and nonsense. Stein-speak has a similar kind of technical brilliance as the tongue-twister except that its aural consonances are based on phonetic repetition rather than similarities and that its acrobatics lie not in pronunciation but in semantics (not in nonsense but in senses so plainly palpable that they are common sense).

In Stein's lecture "Portraits and Repetition," Stein distinguishes between mechanical or rote repetition and *lively* repetition when she describes her "very lively little aunts" in Baltimore:

If they had to know anything and anybody does they naturally had to say and hear it often, anybody does, and as there were ten and eleven of them they did have to say and hear said whatever was said and anyone not hearing what it was they said had to come in to hear what had been said. That inevitably made everything said often. I began then to consciously listen to what anybody was saying and what they did say while they were saying what they were saying. This was not yet the beginning of writing but it was the beginning of knowing what there was that made there be no repetition. No matter how often what happened had happened any time any one told anything there was no repetition. This is what William James calls the Will to Live. If not nobody would live. (*L* 169)

Stein's home with her German Jewish aunts was, in many ways, the setting of *Three Lives*. From their talk and gossip, their ways and manners of speaking, Stein may have derived the dialect of the German immigrants in her stories. What she certainly did develop from their talk was a methodological repetition of "what anybody was saying and what they did say while they were saying what they were saying" into the very sentence structure of her writing. Stein's tautological phrasing that they say what they say while they say what they say frustratingly leaves unanswered the question of "what did they say?"

But her claim is that this is *not* a tautology, *not* a repetition, but rather an *insistence* that tonally distinguishes each repetition from the other. The insistence is, then, an aural difference, something that one can "listen to," that at the same time becomes a semantic difference the way

in some languages' tonal differences distinguish different phonetic homonyms. In that way, to say what they say is what they say, or Stein's more famous line of "Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose," is not a tautology since there is an implied or emphasized tonal and semantic difference in each saying of "rose." Stein's linguistic athleticism has to do with making the same words do the work of that tonal and semantic transformation, the way an athlete, but more a physiologist or photographer studying the athlete, might make the same muscles perform permutations of training or drilling exercises to isolate them but also work them in multiple, concentrated directions. This is why the style of Stein's writing has an embodied but at the same time detached quality to it. One must speak and hear those words, talk and listen at the same time, to understand the work they do—in other words, one must do work.

For Stein, this insistence is the work—the labor power and vital force—that is life. It is what she calls James' "Will to Live,"<sup>17</sup> and it is an insistence performed by both her language and by the lives of the characters in *Three Lives*. The fascination with Life is a recurring and reverberating trope of philosophy, and its undeniable attraction has to do with epistemological questions on the nature of experience, as well as ethical questions that follow from that epistemology. How do we know life? How do we feel alive? What marks the vitality in us and how do we access it? How should we live? These questions point to the blurry boundaries between Aristotelian categories like bare life and life (*zoë* and *bios*), mere existence and entelechy (vitality directed toward fulfillment), but also between political distinctions like animatedness and spiritedness, subjection (being animated by another) and subjectivity (being inspired by oneself).<sup>18</sup> In the late nineteenth century, life, as we have seen, was more and more conceived of and felt as a vital energy, whether as psychic activity, physical motion, mechanical work, labor power, or productivity.

Yet whether this vital energy was transcendental and metaphysical or scientifically measurable was subject to debate. At stake in vitalist-mechanist debates of the modern era<sup>19</sup> was precisely how one would approach life—as something to be bewildered within, to be experienced, as myriad possibilities and associations, or as something to be known, to test and compete within, as a determinable and logical structure. In *Three Lives*, the vitalist-mechanist question is, then, a question of how one would read the lives of the Good Anna, Melanctha, and Gentle Lena. Are their lives vital or mechanical? What is the nature of the life that they live, the work that they do? My reading of Stein's linguistic work thus far contests a view that sees labor power as mechanically reproducing bare life in favor of one that pulses vitally and insistently in time with a singular and concrete, if stereotypical, life. I have, admittedly, drawn the lines crudely, and Stein's position in the vitalist-mechanist debate is far from being a simple step to one side or the other. In the following sections, by placing Stein in context with a history of American vitalism and mechanism and with life philosophies of her time, the philosophical

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17 James never used this term, though the closest term he did have was the "will to believe."

18 There are many ways to define life, and even following the Greek divisions of life as *bios* and *zoë* offers different delineations. Agamben and Arendt consider *bios* the private life of the domestic, subsistent economies of living while *zoe* is the public life of active politics and ethical living. However, *bios* and *zoë* have also been divided as the individual, finite life and the eternal, infinite soul. For an intellectual history of life philosophies from Descartes to Deleuze, see Donna Jones' *Racial Discourses of Life Philosophy*. For more on bare life and life, see Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer*; on entelechy, refer to the vitalism of Hans Driesch; on animatedness, see Sianne Ngai's *Ugly Feelings*, and on spiritedness, see Philip Fisher's *The Vehement Passions*.

19 Robert Mitchell distinguishes between three different eras of vitalism in *Experimental Life*: the first a Romantic era vitalism concerned with the animating spark of life, the second a modern era vitalism grappling more with the evolutionary aspect of the continuity of life, and the third postmodern era of today's critical theory on biopolitics.

nuances of her vitalism will underscore the implications of what a pulse of life means for conceptions of power and work.

*Machine-Life-Work: The American System of Manufactory*

Scientific and philosophical discussions in the late nineteenth century grappled with many technological developments that changed life as it was lived—so much so that there seemed, for many, a radical discontinuity from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. Stein, registers the distinctly American sense of this break through the technological turnings of the automobile. If the Ford car is a metaphor of motion for Stein, it is also an *American* product for a writer who thought of herself as an *American* genius. That conjunction proves irresistible for Stein's version of American exceptionalism:

A motor goes inside of an automobile and the car goes. In short this generation has conceived an intensity of movement so great that it has not to be seen against something else to be known, and therefore, this generation does not connect itself with anything, that is what makes this generation what it is and that is why it is American, and this is very important in connection with portraits of anything. (*L* 166)

The intensity of movement has to do with the changes in living that mark the movement from one generation of people to the next, which for Americans, in Stein's view, so far exceeds the generational movement in other countries that its "going" is incomparable. In fact, it seems to have cut itself off from everything else much like a stark silhouette in relief. Her sense of discontinuity is based on and figured in technology—the Ford automobile—which in part explains American exceptionality based on its technological and industrial innovation. However, technology also encompasses the techniques of invention in art as "portraits of anything." What automobiles, art, and an American generation have in common is the movement that makes them stand out—their liveliness of self-contained "going" and disconnected "moving" based in technology and technique. This intensity of movement is, for Stein, uniquely American and characterizes a particular discontinuity or break in the life of that moment and milieu.

Henry Adams' autobiography, chronicling the years from 1838 to 1905, also registers that disorientation—a disorientation so profound that the discontinuity of the nineteenth century entirely cuts itself off from the historical timeline. His is a history that asks, "What could become of such a child of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when he should wake up to find himself required to play the game of the twentieth?" (9-10). Adams' peculiar autobiography registers the shock of many changes, but among the most striking are the scientific ones. The current of the nineteenth century appeared to many to be driven by Darwin's theory of evolution and by the technological advances made during industrialization—the railroad, the steam engine, the telegraph, and, of course, the automobile.

It is from these two foci of the nineteenth century—life and the machine—that nineteenth and early twentieth-century vitalist and mechanist debates developed. Does the machine serve life, as mechanists claimed, or, as the vitalists censured, does life serve the machine? Does life progress causally by survival of the fittest, as a mechanist might rationalize, or does life evolve through incalculable, immeasurable, and perhaps metaphysical flows and currents, as a vitalist might intuit?<sup>20</sup> For some mechanists, the world was a secular and rational system with physical

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20 See Donna Jones' *The Racial Discourse of Life Philosophy* for an excellent history of the vitalist and mechanist debates of the nineteenth century. Although Jones focuses primarily on the European context and the vitalist philosophy of Bergson, she provides a thoroughly extensive background of the intellectual history of vitalism. Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* provides an intellectual history of mechanist debates of the late

laws; for others, the world was a divine mechanical system organized by physical laws that also symbolized metaphysical ones. Vitalists, however, abhorred mechanisms as a constraint on the energies of life, though their critiques centered more on the detriments of mechanistic thought on intellectual and societal life than on the science itself. They criticized, for example, the social machine in which creative human thought seemed increasingly replaced by mechanistic thought governing social policies and customs, as well as the industrial machine tending more and more to a factory-system that harnessed men, women, and children to machines.

*Three Lives* stages this debate in a lover's dispute between Melanctha and Jeff Campbell. She complains, "Don't you ever stop with your thinking long enough ever to have any feeling Jeff Campbell," and then contrasts her feeling for him against his intellectualism, saying, "I certainly do care for you Jeff Campbell less than you are always thinking and much more than you are ever knowing" (T 83). Their opposing philosophies of an intuitive experience of love (Melanctha) and an intellectual rationale for love (Jeff) map onto a vitalistic feeling or care and a mechanistic thinking and measuring. Yet that this is a lover's dispute—a bitter opposition between life and the machine, which are nevertheless desperately attracted to one another—is indicative.

In the American context, as Leo Marx has shown in *The Machine in the Garden*, the entrance of the machine into the pastoral scene of life was not so antagonistic, though it was certainly disruptive. If anything, one might say that Americans loved machines and the way they worked. Marx's emblematic trope is that of the train interrupting a pastoral landscape of harmony and greenery whether cultivated or wild. The arrival of the machine is something like a new god, a literal *deus ex machina*, except that instead of untangling and resolving the plot, the machine gives it a conundrum that moves the plot ever forward. How to reconcile the machine in the garden? For Marx, American romantic pastoralism<sup>21</sup> stages the dramatic confrontation between the machine and the garden, progressing technologically and industrially even as it remains nostalgic for the pastoral. He attributes this embrace of the machine to "what can only be called the official American ideology of industrialism" (181).

Such an ideology is based thoroughly on a mechanist argument. It relies on, first, a notion of causality where the use of a machine obtains concrete and reliable results—one builds a car affordably, therefore people will buy and drive Fords; one has a Ford, therefore one can deliver aid to soldiers in Perpignan, or, if one chooses, take a leisurely motoring trip with a beloved companion and compatriot. And second, a related notion of progress where parts build up to something greater—not necessarily a whole or a flourishing finis, but certainly to something greater and greater—as walking is built upon by the bicycle which is built upon by the automobile which is built upon by roads which is built upon highways. This is well-demonstrated by Frederick Jackson Turner's example in the "Frontier Thesis" (1893)—itself a mechanistic argument of how environmental conditions determine American development—on the way the train built on roads that built on trading routes that built on Indian trails to water sources. Thus, as in a fixed game, America's progress is guaranteed by technological

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eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that pertain to the American context. He looks not only to well-known American figures like Thomas Jefferson and Michel Crèvecoeur, but also to European critiques of mechanism in Schiller and Carlyle and their American responses in lesser known, but important industrial figures like Tench Coxe, a merchant who spoke at the Constitutional Convention of 1787 representing manufacturing interests, and Timothy Walker, who wrote a "Defence of Mechanical Philosophy" for the *North American Review* in 1831.

21 American romantic pastoralism is, for L. Marx, a complex and serious pastoralism to be distinguished from primitivist and sentimental pastoralism which naively extols the idyll.

developments in which the machine is both a tool and a principle underlying the order of things. Third and finally, a method of organization that bases the fitness of the order on the fitness of each of its components. This is a kind of systems-approach to organization, and the American System of Manufacturing, a precursor to Taylorism, advertised and exported such a component-based system. This was a two-fold system in which both the machines used for manufacture and the products manufactured relied on parts that fit together in neat, standardized, and interchangeable ways to increase efficiency and productivity. That this system was widely popular in America and that it was known abroad as the "American System" testifies to its perceived synecdochal relationship to the United States as a country made up of mechanical parts which check and balance each other.

Stein, as a child of the nineteenth century and of America, is no less preoccupied with these themes of life and the machine. Yet it isn't in mechanistic thought that Stein's love for machines lies. Rather, hers might be called a vitalist materialism, where machines are dynamos of inexplicable and indeterminate vital force—not of predictable logic or even divine teleology. Machines are not vehicles of life—much less tools or rivals of life—but rather interpenetrating life such that life can no more be separated from the machine as it can be from any other material. This characterizes what is "most intensely alive," Stein writes, which is "doing both things, not as if they were one thing, not as if they were two things, but doing them, well if you like, like the motor going inside and the car moving, they are part of the same thing" (*L* 170). The machine is not two things—energy and mechanical parts, life and matter—or even things that can be added together to make one thing to be measured. The machine is alive by its doing, a doing that is one and the same as work is both the working and the work.

Henry Adams is her close compatriot in this matter when he gives up, exasperated, on measuring the forces generated by machines and atoms, and attempts to content himself with tracing their force of attraction to his mind, that is, not as measurable, and therefore explainable, quantities or even qualities, but as psychological forces that are, specifically, symbols of life, of generative or reproductive energy. This is an era of new sciences—not just of mechanical inventions like the dynamos he views in awe in the gallery of machines at the Paris Exposition of 1900, but also of atomic discoveries like quantum energy and radioactivity. Many scientists, including the Curies, Bergson, Marey, and James, were closely affiliated, in fact, with groups researching supersensible phenomenae, and were primarily interested in studying and understanding these physical and psychological forces with the scientific tools available to them. If Adams "lost his arithmetic in trying to figure out the equation between the discoveries and the economies of force...incapable of expression in horsepower," so did most other people, and the new sciences suggested a suprasensual, occult world of phenomena, that was a "physics stark mad in metaphysics" (362).

The Dynamo is, for Adams, a symbol of this generative force, one comparable to the immeasurable magnitude symbolized by the Virgin and her reproductive energies. But neither Adams nor Stein turn completely to metaphysics—Adams remains the ever frustrated historian hunting and writing out rational sequences and Stein attends to the experientially physical in the metaphysical. The vital work the machine does, for Stein, is not to deliver results but simply to *work*. Its *working* is what is technically not there—inexplicable and immeasurable and undeliverable in terms of  $\text{work} = \text{force} \times \text{distance}$ —but is undeniably working, and that working is inextricable from its physicality. This materialist version of vitalism figures the psyche as necessarily embodied; one cannot think the mind or spirit without giving it a body, arms, or wings. *Three Lives* is about this working, and Stein is no less obsessed with forces as Adams.

Perhaps the most evocative instance of work in *Three Lives* is that of Melanctha's fascination with activity at the railroad yard. There:

Melanctha liked to wander, and to stand by the railroad yard, and watch the men and the engines and the switches and everything that was busy there, working. Railroad yards are a ceaseless fascination. They satisfy every kind of nature. For the lazy man whose blood flows very slowly, it is a steady soothing world of motion which supplies him with the sense of a strong moving power. He need not work and yet he has it very deeply; he has it even better than the man who works in it or owns it. Then for natures that like to feel emotion without the trouble of having any suffering, it is very nice to get the swelling in the throat, and the fullness, and the heart beats, and all flutter of excitement that comes as one watches the people come and go, and hears the engine pound and give a long drawn whistle. For a child watching through a hole in the fence above the yard, it is a wonder world of mystery and movement. The child loves all the noise, and then it loves the silence of the wind that comes before the full rush of the pounding train, that bursts out from the tunnel where it lost itself and all its noise in darkness... (T 61)

Comparable to Adams' dynamo and virgin, Stein's railroad yard is a symbol of generative forces and reproductive energies. Its motion and swelling and pounding figures both mechanical and sexual work—as when a railroad worker calls out to Melanctha with the innuendo, “Hullo sis, do you want to sit on my engine” (T 62). It seems, then, to continue an obsession with the railroad and train in American literature and criticism, and therefore also a certain narrative of American development and power that is intensely gendered. Drawing on the masculine, and often sexist, vocabulary of symbolic interpretation, repression, and wish-fulfillment in Freudian psychoanalysis, Leo Marx describes American industrialization as follows:

The lay of the land represents a singular insulation from disturbance, and so enhances the feeling of security and repose. The hollow is a virtual cocoon of freedom from anxiety, guilt, and conflict—a shrine of the pleasure principle. To describe the situation in the language of Freud, particularly when we have only one example in view, no doubt seems farfetched. But the striking fact is that again and again our writers have introduced the same overtones, depicting the same machine as invading the peace of an enclosed space, a world set apart, or an area somehow made to evoke a feeling of encircled felicity... Most important is the sense of the machine as a sudden, shocking intruder upon a fantasy of idyllic satisfaction. It invariably is associated with crude, masculine aggressiveness in contrast with the tender, feminine, and submissive attitudes traditionally attached to the landscape. (28-29)

But in “Melanctha,” the fascination with the railroad yard is one removed from the railroad yard itself. The real experience comes at a cost—suffering—and perhaps that is why Stein says that the lazy man seems to have it better. Yet the real work or experience of the railyard (and of sexual knowledge) is what Melanctha craves. She wanders in search of this experience, dallies with it among all the railroad and dock workers, but as the narrator puts it, “she was not getting what she so badly wanted, but with all her break neck courage Melanctha here was a coward” (T 61). In other words, this symbolic version of work is not it. The railroad and train are not it, and the fine horses at the Bishops' stables that Melanctha used to visit are not it either.

Both the train and the horse are nineteenth-century symbols of power, whether mechanistic or organic, and that is exactly it—they are vehicles for power and not the power itself. This vital energy will move on to the automobile by the end of the century, and its movement is, ultimately, the real subject of *Three Lives*. Melanctha quickly loses interest in both

the railroad and the horses, and the narrative moves on. They do not *work* for Melanctha nor for the narrative—each one must herself work. When Melanctha falls and breaks her arm during one of her adventures flirting with construction workers, that is, flirting with power, she plays the same role as Emerson in "The Poet" who tumbles and falls in flight, unable to hold himself aloft and match the aerial dynamism of the poet. He is, after all, human—without wings—and what Emerson's resignation and Stein's melancholy show is that perhaps the fall is, perversely, the closest experience and expression of human flight as a figure for vitality. The human spirit can and will attempt to fly and it will necessarily fall and break its arms; and it is the break, the pain and suffering of that break, that *is* the experience of power. In falling, it is not the power of flight, but the power of the break that marks experience.

Like Adams' tracing of force in "The Dynamo and the Virgin," Stein's *Three Lives* are histories of power mutated, muted, and exchanged; but they are also the very mediums for the movement of energy. Melanctha's love affairs with power participates in American histories of vitalism and mechanism at the same time that it breaks through those histories to get at what is not merely history but an Emersonian experience. Although the horses, trains, ships, and "engines" of Bridgepoint are symbols of power, these symbols are constantly broken and rebroken into by a language that disrupts their ability to signify and represent. The story manipulates force through language—it *works* heuristically rather than theoretically or even empirically in the intellectual tradition. It feels almost wrong to read Stein's work metaphorically or symbolically precisely because her language works against this kind of allegorical reading in favor of an experiential reading. *Three Lives*, if it is anything, is not the romantic pastoralism and allegorical fictions of Hawthorne and Melville; it is not realism either, but certainly a kind of realism that realizes itself as inadequate to realism, but more than adequate for what it is.

That this sounds like the difficult-to-pin-down temporal presence of Oakland's "no there there"—"there is too much of nothing or there is never enough of anything"—is not a coincidence. It has an imprecise, or rather, a non-mechanistic and non-intellectual sense of experience that is very similar to Henri Bergson's vitalism. The French philosopher most well-known for vitalism in the early twentieth century, Bergson often described vitalistic intuition by its contradictory superlativeness and inadequacy with respect to mechanistic logic. He, too, placed vitality in relation to the past and present, and defined the vital essence of life as duration, "the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances" (C 3). I will, however, distinguish Stein's version of vitalism from that of Bergson's. Her vitalist materialism suggests a kind of pulsating life rather than a continuous flow or duration of life. Further, it reifies neither life nor work, and so presents a different psychological profile than the one Freud does—one that uses signs and symbols, totems and taboos—in order to un-reify and un-petrify them.<sup>22</sup> Stein is closer, both in terms of psychology and philosophy, to her mentor William James.<sup>23</sup> There is no symbol-reading in James, and instead, his psychology and philosophy have a "how-things-work" approach. When it comes to the mechanical he embraces it as something that is inseparable from the psychical, just as he embraces the

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22 Further, Freud's writings on psychology had not much influenced America of the 1890s while Stein attended Radcliffe and studied philosophy and psychology. In his biography on Stein's work, Donald Sutherland notes the major interest in consciousness in American scholarship at that time, as well as Stein's own participation in studies on automatism and attention, but writes that, "Freud and the misconstructions of Freud did not yet count at Radcliffe" (2).

23 Stein writes extensively of her experience with William James and her science and medical education at Radcliffe and Johns Hopkins in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. See especially 77-85.

symbolical as another way for people to think about and live life. Theirs is a vitalism that takes life as candidly as possible.

*Bergson, James, and Stein: Vitalism, the Will to Live, and Horsepower*

Henri Bergson was perhaps the first popular philosopher of the early twentieth century who addressed vitalism explicitly. His background as a scientist, particularly as a cell biologist, made him both critical of his discipline's mathematical logic but also dependent on its logic and its understanding of biological life for his own metaphysics. For Bergson, Life is a “beneficent fluid [that] bathes us,” an “ocean of life, in which we are immersed,” a “Whole,” the substance of which is time (C 123).<sup>24</sup> Its flow courses and carries through one’s entire accumulation of personal, racial, and virtual memory; and it is into this duration that every being, every cell, every germ, every organism, and the universe coheres and dissolves as droplets into the ocean. This is a vitalism that envisions evolution as an upward, transcendent force toward continuity, wholeness, and purity, even as it acknowledges a matching downward force toward discreteness, disintegration, and matter. Its basic premise of evolution is an idea of growth and accumulation that is analogous to that of cell division and reproduction.

Yet this experience of Life as a continuous force and duration is one that the intellect of scientific reasoning cannot know or think because it cuts, isolates, and measures everything into partial, discrete, and static views. Bergson calls this the cinematographical mechanism of ordinary knowledge—a practical mechanism, but one where “[i]nstead of attaching ourselves to the inner becoming of things, we place ourselves outside of them in order to recompose their becoming artificially” (C 195). Opposing mechanism, he posits sympathetic intuition as the alternative, purer access to the “inner becoming of things” that mechanistic intellect cannot perceive from its external and disaggregating perspective. Intuition of vitality fringes the opacity of intellect the way a penumbra hazily suggests the more radiant and spotless source of its emanation underneath the eclipse.

Bergson's emphatic metaphysics were such a strident critique against mechanism and scientific rationalism that it inevitably conspired with the artistic movements of the early twentieth century, but also with the occult mysticisms and the romantic (and often racist) nationalisms of that era.<sup>25</sup> As Pavel Tchelitchev remarked of the 1920s when he lived in Paris and met Gertrude Stein, “Bergson was the great god of the time” (93).<sup>26</sup> Tchelitchev, called

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24 Vitalist philosophies of the early twentieth century were immensely popular, and French philosopher Henri Bergson was probably the most popular in a way that Stein always claimed to be but never was. Embraced as a different way of life than the scientific and mechanistic (both in the industrial and social sense) but also the religious, Bergson’s vitalism has been appropriated by any and every movement spanning the far political left to the far right, by aesthetics, by nationalist and racialist ideologies, by the spiritual occult, and so on. The historical and intellectual relationship between William James and Henri Bergson provides one way to link Bergson and Stein. James’ *A Pluralistic Universe* published the same year as *Three Lives* includes a lecture on “Bergson and His Critique of Intellectualism.” As Donna Jones points out in *The Racial Discourse of Life Philosophy*, however, Stein’s vitalism, as a kind of immediatism, is different from Bergson’s unmediated or demediatized *élan vital*.

25 See Jones, *Racial Discourses of Life Philosophy*. In other words, vitalism offered a more mystical defense of nationalist and racist policies as an alternative to the “scientific” one in social darwinism.

26 Pavel Tchelitchev was a Russian modernist artist who was part of the Paris art scene in the 1920s. Though he later fell out of favor with Stein, he still considered her a great friend and pivotal to his artistic career. The quotes are from the Martin A. Ryerson lecture he gave on February 20, 1951 in connection with an exhibition on Stein, reprinted in *Gertrude Stein Remembered*.



"Tchelitchew" in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and "Tchelitcheff" in Stein's correspondence, was part of a group of young painters who congregated around Stein in the post-WWI era. Of her interest in Tchelitchew, Stein wrote that the "interest gradually increased and then she was bothered" (A 225, 227). In a typically bland but definitive tone, Stein continues that "in order to seize these influences [which make a new movement in art and literature] and create as well as re-create them there needs a very dominating creative power. This the Russian manifestly did not have"—and that is the last of Tchelitchew in the *Autobiography* and presumably the last of him in Stein's thoughts. And what did Stein think of Henri Bergson? Tchelitchew points out their common interest in time and continuity, saying, "Gertrude Stein was very much interested in speed; she was always very much annoyed because I was so slow....I told you about the time when I was in Paris the newest ideas were the investigation of time by Bergson, the ideas about flow of time and continuity....So there was a new element, time" (102). Like Bergson, Stein was interested in time, with what she called the continuous present, and with evolution, genealogy, history, and life, as well as with the trope of cinema for the representation of life.

It would be easy to consider Stein's vitalism as another version of Bergson's, especially when one draws the lines between vitalism and mechanism crudely. Yet Tchelitchew goes on to say, quite affably:

I will tell you something that will surprise you probably. I think Gertrude Stein was very little affected by the ideas of Mr. Bergson. I think she went in a completely different way, and if she repeated, her mind was creating certain patterns....For me she created polyhedra in words, and their repetition and the number of repetitions, have to do something with that. She created new relations between words, between the same words..." (102)

Tchelitchew certainly has a general sense of Stein's disposition and her delight with word games, but he also seems to overlay this personal understanding of Stein with his own philosophical or aesthetic interpretations of Platonic forms. However, his take on the connection, or rather disconnection, between Stein and Bergson is interesting because it does allude to a distaste on Stein's part for Bergsonian vitalism despite (or perhaps because of) superficial similarities in the way they conceive of continuity and the cinematographic mechanism. In fact, though they generally agree on these processes, just as Tchelitchew and Stein might have generally agreed with each other but not enough to be longstanding friends, they are diametrically opposed to one another on how these processes carry or generate vital energy. Bergson's concept of duration carries forward all the time of the past into the present; whereas Stein's continuous present has everything to do with what Bergson criticized as the cut-up cinematographical time of the scientific intellect. If, as Bergson claimed, "...our duration is not merely one instant replacing another; if it were, there would never be anything but the present—no prolonging of the past into the actual, no evolution, no concrete duration," then Stein agreed, saying in "Portraits and Repetition," "By a continuously moving picture of any one there is no memory of any other thing..." (L 176). For Stein, however, there *is* a generative vitality achieved in this duration of nothing but the present, what she considers a kind of movement within a still life or portrait or a revving motor in a stalled car. Such a vitality *does* see and experience life in snapshots, as in "a cinema picture made up of succession and each moment having its own emphasis that is its own difference and so there was the moving and the existence of each moment as it was in me" (L 198). Neither see time as repeating—both see it as continuous—except that for Stein, endurance

is the present continuing and slipping away in discrete units, while for Bergson endurance is the past continuing and accumulating into a totalizing flow.

The difference between Stein and Bergson is comparable to the difference between William James and Bergson; and the similarity between Stein and James is, of course, unsurprising given that James was "the most important person in Gertrude Stein's Radcliffe life" (A 78). James, unlike Stein, however, notably admired Bergson for his willingness to throw out logic and intellectualism, and in *A Pluralistic Universe*, published the same year as *Three Lives*, he appreciatively singles out Bergson and agrees with the French philosopher that rational concepts "fail to connect us with the inner life of the flux [of reality], or with the causes that govern its direction....[and] negate the inwardness of reality altogether" (246). James' radical empiricism, though, leads him to a different version of how one senses reality. Bergson's great example of the failure of reason was Zeno's paradox of never reaching a destination because the space between can be infinitely divided in half. James' counter-reading of this same paradox is instructive; for him, Zeno's paradox is not possible because real change—in time or space—is experienced in discrete units, which cannot but get us closer or farther along. As he puts it:

If all change went thus drop-wise, so to speak, if real time sprouted or grew by units of duration of determinate amount, just as our perception of it grow by pulses, there would be no Zenoian paradoxes or Kantian antinomies to trouble us. All our sensible experiences, as we get them immediately, do thus change by discrete pulses of perception, each of which keeps us saying 'more, more, more' or 'less, less, less,' as the definite increments or diminutions make themselves felt. (P 231).

For Bergson, the discreteness of space and time is an intellectual fallacy; for James, it is how we experience the world. We reach our destination not because of intellectual mechanisms nor because of intuitive sympathy with the flow of time and space, but because we empirically and sensibly move through time and space in discrete units. This is James' radical empiricism, what he calls "our human form of experiencing the world" such that "the absolute sum-total of things may never be actually experienced or realized in that shape at all, and that a disseminated, distributed, or incompletely unified appearance is the only form that reality may yet have achieved" (P 44).

For Bergson, that we reach our destination despite Zeno's paradox is because the intellectual activity of cutting up time and space, which "immobilizes" movement, does not correspond with the real continuity of time and space, which can be felt intuitively rather than intellectually. To describe the intuitive, and even aesthetic, sense of a unitary movement, Bergson uses the syntactical and semantic structure of Melanctha's "more than you know, and less than you think." In an example of moving one's hand from one point to another as an "undivided act," Bergson writes:

In one sense, the movement is more than the positions and their order; for it is sufficient to produce the movement in its indivisible simplicity to secure that the infinity of the successive positions as also their order be given at once, with something else which is neither order nor position but which is the essential thing, its mobility. But, in another sense, the movement is less than the series of positions and their connecting order; for to arrange points in a certain order, it is necessary first to conceive the order and then to realize it with points, there must be the work of assemblage and there must be intelligence, whereas simple movement of the hand contains nothing of either. (C 59)

The "indivisible simplicity" and the "essential thing, its mobility"—that is, *movement*, which we know to be synonymous with vital energy—eludes the metrics of a mechanistic logic of more or

less. On one hand, it is more than successive positions so that intellect lacks what essence provides, and on the other, less than the assemblage of those positions so that intellect offers a synthesis that supercedes essence. Movement as both more and less than its series of positions, the gesture of the hand as more and less than intelligence, shows how intellect stymies itself by its attempt to account for movement by quantitative terms of *more* or *less*. Against the dividing, serializing, and ultimately confounding intellectual logic, which he calls "the cinematographical mechanism," Bergson champions the gestural hand for its intuitive grasp of the world. Given his frequent allusions to poetry or music as vitalist, I see his choice of the "simple movement of a hand" as significant, no less than a synecdoche for the artist's figurative work. He values in all these types of art their gestural or impressionist method of expression, which is, of course, a specific conception of art and its mode of representation.

Art's association with science, however, results in inconsistencies in Bergson's preference for figuration over mechanism, and this becomes apparent in how he sees the horse's gallop in its implication within aesthetic rendering and motion studies. Comparing Phidias' frieze of a galloping horse (or the eye's perception of movement according to ancient Greek science) to photography (of modern science), he writes:

It is the same cinematographical mechanism in both cases but reaches a precision in the second that it cannot achieve in the first. Of the gallop of a horse our eye perceives chiefly, a characteristic, essential or rather schematic attitude, a form that appears to radiate over a whole period and so fill up a time of gallop. It is this attitude that sculpture has fixed on the frieze of the Parthenon. But instantaneous photography isolates any movement; it puts them all in the same rank, and thus the gallop of a horse spreads out, into as many successive attitudes as it wishes, instead of massing into a single attitude, which is supposed to flash out in a privileged moment, and illuminate a whole period. (C 212)

Bergson's obsession with the horse's gallop is telling—it is the most powerful pace of the horse and a symbol of power which takes a gallop to *wholly* symbolize a continuous motion—and it is also the most difficult to scientifically record. Here, both the frieze and the photograph present mechanist attempts to schematize or isolate the gallop, but neither capture the gallop's essential mobility. Yet the gallop itself is also a figure and a physiological movement, a triumvirate of motion, art, and mechanics—in Phidias' frieze, in Muybridge's photographs<sup>27</sup>—and, like many of Bergson's case studies (light, vision, movement, etc), is a selective example that lends itself to being a trope or analogy of vitality. To take an example of art as science, as he does with Phidias' frieze, contradicts Bergson's usual sense of art as vitalism, as when he describes vitality's overall triumph over matter through the gallop:

All the living hold together, and all yield to the same tremendous push. The animal takes its stand on the plant, man bestrides animality, the whole of humanity, in space and in time, is one immense army galloping beside and before and behind each of us in an overwhelming charge able to beat down every resistance and clear the most formidable obstacles, perhaps even death. (C 173)

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27 Many critics associate Marey's chronophotographs with the ones mentioned here by Bergson (see, for example, Rabinbach); they were both colleagues at the Collège de France and Marey had, furthermore, been fascinated with Phidias' frieze as an accidentally accurate representation of the horse's attitude (see Marey, "A Study in Locomotion"). However, Muybridge's motion studies, arrayed in their grids, are a better representation of the "spreading out" and cinematographical mechanism that Bergson refers to, and they are also a better example from which to draw out the engagements of both art and science in its vitalism. Marta Braun has suggested that Bergson may have conflated Marey and Muybridge in his reference here (Q&A Session, 6 April 2012).

His flourishing return to the gallop as a figure for creative evolution suggests that art's overcoming of mechanism is more powerful than even his articulation of it as a science. The figure of the gallop represents the amassing of consciousness in time and *carries* with it the entire force of intuition and duration as an essential attitude of multiplicity—"one immense army." The gallop is the symbol of vitality *and* a symbol of aesthetic symbolism as vitality, for the gallop is also the metaphoric and analogic structure upon which Bergson's version of vitality is based. It melts every example of vitality into the next, and just as psychic states are continuous becoming, so, too, is movement, and so, too, is evolution itself.<sup>28</sup>

For Bergsonian vitalism, life and matter are dual forces. Life must seat itself within matter—consciousness must adapt itself to cerebral structures and mechanisms—but its transcendent force is able to exceed those bounds at moments of intuitive awareness. *Creative Evolution* is something of an opus to the triumph of mind over matter—specifically that of the intuitive and figurative human mind over its intellectual grasp of matter. The full passage of the previous quote, which ends his third section on "The Meaning of Life," comes with this fanfare:

At one point alone [Life] passes freely, dragging with it the obstacle which will weigh on its progress but will not stop it. At this point is humanity; it is our privileged situation. On the other hand, this rising wave is consciousness, and like all consciousness, it includes potentialities [*virtualités*] without number which interpenetrate... On flows the current, running through human generations, subdividing itself into individuals... Thus souls are continually being created, which, nevertheless, in a certain sense pre-existed. They are nothing else than the little rills into which the great river of life divides itself, flowing through the body of humanity. The movement of the stream is distinct from the river bed, although it must adopt its winding course. Consciousness is distinct from the organism it animates, although it must undergo its vicissitudes... Finally, consciousness is essentially free; it is freedom itself; but it cannot pass through matter without settling on it, without adapting itself to it: this adaptation we call intellectuality...

...But such a doctrine does not only facilitate speculation; it gives us also more power to act and to live. For, with it, we feel ourselves no longer isolated in the nature that it dominates. As the smallest grain of dust is bound up with our entire solar system, drawn along with it in that undivided movement of descent which is materiality itself, so all

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28 Andreas Mayer points out in "The Physiological Circus" that the motion studies of horses, which began as a debate in France over dressage (the training and riding of horses), led to discussions about the efficacy of physiological approaches to art. The influence of the instantaneous photographs of Etienne-Jules Marey and Edward Muybridge on the painter Meissonier of the French realist school have been well-documented (Meissonier carefully studied horses in order to paint them, and even corrected previous paintings after studying the photographs of Marey and Muybridge), but Mayer points out that the response to the relation between physiological research and art was hardly settled.

The Germans, especially, seemed to coincide with Bergson's opinion that art valuably depicted something that instantaneous photography could not. Ernst Wilhelm Ritter von Brücke, a physiologist at the Berlin Akademie der Bildenden Künste, wrote, for example: "The artist does not depict an arbitrary moment of movement [as does instantaneous photography], but rather that which would leave behind the clearest memory image in the beholder if the movement were to occur before his eyes. When he must select from moments of equal value, he selects either the one that is most characteristic for the action ... or the one that fits best on the basis of artistic, of aesthetic considerations. Here he must make connections with memory images in the beholder that correspond with earlier visual impressions. When the impulse has been given and given properly, it is the psychical activity of the beholder that breathes life into the work of art" (in Mayer 113, from Brücke's 1891 book, though Mayer charts the discussion beginning in the 1880s). The major difference between Brücke and Bergson, however, is that for Brücke, the gallop represented in art is a question of perception (beauty—or in this case, power—is in the eye of the beholder) while for Bergson, the gallop is quintessentially power.

organized beings, from the humblest to the highest, from the first origins of life to the time in which we are, and in all places as in all times, do but evidence a single impulsion, the inverse of the movement of matter, and in itself indivisible. All the living hold together, and all yield to the same tremendous push. The animal takes its stand on the plant, man bestrides animality, the whole of humanity, in space and in time, is one immense army galloping beside and before and behind each of us in an overwhelming charge able to beat down every resistance and clear the most formidable obstacles, perhaps even death. (C 172-73)

The will to live that here charges forth is one that rides upon the wave of the great Chain of Being, an earlier eighteenth century theory that held species as connected to one another in ascendant links of greater and greater superiority. In all the flotsam and jetsam of species, organisms evolving in the flow of time, there is only human intuition that is conscious of these flows, that is, of the potentialities or virtualities of life endlessly differentiating and amassing its duration. This is a *creative* evolution of a psychic energy or impulsion, rather than a species evolution charted by taxonomy. For Bergson, this stream of consciousness is one great stream of consciousness, one great flow of Life; there are no enclosures in this river, and there are also no individuals.

The euphoria of Bergson's vision, the triumph and orchestral sweep of that panorama of Life, can easily carry one away as one is no doubt meant to be carried away. The grandiosity of his language lies also in the way he brings everything into one continuous swell of genesis—individuals, souls, rills, streams, dust, and the solar system, plants, animals, humans. The dissimilarities implicit in the nature of metaphors are stripped away by an analogizing and leveling that fuses everything into a continuous flow unhindered by the frisson of comparison and difference.<sup>29</sup> Nothing divides one being from another any more than one rill from the current. But more specifically, this great stream of consciousness is figured as "one immense army galloping...in an overwhelming charge able to beat down every resistance and clear the most formidable obstacles, perhaps even death." The privilege that Bergson associates with the symbolic gallop is also the same privilege that he allots to humans for their intuitive and non-intellectual consciousness. The gallop and the stream of collective human intuition are one essential attitude of life continuous with one another just as the gallop itself is one monologic, continuous movement. In other words, the metaphor of the continuity of movement and the experience or perception of that movement as continuous (in the gallop) merges with the analogy to the continuity of all life. Monologic continuity is the form of intuition and the movement that Life experiences and perceives, and it is the relation that merges all life into one single, forward-charging immensity.

Opposed to this continuity of movement and life is the cinematographical mechanism of discontinuity in movement and pulse. For Bergson, instantaneous photographs that divide and break singular movements into a series of isolated positions exemplify this mechanism. That the first instantaneous photographs were taken by Edward Muybridge of a horse in motion corroborates the gallop as a symbol of the will to live during Muybridge's and Bergson's time. For Bergson, the horse's gallop is the ultimate expression of human progress in psychic or

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29 This is everywhere apparent in the way Bergson uses analogies in both his writing (through analogies and metaphor as in the quote referenced here) and his argument as evidence of creative evolution. Biological analogies in organ structures between disparate species, such as the eye organ across multiple species, is Bergson's emblematic example of a common and open-ended vital impulse that he believes cannot be explained by mechanistic explanations of cause-and-effect nor finalistic explanations of intelligent design or adaptation.

creative evolution, though certainly analogized with biological or technological development. In the late 1800s, "horsepower" was the term used to label units of power, especially that of engines, and so the horse was a common index, but also icon, of the power or animating and generative force in all things. The vitality that Bergson perceives as amassing in the immense galloping army is a version of this horsepower. Yet while Bergson might see horsepower as continuously building and developing from the horse's gallop, merging animality with human vitality, horsepower in Muybridge's photographs present a different picture of vitality.

For Muybridge, the horse was truly racing against time. In hiring him to photograph and determine the paces of a galloping horse, Stanford's interests were motivated by horse racing as a sport. In a very literal way, the horse made no progress in racing—it merely ran circles around a track—and its utility in a primarily recreational activity reveals its decline against new inventions in transport vehicles. By the end of the century, growing interest in automobile technology and motors measured, of course, in horsepower would herald a new age. Turn-of-the-century trade journals included "Horseless Age" and "Motor Age," and early automobile manufacturers staged long-distance reliability runs to advertise their motor cars.<sup>30</sup> Yet despite this "decline" against the automobile, horses were not dead, not obsolete in any sense, for they continued and continue to race. And so to photograph a horse in motion was to photograph something that was neither progress nor death in the definitive sense. It was not progress because the horse did not go anywhere, and yet it was moving; and it was not death because even though it was dying, it was still life. The photograph of a horse was a photograph of what could not be represented; that is, of what it represented negatively—pure, vectorless motion and power. Horsepower, in Muybridge's photographs, is what is broken up, stilted, and jilted—it is what is not there.

It is this version of horsepower that Melanctha has when she breaks her arm. In all her daring and bold flirtations, what Melanctha truly wants is the actual experience of power. And power, whether one calls it horsepower or labor power or the will to live, is the central motif of *Three Lives*. Although each of the women express or relate to power in a different way—the Good Anna controls others' moral behavior, Lena submits gently to social norms—power is most dramatized in "Melanctha" where it is explicitly described as what Melanctha craves and what she learns through her experiences. The first mention of power in "Melanctha" introduces the father that she hates even though she "love[s] very well the power in herself that came through him" (T 56). Here, power seems to be the blackness, coarseness, and virility of James Herbert—a crude and primitive power that expresses itself as anger and in bloody fights. In Melanctha, however, the power translates into a "break neck courage" that appears over and over in the following sequence that begins with the introduction of her "big black virile" father and ends with his angry response to her broken arm:

The young Melanctha did not love her father and her mother, and she had a break neck courage, and a tongue that could be very nasty. (T 57)

Melanctha had always a break neck courage. Melanctha always loved to be with horses; she loved to do wild things, to ride the horses and to break and tame them. (T 57)

She held out and never answered anything [her father] asked her, for Melanctha had a breakneck courage and she just then badly hated her black father. (T 59)

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30 See James Flink, *The Automobile Age*, for a history of the development of the automotive industries in the U.S.

Sometimes Melanctha would do something of these things that had much danger, and always with such men, she showed her power and her break neck courage. Once she slipped from a high place. A workman caught her and so she was not killed, but her left arm was badly broken. (*T* 64)

Melanctha's power in each of these moments can be constellated with a different array of terms. In the first, her courage has to do with an adolescent insolence and sassiness. In the second, the daring is a physical activity rather than an intellectual one—of *doing* wild things, not merely saying wild things. The third takes Melanctha's wildness and gives it an overtly sexual connotation for what James Herbert scolds her for is for using "her power as a woman" (*T* 59). By the fourth instance, when Melanctha ventures onto a construction site and breaks her arm in a fall, her courage has to do with the willingness to immerse herself in the "strong moving power" of the a work site, of putting herself among working men and daring to be a part of a larger production that is both industrial and sexual. However, all these versions of power in Melanctha—intellectual, physical, sexual, and industrial—are denoted by the same phrase of "break neck courage."

Breakneck courage is certainly synonymous with power, but it is also a particular expression of power, a separation that Stein marks in the last passage by distinguishing between "break neck courage" and "power." To be breakneck is to be extremely fast—racing horses gallop at breakneck speeds—and Melanctha's quickness is both her quick-wittedness in talking back to her parents and chatting with men but also her sensual quickening and springing into liveliness. "Break neck courage," in other words, is the same kind of horsepower as in Muybridge's photograph of the horse in motion; both signify a speed and power that is so extreme and vertiginous that it breaks itself or can only be represented by its breaking. Breakneck quickness is what breaks the very signification of "breakneck" into "break neck"—a broken word and a broken limb.

It is also noteworthy that Melanctha's breakneck courage manifests itself as an adolescent energy, something that characterizes "the four years of her beginning as a woman" (*T* 65). The four different aspects of breakneck courage in the preceding passages might be seen as different moments of her maturation; however, the movement from intellectual to physical to sexual to industrial do not really present clear developmental stages and nor are they mutually exclusive in any of the instances. Instead, they are four moments taken over time that simply show change and "her beginning" again and again with a different pattern or constellation of terms each time. The breaking *of* something or the breaking *into* something registers a change or shift to a new state, but not necessarily a better state. It registers movement, but not a progression. In this sense, the "break" in break neck courage has more to do with a transformative energy. "Break neck courage" stands out as a qualitative aspect of Melanctha rather than "power" precisely for the reason that the subject of *Three Lives* is the breaking—the change, transfer, or motion of energy—rather than a reified vehicle of power, such as the horse or Melanctha herself. Breaking the horse is to break the symbol of power, just as breaking the word "breakneck" into two is to break a symbol. But these broken symbols and limbs are not signs of demise or obsolescence or failure; their breaking into *parts* enacts change and transformation. And so the tracking of Melanctha's "break neck courage" is a tracking of her transformative experience of breaking apart from others and breaking herself apart.

So Melanctha "had a break neck courage," "had always a break neck courage," "had a breakneck courage," "showed her power and her break neck courage." Each of these references to break neck courage perform Stein's serial method of introduction; each time we are introduced

to Melanctha's break neck courage as though it were the first time we encounter her break neck courage. Yet each description is slightly different, as it captures Melanctha at a different moment in her life, just as each photograph of the horse in motion is slightly different as it captures the horse in a different position along the track. There is perhaps no better example of Stein's motion studies than in this quickening, in all its kaleidoscopic senses, of Melanctha through her "break neck courage."

The vitality that Stein's and Muybridge's motion studies present does not accumulate into a continuous motion but breaks into discontinuous paces. And yet, this discontinuity between one pace to the next is exactly what gets one from one place to another, what makes the motion *move* across space and time in James' explanation of Zeno's paradox. Stein shares James' sense of discreteness and pulse, and each life in *Three Lives* is measured out in parts. The breaks between and within each story must be read in relation to the breakneck courage of Melanctha. For example, to break and tame horses, as Melanctha does with wild things, corresponds to the breaking in "The Good Anna" or "Gentle Lena." Breaking horses seems to encompass both the kind of dominating force of the good Anna and the submitting to forces that the gentle Lena exhibit; whether one dominates or submits, one is broken down by an overbearing force of life like Bergson's galloping army. However, if the breakdowns of Anna and Lena—and Melanctha—are read as transformative breaks, we can understand their lives as particular and concrete lives, rather than as continuous with or subsumed by a symbolic life.

All three women are working-class women whose lives are not exactly atypical, but neither are they typical. Their lives are, like Melanctha's phrase to Jeff, more than a stereotype but less than a symbol, more than you know and less than you think. This is not Bergson's metaphysics which is both more than the asymptotic measuring and cutting of science and less than that precision. For him there is something beyond counting out discrete snapshots of a life, something which is Life in its infinite potential, virtuosity, and flow. Stein's more and less is more or less what it is. It is superficially similar to Bergson's more and less because both reject an intellectual experience of movement and life, but where Bergson turns to intuition and continuity, Stein relies on an experience that includes, rather than discounts, discontinuity. At the same time, these discontinuities do not definitively add up or subtract down the way James' "more, more, more" or "less, less, less" can move across a distance. Stein's "more and less" doesn't get anywhere at all; instead it goes back and forth in a way that wholly transforms the working life. Anna, Melanctha, and Lena are not empowered in the sense of amassing and hoarding power, to lord it over others or fail destitute; they are empowered to live and empowered to die, discretely and discreetly, moment to moment and one from the other one.<sup>31</sup> Breaking the horse is to break the horse's gallop into paces and to register experience as

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31 The principle of growth in Bergson's version of power is a cumulative force. In *Pure Immanence*, Deleuze follows Bergson in his reading of Nietzsche's will to power as based on a principle growth; however, he distinguishes between a negative and reactive will to dominate and an affirmative will to create. Yet, I am not sure if the infinite creative force that Deleuze sees in the will to power can actually exclude an oppressive effect. Certainly, one *can* read *Three Lives* as a creative evolution that oppresses Anna, Melanctha, and Lena. However, it lacks the sense of growth and innovation in Bergson's descriptions of creative evolution. The will in *Three Lives* is neither a Bergsonian nor Nietzschean will to power, but perhaps a will to live—a will to inhabit the world for a space of time and no more. The difference between these two versions of vitality is similar to the difference between progression and succession or between wealth measured by productivity (as growth of output per worker) or by prosperity (economic well-being, which, of course, is more difficult to measure by any means, though it *does* include some measure of productivity among other variables).



transformative and particular, as more or less what it is. Of this life in paces, or rather in pulses, James writes:

In the pulse of inner life immediately present now in each of us is a little past, a little future, a little awareness of our own body, of each other's person, of these sublimities we are trying to talk about, of the earth's geography and the direction of history, of truth and error, of good and bad, and of who knows how much more? (*P* 286)

How much more? More than you know and less than you think.

### *Work Again*

"For we are not pans and barrows, nor even porters of the fire and torch-bearers, but children of the fire, made of it, and only the same divinity transmuted, and at two or three removes, when we know least about it." - Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Poet"

In defining Stein's continuous present, and the experience of the world, as discrete pulses of life, I return to the question of labor which is the most immediately identifiable way that *Three Lives* is a study of motion—the study of the labor-power which, in Marx's words, is the "aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in the physical form, the living personality, of a human being, capabilities which he *sets in motion* whenever he produces a use-value of any kind" (*C* 270; italics added). The motion of life experienced in discrete paces would seem to corroborate the approach of an entire system of labor organization which, under the name of the "American System of Manufacturing," and later, "Taylorism," has broken down every work process into discrete, economical steps suitable for machines and mechanized human labor. Stein's well-known love affair with the Ford automobile is indicative of the vitalist love affair with mechanistic modes of production that I earlier called the vitalist materialism of a particularly American genealogy. Barrett Watten sees the relationship between Stein and the Fordism represented by her Ford motor car as an analogy (of similar functions or methods of repetition), claiming that "Stein saw in Ford's modern poetics of repetition a mode of production that was, in explicitly literary terms, analogous to her modernist one" (124). In this way, the modernism that Stein presents is not opposed to the modernity of Ford's America, but a mediation within it; and one can extend this to say that Stein's work is both complicit with and critical of its commodity status. I would argue that Stein's mode of production is only a mediation of Fordism insofar as it mediates the understanding of motion that both Stein's writing and Ford's assembly line were based upon. Their resemblance to one another is one of homology rather than analogy (evolving from the same historical moment and means but functioning differently). The insistence and continuous present of Stein's writing does more than critique Fordist production and the subsumption of labor into capital; by being its own motion studies, *Three Lives* also demonstrates a nontotalizing, noncumulative way of accounting for labor and the reproduction of life.

Stein returned to the tropes of work, motors, and women—especially as aunts and servants—in a poem written during 1917 when she and Alice B. Toklas helped with the war effort through the American Fund for the French Wounded (AFFW). Stein referred to the assignment of setting up supply depots and delivering medical supplies to hospitals in Rivesaltes and Pergignan of southern France as their "war work" (*A* 189), and I think it is important to go to this moment of "work" in Stein's life to glean from it a theory of labor power set in motion whose vitalism coincides, in part, with Marx's. If *Three Lives* was the first time Stein wrote

about work, "Work Again,"<sup>32</sup> as its title indicates, was a reprise of that subject. Driving a new Ford Model T, which Stein named Aunt Pauline after one of her own aunts, they worked from April through the summer of that year.

Yet what kind of "work" was this for Stein and Toklas? Neither of them ever truly went to work in the working-class sense of the word, and they later joked about working as chauffeur and cook in the "straitened" post-war years when they returned to Paris after their charity work. There is a sense that the necessities and obligations that the war brought to bear on their work in southern France drove home an experience that was neither the vacation in the Palma de Mallorca where they had at first gone to escape the war nor the everyday, domestic life at 24 rue de fleurus they had left and to which they would return. What they did as "war work" was service; just as the soldiers they assisted were in military service, they, too, were in service on behalf of the AFFW. Service, as we have seen in *Three Lives*, is unproductive and deteriorating—one works and works and dies. In service, one gives one's life up to the work of maintaining life, but if that is the case, then what are we left with?

"Work Again" begins with a spurring address to the automobile and its occupants:

Fasten it fat we say Aunt Pauline.

Not snow now nor that in between.

Now we are bold. (1-3)

The automobile is both a caring aunt—a deliverer of food, medicine, and comfort—and a strapping workhorse loaded to its carrying capacity. Traveling through the end of the spring snow into bright summer days, Stein anoints the motoring trip with the air of adventure and even patriotic fervor. Her "Hurrah for America," which ends this section, marks the entrance of America into World War II, and so both the hurrah and the spur signal a sense of beginning and quickening. Like Melanctha, they are bold and fascinated with both the mechanical and feminine power that can, in this case, literally deliver vital supplies. They, too, quicken: "Girls are. / Women" (7-8). And watch machines with rapt attention: "I see a mountain wheeler / I see a capstan. / I see a straight. / I see a rattle. / All things are breathing" (10-14). These lines, with their abrupt, declarative sentences, are usual for Stein's style at the time, what Cyrena Pondrom characterizes as "the 'voices' style," which "minimizes sentences, often uses short lines, 'lists' [and is] very hermetic" (lvii). But they are also an expression of incremental change divided into periods—the enjambment and punctuation of "Girls are. / Women." being the most obvious. The anaphoric lines describing the machine in motion breaks the movement into parts—"capstan"—then edges—"straight"—and finally mere sound—"rattle." And the conclusion of all these breakings is a complete spiritedness—the vitality of all things breathing, respiring. This aerial energy continues to merge with machines, particularly the Ford, in another section where wind, automobile, and girls again combine:

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32 Published in *Geography and Plays* in 1922. A revised version of "Work Again" appeared as "The Work" in *Bee Time Vine*, which was published posthumously in 1953. However, Virgil Thomson notes that "The Work" had been written for and published in the AFFW's *Bulletin* in 1917. Thus, it is possible that the "again" in "Work Again" comes from the poem being a second take on "The Work." I would agree with Richard Bridgman in *Gertrude Stein in Pieces*, however, that "The Work" was written after "Work Again," and further that it is an adulterated version of "Work Again" whose additional glosses detract from the first poem. As Bridgman puts it, quite hilariously: "The original, unexplained statement stimulates more interest than does the glossed version, for there the imagination is at least free. Since there is no evidence that these glosses of her ambiguous prose were intended to be satirical, the glimpses they afford into the mind of Gertrude Stein during the period of her obscurity are not propitious. The mind that so expresses itself is not only commonplace, but compared to the Radcliffe student, actually regressive" (157).

Do you like flags.  
Blue flags smell sweetly.  
Blue flags in a whirl.  
The wind blows.  
The automobile goes.  
Can you guess boards.  
Wood.  
Can you guess hoops.  
Barrels.  
Can you guess girls.  
Servants. (67-77)

The overriding sense of the experience is one of sensuality. As in the previous section, the turning and swirling movement of the machine also describes the movement of air, and the combinative and synesthetic power of the whirl encompasses all the actors and actions involved—military flags, automobile, and girls, smelling flags and seeing rattles. Like Bergson, Stein envisions vitality as an army of sorts—but one that is at once more sensual and less substantial than the horse or the automobile, the girls, or even the flags of an army. Against this vitality, Stein asks in the last section "Barrels":

In comparison what are horses.  
Compared with that again what are bells.  
You mean horns. No I mean noises. (241-43)

Though some critics have noted Stein's celebration of her automobile, and perhaps the Americanism and Fordism of that automobile, I am not so sure that the signifier of power is so stable in her rhetoric.<sup>33</sup> If the breaking of the horse carries through with the breaking of the automobile into bells and whistles, and finally into sound as in the first section, then the automobile is no more a signifier of power than the horse. For these are only servants—automobiles, girls, and barrels—all-purpose containers for carrying vitality; and power itself is elusive—"We are not mighty / Nor merry. / We are happy. / Very" (86-89).

If vitality, for Stein, is not might; if it is a happiness that is not merriness, what is it? What vitality is left when the horse expires, and the bells and horns? What kind of spiritedness is this vitality? And is it worth the work of it? Especially coming from someone who sees that work as temporary, an adventure—"in the meantime"—rather than an entire working life? In one of the interludes of "Work Again," while waiting for permissions to go through or perhaps even the war to end, Stein writes:

We wait.  
We come.  
In that way we feel.  
And is it useless.  
It is not useless.  
Saturday.  
Statutory.  
In that case.  
In that case what.  
Are you satisfied.  
Certainly with me.

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33 See, for example, Watten's "Bride of the Assembly Line" in *The Constructivist Moment*.

Then we have the use of it.

Indeed yes.

We are agreed.

In the case of mothers.

Aunt Pauline. (133-48)

The short lines of this section seem to punctuate every second of the waiting. The speakers go back and forth, question and answer, agree and conclude, as time ticks on. One must imagine Gertrude and Alice outside the office of some French official on a Saturday afternoon, Gertrude sitting in the car waiting with the motor running, Alice going down to see if anyone is there. How much time did they spend waiting doing their "war work"? Waiting for the war, waiting for others, waiting on others, waiting with others. Their waiting puts them in a category with mothers and aunts who wait on their children, with cars who wait on their drivers, but also with soldiers who wait at battlefronts, chauffeurs who wait for their riders. Waiting is a kind of readiness, and it singles out the attention that work and the getting ready for work requires. To wait is to attend to something or someone; to wait is to serve. Bryony Randall argues that, for Stein, attentiveness is a "constant engagement with the ongoing patterns and rhythms of the home and of course the body" (115) and a "working *on*, modifying energetically without destroying or reaching an end" (120). By resituating professional work in the domestic via this "everyday" attention, Randall also suggests that Stein challenges conventional, gendered definitions of work and shows some affinities to Bergson's sense of temporality. Likewise, war work in "Work Again" is not only a "man's job," but also a kind of everyday, domestic labor.

This work has certain vitalist qualities—attendance, feeling, and usefulness—for to wait is to attend, to feel, and to be not useless, all of which finally constellate around a kernel of breath or a certain air—spirit. In their acceptance of work, Stein and Toklas are satisfied—filled with some "right spirit":

The right spirit. There are difficulties and they must  
be met in the right spirit.

This is an illustration of the difficulties we have in  
many ways.

Then we go on.

I have made up my mind not to be excited.

In speeding I speed. (262-68)

Much of this has to do with putting to use their car and their not-so-adroit skills as drivers and carriers in the war effort. The vitality offered by this *use* rests upon Stein's final line in the above section: "Aunt Pauline." Auntie settles the case of use—that waiting is useful after all—that a car with its motor going without going somewhere is vitality, that a woman working without getting anywhere is vitality. They are unproductive and shifting, shifty things, but they are useful; Aunt Pauline is a car, but she has the "right spirit." Coincidentally, Frederick seems to exhort the same with her maxim: "*Cultivate right feeling about work*—be contented, enthusiastic, optimistic" (514). Yet it is crucial to recall that Frederick's "right feeling" attempts to compensate for the humdrum of Taylorist tasks and exercises efficiency to make up time and energy for self-improvement during leisure time. Stein's "right spirit," on the other hand, is attentive in its *idleness* and useful in its wasteful futility and everydayness as when an engine idles in neutral gear—ready, motor running—going and becoming for no end.

"Work Again," if an illustration of the difficulties they met while delivering medical supplies in the spring and summer of 1917, is about the suppressed complaints about the food

they had in hotels, the misunderstandings and mistranslations of communicating in French, and the ordeals of driving, reversing, speeding, stopping, starting, finding gasoline, and so on.<sup>34</sup> What it really is is an illustration of "[t]he right spirit" with which one meets such difficulties. The kind of air or flourish with which one meets a task, meets a person on the street, in a casino, or at a table. In the *Autobiography*, Stein explains this spirit in an anecdote about why the men they encountered on the road were always willing to help them, writing:

This faculty of Gertrude Stein of having everybody do anything for her puzzled the other drivers of the organisation. Mrs. Lathrop who used to drive her own car said that nobody did those things for her. It was not only soldiers, a chauffeur would get off the seat of a private car in the place Vendôme and crank Gertrude Stein's old ford for her. Gertrude Stein said the others looked so efficient, of course nobody would think of doing anything for them. Now as for herself she was not efficient, she was good humoured, she was democratic, one person was as good as another, and she knew what she wanted done. If you are like that she says, anybody will do anything for you. The important thing, she insists, is that you must have deep down as the deepest thing in you a sense of equality.

Then anybody will do anything for you. (A 174)

The vitality that Stein is left with, the vitality that anybody would do anything for, would help another on the road for, serve another in a restaurant for, give up one's own life for, is this "right spirit" of having a sense of equality with another. I would give you my life because you are as good as I am. This is not Taylor's one brute is as good as another since all we need is for him to carry a load or switch a lever. Nor is it a sentimental form of pity that extends its hand to those perceived as weaker, helpless, or feminine. The interchangeability of parts in Stein's spirit is based on a fundamental inefficiency in humans, not an ideal or culture of efficiency nor a culture of feeling. It is because we all lack that we do for others; it is because we are equally deficient and dying a little each day that we live for others just as they live for us. I live for you because you live for me; I die for you because you die for me. The absolute candor of these approaches was perhaps made apparent by the war-time conditions in which Stein and Toklas found themselves. Despite the difference in subjects, the difference between you and me, the verbs are equivalent to one another, live and live, die and die. Stein sees the activity of labor as having this equivalence and plainness—we all do and so we do. In doing we do. In speeding, we speed. This equivalence or equality is the basis of labor—of motion.

Further, Stein's "right spirit" stresses another aspect of labor—that of *meeting* others. Stein's theory of labor depends upon a relation in which the worker and the patron, or the driver and the car, meet one another as living persons even when there may be difficulties in doing so. Many of the episodes in "Work Again," are in fact performances of mistranslation between French and English, and the "difficulties" that they meet on the road are as much the people as the car mechanics. Indeed, "unproductive" labor always serves a *person*, a peer, and some one—human or nonhuman—who lives by virtue of the services rendered, the transactions completed,

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34 Many of the episodes in "Work Again," are in fact performances of mistranslation between French and English. In the section "Kindly call a brother," they seem to have met a curé to whom Stein says, "I speak french" (104). In the talk of "fish" and "wonders," their efforts are compared to Jesus' miracles of feeding the multitude. In another section, "How did you pronounce it", they seem to be speaking to or about French soldiers who "have fought so hard and so well" and are astonished that they "should pick yellow irises and fish in a stream" (398). In a series of lines that play around homophones *flower* and *flour*, Stein confuses camelias, roses, pansies, as pinks that are flowers with the flour in cookies and doughnuts. Although she speaks French, it is clear that translation between French and English can become a tangle of words, especially when "[s]he always makes a mistake / In french" (226-27).

the communiqués released. Vitality, for Stein, is a matter of spirit, of how one meets another person, whether you know this person or not, in France or in America, for business or for pleasure, for duty or for charity. It isn't a matter of time since one could be waiting all day for someone or something to arrive; nor is it a matter of continuity and identity since one could very well meet someone anew even if they had met before; and neither is it a matter of understanding since we meet people and things we do not understand all the time. Vitality is how we meet another being as a living person every time, time and again.

Where Stein's spirit of equality acknowledges a difference—a difficulty—and a meeting between you and I, Bergson's interest in a consciousness able to intuit time as duration restores and resolves everything into a monologic flow of vitality—of movement, of psychic energy. There is, in effect, no true sense of individual personality in his *élan vital*.<sup>35</sup> Vitality is, in Bergson's words, "a wholly dynamic process, not unlike the purely qualitative way in which an anvil, if it could feel, would realize a series of blows from a hammer" (*T* 123) or, again, much like "when we hear a series of blows of a hammer, [and] the sounds form an indivisible melody in so far as they are pure sensations, and, here again, give rise to a dynamic process" (*T* 125). I choose, of course, these examples of vitalism in the hammer and anvil because they are the closest that Bergson gets to speaking of mechanical work as having any vitality. It is only, however, in the perception of the blows as melody that labor may be revived, and this perception belongs to a highly impersonal and nonhuman anvil or a detached observer. The worker is, in fact, wholly absent from his formulation. For Bergson, then, vitalism and mechanism remain opposed to one another as music or dance is to work (for work is only vital when it *is* music or dance) and impossibly reconciled in a disembodied anvil of human consciousness. Bergson's duration is that of a consciousness that perceives flow, loses its bodily matter, and *becomes* flow—"a wholly dynamic process"—an ongoing melting, fusing, resolving into itself.

Stein's motion studies, however, see movement in discontinuity, life in parts, and art in mechanical work. Her "right spirit" has to do with meeting *others* and not resolving everything into an easy whole. When Stein names her car "Auntie," she does not greet her Aunt Pauline but this Aunt Pauline. To meet someone as a person is perhaps the most difficult thing one can do; and when that someone is a machine or an alienating system or an artwork, it is even more difficult, but should we not hold both humans and nonhumans to the same standard of meeting some one as a person?<sup>36</sup> In Aunt Pauline, both the renaming and the remeeting of a person and a machine, we have the coincidence of meeting and revivifying that constitutes Stein's labor. Labor can never be done in a vacuum or even done for oneself—it is always in service of someone, even in love with someone, but a love that is neither romantic nor erotic, but perhaps

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35 The implications of Bergson's analogizing vitality also surfaces in readings on the moment of life before death. See Deleuze's *Pure Immanence* and Georges Poulet's "Bergson: The Theme of the Panoramic Vision of the Dying and Juxtaposition." Vitality flickers as an impersonal singularity in the former and a relaxation and dissolution of the self in the latter.

36 In "Where are the Missing Masses? The Sociology of a Few Mundane Artifacts," Latour reevaluates the constituents of society to include both human and nonhumans while driving in a car and noticing the work done by its seat belts, warning lights, and safety handles or bars. Each of these mechanisms are, in effect, characters, and Latour thinks of engineers as "authors of these subtle plots and scenarios of dozens of delegated and interlocking characters so few people know how to appreciate" (241) and machines as nontalking actors who "remain silent to become agreeable to their fellow machines and fellow humans" (249). As Latour demonstrates, there is something profoundly literary about machines, and the examples I have chosen of Stein's vitalism—Melanctha and Aunt Pauline—reveal themselves as both literary characters and mechanisms who deserve to be included in such a sociology.

merely love.<sup>37</sup> This is Stein's answer to why we do the things we do, why we live at all, and why art lives and why it lives for us. That kind of work is unproductive and yet lively, and of such motions that what liveliness there is is miserable—or inspiring. It is a broken life, a stereotypical and partial life, but it is also *a* life that is breaking and breaking and breaking and breaking. Can we understand these mixed terms? No, but we can call it Aunt Pauline who "behave[s] fairly well most times if she [is] properly flattered" (*A* 172). Stein's vitalism equivocates and modulates rather than instigates a situation. If we accept vitality in machines, portraits, cinema, and series production, how do we acknowledge the casualties—cows, horses, women, men, but also trains, bells, horns, bones, hoofs, and zoetropes—of their technique? If we refuse vitality in those things, how do we go on? "Then we go on." "Indeed there are barrels."<sup>38</sup> Moving, working, pulsing, breathing, posing and going.

To leave it at that—unreconciled and unresolved—is a way to leave things open for vitality. It is also a way, I think, for Stein's genius to chide itself for its Americanness, for its ingenuity and its love of machines. There is no straightforward movement in this posing and going, and one way to love Stein is meet her on those terms—the terms of not knowing and not understanding:

Other peoples say they do or do not understand something but Americans do worry about understanding or not understanding something....The only thing that anybody can understand is mechanics and that is what makes everybody feel that they are something when they talk about it....That is the reason that everybody thinks machines are so wonderful they are only wonderful because they are the only thing that stays the same thing to any and every one and therefore one can do without them, why not, after all you cannot exist without living and living is something that nobody is able to understand while you can exist without machines it has been done but machines cannot exist without you that makes machines seem to do what they do....Some day Americans will find out something about not understanding anything but will they like then I am wondering. (*E* 252)

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37 *Three Lives*, we might also say, is three stories in some way about love, but particularly love where romance fails—between Mrs. Lehnman and Anna, between Melanctha and Jeff, between Lena and herself because she does not even know what romance is. The love that is leftover after romance fades is the love that Stein is interested in—ordinary, everyday love.

38 Stein "Work Again" 266, 292.

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