

SECONDARY AUTHORSHIP: AESTHETICS AND THE IDEA OF MASS CULTURE
IN THE UNITED STATES, 1835-1866

by

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Abstract

My dissertation examines popular authorship in the antebellum United States. Following the print explosion of the 1830s, American authors found themselves participating in a slowly emerging mass print culture. While most scholars agree that massification proper did not characterize the production, circulation, and consumption of popular literature until after the Civil War, I argue that the *idea* of mass culture emerged in the antebellum decades. The idea that reading could be a mass-scale phenomenon provoked many antebellum authors to attend to the material effects of reading, while their relative freedom from institutional constraints enabled these same authors a degree of pre-culture industrial experimentation that was unique to the antebellum period. The title of my dissertation, “Secondary Authorship,” refers to a loss of confidence in the idea of authorship as origination; authorship in antebellum America, I argue, was a circular game of observing the effects of writing and experimenting in their causes.

My first chapter analyzes Edgar Allan Poe’s recasting of Kantian disinterest in terms of mass interest in his short tale “Berenice.” In my second chapter, I extend Poe’s theory of interest to a consideration of antebellum city mysteries fiction, and, in particular, to the reformist poetics of George Lippard’s *The Quaker City*. My third chapter reads Herman Melville’s *Pierre; or, the Ambiguities* as ambivalent about its participation in mass reading. Finally, my fourth chapter examines the “minor” relation to Emersonian Transcendentalism that Louisa May Alcott constructs in her novel *Moods*. In the course of my analyses of antebellum fiction, I make literary critical use of systems theory, Immanuel Kant’s aesthetic theory, American Pragmatist philosophy, and the affect theories of Silvan Tomkins.

Preface

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To My Family

Introduction: The Secondary Creation

“The cases of which you speak were, in fact, instances of the secondary creation—and of the *only* species of creation which has ever been, since the first word spoke into existence the first law.”

—Edgar Allan Poe, “The Power of Words”

Authorship in the antebellum United States was an experimental game of observing effects and speculating upon their causes. Following the antebellum advent of new technologies of production, transportation, and communication, American print culture began a process of massification that would continue throughout the course of the nineteenth-century. Massification was still only partial during the antebellum decades, however, and this incompleteness enabled unique modes of experimentation with the implications of mass culture *before* the institutions that would eventually comprise the American print culture industry actually began to intervene, to any significant degree, in the material processes of literary composition, circulation, and consumption. “Secondary Authorship” analyzes some of the formal outcomes of this situation of literary creativity newly tethered to the contingencies of an emerging mass marketplace.

I use the terms “creativity” and “mass” advisedly. As this introduction will demonstrate, the historically emergent idea of mass culture presented itself as a challenge to romantic constructions of creativity and artistic genius. Rather than being replaced immediately and wholesale with a culture industrial model of routinized and mechanized labour, however, authorship took on a *secondary* aspect, for a number of antebellum theorists and practitioners of writing, the several entailments of which I will unfold over the course of this introduction.¹ With the phrase “secondary authorship,” I mean to

trouble historical and critical accounts of authorship as origination, while at the same time preserving, under the name of authorship, the possibility of writers observing and experimenting with the effects of writing.

In an influential formulation, Michel Foucault ascribes to the author the function of a limit: “the function of an author is to characterize the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within a society” (“What Is an Author?” 124). In “characteriz[ing]” discourses, Foucault implies that the author does not originate anything; rather, the name of the author marks particular reductions in the “proliferation of meanings” (138) in a society. The subject, generally, Foucault continues, “must be stripped of its creative role and analysed as a complex and variable function of discourse” (138).

The Foucauldian formulation of the author function as a limit in relation to the “proliferation of meanings” resembles Niklas Luhmann’s systems theoretical conception of a system, which is predicated upon a distinction between itself and the environment that is also a reduction in the complexity of the environment.² Foucault describes the author function as a “principle of thrift” (138), and the same could be said of the Luhmannian system as it relates to the environment. Luhmann’s articulation of the difference between system and environment is premised upon a circular dynamic, however, that would not allow for a system to be merely a function of the environment (as the Foucauldian author is a function of discourse). “[A] system *is* the difference between a system and the environment” (“System as Difference” 38), Luhmann writes, and the recursivity of his formulation (i.e. the definition contains the term being defined) registers the impossibility of locating an agent or a starting point. Rather than stripping

the author altogether of its “creative role,” as Foucault advises, I want to attend to some of the non-causal or circular dynamics characterizing creativity and authorship in the antebellum United States. Rather than thinking of the author as a function of discourse, in other words, I want to think of the author as a difference between the author and discourse.

Ever since its early days, nineteenth-century Americanist criticism has struggled with similar questions of cultural origin and creative agency. For F.O. Matthiessen, the early to mid 1850s—the period of such “masterpieces” (vii) as *Representative Men* (1850), *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), *Moby-Dick* (1851), *Walden* (1854), and *Leaves of Grass* (1855)—was the primal moment in American culture. However, the following passage from the opening pages of his influential study, *American Renaissance*, captures him fussing over how to articulate historical primacy:

It may not seem precisely accurate to refer to our mid-nineteenth century as a *re-birth*; but that was how the writers themselves judged it. Not as a re-birth of values that had existed previously in America, but as America’s way of producing a renaissance, by coming to its first maturity and affirming its rightful heritage in the whole expanse of art and culture. (vii)

In the sense that the American Renaissance was not the *re*-birth of lapsed or forgotten American values, Matthiessen would seem to imply that it was simply a birth—a period of the cultural origination of these values. Matthiessen chooses to name it a “renaissance” in order to suggest the analogy between this American birth and the European Renaissance, a prior cultural birth which itself looked back to the classical world for its analogy. To follow the sequence of borrowings, then, the birth of American culture is at

least twice removed from the cultural birth that is its ultimate rhetorical antecedent. Matthiessen further complicates his account by describing the American Renaissance as a “first maturity,” an extension of the birth metaphor that could suggest either a continuity in some great tradition of Western culture (“rightful heritage in the whole expanse of culture and art”) or a prodigious birth, the spontaneous appearance of something fully formed. These two connotations of “maturity” in Matthiessen’s formulation are not particularly amenable to one another, but I would argue that the tension emergent from this verbal ambiguity is a repressed yet foundational condition for his influential American Renaissance thesis: the primality of American culture *is* its secondarity, and the form of this secondarity is prodigious.³

Some decades later, David S. Reynolds would supplement Matthiessen’s American Renaissance thesis in *Beneath the American Renaissance*, a study of the “subversive literature” that existed “beneath” the more critically celebrated work of the American Renaissance authors (8). In articulating the aim of his study, Reynolds adds a spatial dimension to Matthiessen’s temporal metaphor:

Delving *beneath* the American Renaissance occurs in two senses: analysis of the process by which hitherto neglected popular models and stereotypes were imported into literary texts; and discovery of a number of forgotten writings which, while often raw, possess a surprising energy and complexity that make them worthy of study on their own. (3)

In suggesting that certain “popular modes and stereotypes” were “imported” into the “literary texts” of the American Renaissance, Reynolds would seem to imply that the Renaissance texts are derivative of the forgotten popular texts, but this suggestion is

undermined by the spatial hierarchization of his metaphor: the popular works are beneath the American Renaissance works. At the same time as he insists upon the discursive (as opposed to creative, autonomous) origin of the motifs, stereotypes, etc., that characterize the American Renaissance texts, Reynolds is able to preserve Matthiessen's notion of the originary power of these same texts, which, after all, exist, implicatively, above the popular. In effect, Reynolds is not subverting Matthiessen's thesis (even as he introduces the new category of subversive literature), since both scholars agree that there was American writing before and beneath the American Renaissance; the American Renaissance writing simply came to constitute what Matthiessen calls the "expression" of a coherent American value-system, a thesis wherein the claim to primacy can only be maintained through the repression (or "subversion," in Reynolds's terminology) of all traces of cultural, historical, or aesthetic secondarity.

Mechanic Accents, Michael Denning's history of cheap fiction and working-class culture, takes a more materialist and a less evaluative approach to nineteenth-century American popular writing than *Beneath the American Renaissance*. Denning examines the conflicts between the role cheap fiction played in working-class cultures and the ideological representations of the working class in that same cheap fiction, arriving at the conclusion that these popular narratives represented a "contested terrain," neither wholly "deceptive" or "manipulative" (in the Frankfurt School senses of these terms) nor wholly "expressive" of "a genuine people's culture" (3). Denning argues that nineteenth-century cheap fiction embodies the conflicts between working-class culture and the emerging culture industry, an ambivalent position that enables him to identify several *auteurs* of the early days of the print explosion (87). The city mysteries author and socialist activist

George Lippard (who is the subject of my second chapter) is one of Denning's "*auteurs* ... of this new culture industry" for "mixing the production techniques of the fiction factory with working class ideologies of republicanism and socialism" (87). I am drawn to the ambiguities of agency suggested by Denning's conception of culture industrial *auteurs*, but I can't help thinking that both sides of his oxymoron are being applied somewhat anachronistically to the antebellum moment. As I will show further along in this introduction (and as Denning himself argues at times, if in less insistent terms), a national-scale print culture industry would not arrive, as such, in the United States until after the Civil War (i.e. until at least more than a decade after Lippard's death in 1854). Furthermore, the notion of an antebellum *auteur*, that is, an author exercising control over all aspects of the production of the literary work, was neither thinkable according to antebellum constructions of "work" nor of "author."

If Denning holds out the possibility of culture industrial auteurship in antebellum America, Meredith McGill responds by positioning the "unauthorized" reprinting of texts as one of the key principles of antebellum literary production (2). In *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting*, McGill offers reprinting as a framework for rethinking some of the problems of creativity and cultural nationalism that I have been surveying in the Americanist scholarship. "Taking reprinting as my point of entry into antebellum culture," she explains, "enables me to reach back through the foundational anxieties of literary nationalism to uncover a literature defined by its exuberant understanding of culture as iteration and not origination" (4). In moving away from the author and the work as the chief interpretive units in literary criticism and toward the unauthorized reprinting of both foreign and domestic texts, McGill manages to replace Foucault's

“principle of thrift” with something exuberant and other than authorship, namely, “a set of publishing conditions characterized by a superabundance of literature” (19).⁴ The emergent exuberance that McGill identifies in antebellum America’s culture of reprinting effectively preserves the sense of experimentation and creativity that Denning and others observe in the period’s print culture, but without requiring recourse to auteurship or other theories that rely upon the autonomy of individual cultural agents.

In a chapter that focuses on Edgar Allan Poe’s unique talent at moving through antebellum America’s cultures of reprinting, McGill describes some ways that Poe “creatively embraces America’s cultural secondarity” (152). Against the nationalist critical projects initiated by earlier Americanist scholars such as Matthiessen, McGill presents a literary culture that was “regional in articulation and transnational in scope” (1), and the various dislocations of historical and geographical referents that recur throughout Poe’s poetry and tales constitute one prominent example of this characteristic antebellum mode of secondarity. McGill borrows the term “secondarity” from Jacques Derrida, who uses it to describe the foundation of all origins in *différance*.⁵ “The secondarity that it seemed possible to ascribe to writing alone,” Derrida explains, of the unsettling of temporal precedence that he hopes to capture with the term, “affects all signifieds in general, affects them always already, the moment they *enter the game*” (7). For McGill, the phrase “cultural secondarity” describes not only the antebellum American taste for foreign literary models and for reprints of foreign texts, but also, and more significantly, the general impossibility of locating foundational American cultural moments amidst the promiscuous circulation and recirculation of domestic and foreign texts (152).

In unauthorized authorship, however, McGill loses some of the circular or distributed agency that is made available by paying critical attention to the positive feedback effects of authorial observation and experimentation. Without contesting any of the rich array of examples of unauthorized authorship that McGill provides, I want to offer some examples of secondary authorship in this dissertation, that is, examples of authorship wherein the observation of the effects of writing feeds into the compositional act.

As I hinted, I will frequently make use of systems dynamics in unfolding the different examples of experimental authorship that make up the chapters of my dissertation. Luhmann posits the distinction between “self-reference” and “other-reference” as a condition of any observing system (*The Reality of the Mass Media* 10). The difference between environment and system is copied into the system, Luhmann explains, and serves thus as “a schema of its own observations” (10). One consequence of this conception of observation is the inevitability of “a variety of observing systems” (“Deconstruction as Second-Order Observing” 764), a consequence that Luhmann compares to Derrida’s deconstruction of the “one observer-one nature-one world” assumption underpinning Western metaphysics (765). Luhmann suggests “replac[ing]” deconstruction with second-order observing, however, since researchers “can very well observe [systems] observing” (776)—that is, researchers can obtain data from observing the “*construction* of reality” undertaken by systems that have made the distinction between self-reference and other-reference (776). The distinction between self-reference and other-reference can be thought in relation to the author-system, which uses this distinction as the basis for observing and experimenting with its constructed reality. As

an alternative to unauthorizing authorship or reducing it to a function of discourse, then, observing unfolding author-environment couplings—the particular constructions of reality and interventions in those constructions undertaken by particular authors—can constitute part of the second-order observational work of criticism.

Each of the four authors that I analyze in this dissertation engages, enlarges, exploits, or resists the secondary aspect of antebellum authorship in her or his public work, as well as in her or his various public and private reflections upon that work. These authors—Edgar Allan Poe, George Lippard, Herman Melville, and Louisa May Alcott—all wrote popular fiction during the early to mid decades of American culture’s slow process of massification, and this context provided them with the unique opportunity to observe and experiment with the effects of reading as a mass-scale phenomenon. Edgar Allan Poe’s major contribution to the discourse of secondary authorship is his theory of interest, a recasting of Kantian disinterest that positions taste in explicit systems relation to the contingencies of a nascent mass print marketplace. George Lippard develops the theory of interest in ways that undermine the control that Poe’s theory of composition struggles to preserve. Lippard’s activist poetics, which are embodied in his story paper fiction and journalism, encourages transformative modes of interaction between fiction writing and other social systems that further distribute authorial agency. In contrast to Poe’s and Lippard’s opportunism, Melville appears uneasy with the idea of mass reading. After attempting to restrict the circulation of texts and the circularity of agency to an elite and exclusively male cadre of fellow “geniuses,” Melville eventually makes a concession to popular writing that is marked by ambivalence, shame, and a loss of confidence in origins and originality. Like Melville,

Alcott registers skepticism about originality and genius in her writing, but her studied, “minor” relation to New England Transcendentalism represents a more radically generative experiment in some philosophical implications of secondary authorship.

I turn now to one of Poe’s cosmological tales to help me unfold some of the specific entailments of secondary authorship as a generative and intrinsically experimental principle. In “The Power of Words” (1845), an angel authors a star: “This wild star,” observes Agathos, the angel in question, as he and his companion Oinos hover in interstellar space, “it is now three centuries since with clasped hands, and with streaming eyes, at the feet of my beloved—I spoke it—with a few passionate sentences—into birth” (*Poetry and Tales* 825). Poe explains that Agathos’s powerful speech traverses time and space along the “ether” (“the great medium of *creation*”) in the form of “impulses” that eventually “condense” into a star (825). The dramatic indifference to time, space, and scale underlying Poe’s account of mediation in “The Power of Words” is a good indication of the perception that “words” were imagined to exert a new sort of “power” under the emerging antebellum mass media regimes.

To say that words have power is not the same as saying that their authors have power, however: Poe’s tale is quite clear about this. Poe’s vision of the universe in all of his cosmological writings is one of pure relationality, wherein all relations express themselves according to a small set of mechanical laws: cause and effect, attraction and repulsion.⁶ However intricately inter-implicated, remote, and impossibly complex these relations are, moreover, Poe attends recurrently—even obsessively—to the possibility of their being unfolded for observation. Agathos explains to Oinos that he and his fellow

“Angelic Intelligences” are capable of tracing “the remote undulations” of “a given impulse” through all its various “impressions,” a capacity that Poe names “retrogradation” (824). Still, even Angelic Intelligences are incapable of knowing the “fulness and perfection” of the divine impulse, which is “unimpressive *at last*” (824). Even if Agathos is capable of tracing a condensation of matter back three hundred years to a speech act he himself performed, in other words, he is incapable of identifying its ultimate, divine cause. It is in this sense that Agathos and all the other angels are secondary creators, and their speech acts are only “instances of the secondary creation—and of the *only* species of creation which has ever been, since the first word spoke into existence the first law” (823). Poe’s angels exist in a universe of superabundant effects, where the single, divine act of volition is fated to be always a mystery. They are in the unique position, however, to marvel at the precise sequence of impulses that began right after the first cause, i.e., *the first and every subsequent effect*.

Allen Tate takes on Poe’s vision of cosmic creativity in an essay that argues for the prominence of overdetermined or excessive figurations of authorship in Poe’s writing—a position that provides useful contrast to the model of secondary authorship that I have been developing. Reframing T.S. Eliot’s notorious opinion that Poe lacks a fundamental “coordination of the various emotions” (qtd. in Tate 456), Tate diagnoses Poe’s facultative imagination, discovering “perversions” in each faculty (i.e., intellect, will, and feeling). Unlike Eliot, however, for whom such perversions evince Poe’s immaturity, Tate discovers the outline of a consistent, recurring “idea” in Poe’s treatment of the faculties, namely, “the disintegration of personality,” the “great” (and, presumably for the Southern Agrarian Tate, lamentable) subject of Modernity (461). This

disintegration is manifested in Poe's work, somewhat paradoxically, as a "hypertrophy of the three classical faculties": the nightmarish (and often vampirish) perversion of the "natural feelings," the extension of the will "beyond the scale of human action" (457), and the questing after "essential knowledge" beyond the limitations of "the human situation" (458). All three hypertrophies are on display in Agathos's powerful speech act, allowing it to function as a kind of "verbal magic" (468) or "incantatory magic" (471), Tate argues, which thereby gives "man" the power "of God in his aspect of creativity" (472).

Tate is mistaken about a minor plot-point in "The Power of Words," however, and this misreading ends up having significance for the picture of authorship that he derives from the tale. Tate draws his conclusion about the "omniscient intellect of man" (473) after observing that Agathos was actually still a human, grieving over the corpse of his beloved, when he uttered the star-creating sentences (471); Agathos deliberately created a star through this act of superabundant, over-fed feeling, will, and intellect, Tate seems to imply, as a kind of cosmic monument to his dearly departed. I can't find it stated or implied anywhere in Poe's tale, however, that Agathos intended to create a star—that he had *this* object in mind when uttering his "passionate sentences." All we know, by the end of the tale, is that Agathos understands that he spoke the star into existence, and he understands this precisely because of his angelic talent at retrograding. We don't know that his passionate sentences were meant to catalyze a sequence of impulses that would eventuate in this particular aggregation of matter, and, in fact, the "passionate" character of his sentences suggests their categorical non-association with volition.

So, what *is* the nature of Agathos's powerful speech, if it isn't incantatory? The simple answer would be that it is "physical" (825), to use Poe's own terminology, and that it functions according to the same mechanical laws as does all matter in Poe's universe. But this doesn't get us much closer to the theory of authorship implicit in Agathos's speech act, other than to distance it from the theologism underpinning Tate's reading of the angelic possibilities of speech. Rather than emphasizing the "superangelism" of "man" as a primary instance of the "disintegration of personality" in Poe's work (472), as Tate does, I would emphasize, instead, the gap between Agathos's capacity to understand effects in all their enormous complexity and his fundamental incapacity to trace these effects back to a pure act of origination.

This gap might not have been apparent or important to Tate's New Critical imagination, which probably took for granted that objective correlatives might reliably be discovered by the critic invested in tracing felt responses back to concrete forms. In fact, Eliot's famous description of objective correlatives seems to invest the critic with a talent not unlike angelic retrogradation, with the difference being that the "particular emotion" might actually be traced all the way back to its point of origin:

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked. ("Hamlet and his Problems" 58)

The crucial distinction between Eliot's objective correlative and Poe's theory of composition is that Poe's theory is saturated with an unshakeable anxiety with regards to

the origin of the impulse, the original creative or authorial act. Where Eliot can calmly and confidently speak of a “formula” for the evocation of emotion, Poe obsesses and puzzles over the same problem, usually before positing a solution just beyond the limits of analysis.⁷ In this sense, “The Power of Words” (not to mention Poe’s writing generally) dramatizes the secondary position that antebellum authors found themselves in—a position which emerges in contrast (as I argue at various moments throughout my dissertation) to the autonomy, control, and even genius that is the author’s potential share in both romantic and modernist conceptions of the creative act.

Poe’s interest in secondary creation can be situated among the early scenes of the story of the gradual massification of American culture in the nineteenth-century. The beginning of Poe’s career as a published author in the early 1830s coincided with an explosion in the production and circulation of print materials in the United States. The antebellum print explosion was catalyzed by breakthroughs in printing, paper-making, and telegraphic technology; the construction of railroad lines and the Erie Canal, which together expanded transportation and communication networks along the Atlantic coast and inland to the Great Lakes; and socio-economic trends towards immigration, urbanization, and industrialization, which together contributed to the advent of huge, densely-aggregated markets for printed commodities. Some early outcomes of these shifting material conditions in American print culture were the rise of a sensational penny press, starting around 1833, and the related boom in cheap story paper and pamphlet fiction, starting a few years later.⁸

Even if the antebellum print explosion offered glimpses of reading as a mass-scale phenomenon, it wouldn't be until much later in the century that a national mass culture appeared. Richard Ohmann argues that the magazine and book publishing industries, as well as other "modern culture industries," all formalized practices of rationalization, routinization, and control and, accordingly, came into greater conformity with one another, in the last decade and a half of the nineteenth-century—the "inaugural moment," he claims, "of [America's] national mass culture" (23). In advancing this historical argument, Ohmann lists a number of features that inform his definition of mass culture, and this list offers some useful points of contrast between antebellum print culture and the late nineteenth-century mass culture that is Ohmann's subject. For Ohmann, mass culture is a "voluntary experience" (in contrast to the consumption of necessities), and it is "produced by a relatively small number of specialists" for "millions across the nation," simultaneously, with "dependable frequency," and in the same form for everyone (14-15). Mass culture also shapes the habits of its audiences (i.e., to encourage repeat consumption) around shared interests in order to ensure a final significant feature: profit (15-16).

Ohmann notes that certain, more or less isolated experiences in the antebellum decades were in fact marked by some of the characteristics of mass culture. Examples of these include one-off antebellum sporting events with crowds upwards of 50,000 (18), scheduled theatrical entertainments, Jenny Lind's hugely successful American tour, and, most notoriously, Barnum's American Museum, which drew tens of thousands of visitors (19). Barnum's Museum was particularly influential for teaching American audiences "that they *must* have certain experiences," Ohmann argues, but, nevertheless, such

experiences still came only “in staccato bursts of the extraordinary” (19). The measured, formulaic, and repeated experiences of mass culture that would eventually be enabled by national-scale mediation, in other words, were only predicted by the antebellum cultural scene.

In addition to the antebellum entertainments that Ohmann cites as precursors of the mass cultural experience, antebellum America’s print culture showed early signs of massification, with unprecedented volumes of print materials reaching unprecedented numbers of readers by the 1830s. However, scholars tend to agree that the antebellum print culture was still fundamentally regional in its scope and was characterized equally by capitalistic and pre-capitalistic relations. Against earlier scholarly arguments for the co-emergence of a national print culture and nation-consolidating “imagined communities” in the early national and antebellum periods, Trish Loughran argues that the 1830s advent of new communication and transportation networks actually revealed a nation characterized by dissent and inter-regional hostility: “it is no coincidence,” Loughran writes, “that the decade in which the technologies of steam and rail came into widespread use was also a decade that saw an astounding rise in mob violence against printers across the United States as well as the earliest threats of Southern Secession” (4). Leon Jackson extends Loughran’s observations about the regional character of antebellum America’s print culture with his study of the period’s “embedded” relations (including borrowing, bartering, and gifting), which served the non-capitalistic function of “creat[ing] and sustain[ing] powerful social bonds” (2). For Jackson, the signal shift in American print culture came much later in the nineteenth-century, with a “social disembedding” of writing that was characterized by “the exclusive use of cash and

contracts” (3). Similarly, Sandra Tomc has recently used the term “entertainment industry” to capture the transitional nature of antebellum print culture, wherein regional, “fractal-like” entertainment and amusement networks existed “both prior to and inside” the developing market infrastructure that would later coalesce into a national print culture industry (12).

Two related outcomes of the 1830s print explosion that pre-dated the national print culture industry were the penny press and the cheap fiction industry, and a brief discussion of both of these examples can help elaborate the incompletely massified conditions under which antebellum authors laboured. Cheap-for-cash daily newspapers began appearing in Boston and New York in 1833 as a response to the increasingly expensive subscription rates of large-format mercantile papers (Mott 218-19). Benjamin Day’s New York *Sun* was the first such daily paper to enjoy large-scale success, and its format and mode of circulation set a new paradigm for the newspaper medium in the United States. In contrast to the year-subscription model of the earlier papers, the *Sun* was sold on the street by newsboys, either on the spot for a penny or to weekly subscribers (220). Its content, moreover, strayed dramatically from that of the mercantile and political newspapers that preceded it in offering the first instances in the history of American journalism of what Frank Luther Mott calls “domestic tragicomedy” (222-24). “[S]hort, breezy items” mingled in the *Sun* with “theatrical notices, paragraphs about monstrosities and prodigies, and ... crime news,” Mott explains, with George Wisner’s voyeuristic, facetious, and enormously popular “Police Office” column leading the way in the paper’s transformation of American news away from an emphasis on content with “a wide significance and recognized importance” toward whatever content proved

“interesting and readable” (224). Despite the enormous local popularity and influence of the *Sun* and its descendants (most notably, James Gordon Bennett’s New York *Herald*), however, the sensational penny press remained a pre-mass cultural phenomenon in many respects, with its circulation almost never extending beyond a given city and its forms and styles in constant flux.

The first wave of cheap fiction appeared shortly after the advent of the penny press. These fictions were usually serialized, and they appeared in, or as supplements to, weekly newspapers (which had lower postal rates than books), or in the form of yellow-covered pamphlet installments, which were often sewn-together at the end of a serial run and sold on street corners in book-form for a nickel or a dime (Denning 19). One of the most successful forms of early cheap fiction was city mysteries fiction, a narrative form that purported to expose “the mysteries and miseries” of city life. City mysteries serials and cheap books were a ubiquitous presence in print marketplaces all over North America, Europe, and even Australia, throughout the 1840s and early 1850s. Regardless of their particular linguistic or national affiliations, moreover, the majority of city mysteries fictions bore the same generic title “mysteries of...” or “mysteries and miseries of...,” combined with a given local variant: the most prominent (and most obviously cosmopolitan) of the early instances of the genre were *Les Mystères de Paris* (1843), *The Mysteries of London* (1844), and *The Mysteries and Miseries of New York* (1849), though more noticeably “regional” varieties of the genre could also be found in Montreal, Lowell, Cincinnati, Melbourne, and hundreds of other cities and towns. The impressive transnationalism of the city mysteries formula can be understood as an early extension of mass cultural sameness across vast cultural and geographical difference. Significantly,

however, Denning resists a total identification of city mysteries and other early cheap fictions with the dime novel industry, the institutional structures of which would only materialize some time after the brief 1840s heyday of city mysteries serials.

As I mentioned above, Denning could provisionally identify a few *auteurs* among the first wave of cheap fiction authors; however, no such degrees of control would be available to those producing the dime novels that began appearing in the 1860s. Unlike the cheap fictions of the 1840s, which were mostly limited in their distribution to a single city, the new dime novel series were kept afloat for decades by mass-scale distributors, the most successful of which, the American News Company, helped turn the post-Civil War dime novel into a “national industry” (Denning 19). Another shift of even greater significance to my argument was that from author to brand: “the tendency of the [post-bellum dime novel] industry,” Denning explains, “was to shift from selling an ‘author,’ who was a free laborer, to selling a ‘character,’ a trademark whose stories could be written by a host of anonymous hack writers and whose celebrity could be protected in court” (20). This shift away from authorship and toward the distribution of literary labour is captured in the late nineteenth-century image of the “fiction factory.” Edward Bok describes the process of one such fiction factory in an 1892 article for the *Ladies Home Journal*: a host of “girls and women” begin by combing through all available dailies and weeklies in search of “any unusual story of city life,” which they subsequently hand over to a male “manager,” who, in turn, distributes the best sample stories to a smaller team of women; this team is tasked with producing the outline of a narrative for “some one of the hundred or more writers” on the publisher’s payroll, who will finally produce from the outline a finished dime novel (qtd. in Denning 17).

The examples of secondary authorship that I will present throughout this dissertation are different from the image of collaborative and distributed authorial agency that emerges out of Bok's description of the fiction factory. Theodor Adorno's sense that late-capitalism's addiction to novelty is identical to its repetition compulsion (its "compulsive return to the old") registers in Bok's description, wherein the news itself (along with its operational emphasis on the unusual) is hopelessly caught up in modes of reproduction and repetition that confirm its "perpetual sameness" (*Minima Moralia* 236). This introduction argues that antebellum print culture pre-dated Adorno's dialectic of the new and the same. Authors had the idea of mass culture to contend with, but in the absence of the rationalization and routinization of literary production, they had a certain flexibility to experiment with the effects of writing that was often generative of something other than a return to the old.

Two images of pre-mass cultural authorship can help me elaborate upon this idea of incompletely industrialized authorship. The first image is compiled by David S. Reynolds from contemporary accounts of George Lippard's work habits:

Lippard ... wrote with feverish rapidity and rarely revised or even reread what he had written before it went to press. As soon as he completed a page of manuscript it was rushed off to the compositors. One of the employees at the *Quaker City* weekly had the unusual job of seeing to it that Lippard's cigars were always lit, so that the author need not stop writing to light them himself. ("Introduction" 24-25)

Aspects of the fiction factory model of literary production appear in this picture of Lippard at his desk, but a key difference is the emphasis on Lippard as the uncontested engine of the writing machine. It is a strange image that partakes equally in romantic

notions of “feverish” creativity and the unrelenting, machinic productivity of industrialized mass production. Lippard’s perpetually-lit cigar amplifies this effect: it is a prop contributing to his manic-romantic persona, but it is also a post-industrial take on that persona which reconfigures the author as a kind of romantic factory, breathing in creativity and expiring, along with manuscript pages, the burned-off byproducts of his creative labour.

Louisa May Alcott offers a companion image to that of Lippard’s fuming creativity factory: when she herself or one of her female characters is in the thrall of creativity, Alcott will often comment that “genius burns.”⁹ As with Lippard, Alcott is transformed through her image into a remarkably productive romantic subject, burning “all day ... and nearly all night” as she produces, in this example, an early draft of her first novel (*Journals* 99). The image of Alcott’s burning genius is heightened by an anecdote that is often invoked to ground critical narratives relating to her extremely disciplined approach to her work: when overwork led to cramping in her right hand and the eventual loss of the use of her right thumb, Alcott is said to have taught herself to write with her left hand as well (Showalter ix; Brodhead *Culture of Letters* 74), leading Elaine Showalter to describe her as “a doubly efficient writing machine” (ix). The idea that Alcott’s genius burned for so long at a time and with such intensity that it would actually wear out parts of her body again combines the image of a superabundant romantic spirit of creativity (i.e. a spirit which overruns the limits of the body) with a post-industrialized image of the body-as-machine, burning away so unrelentingly that it doesn’t even need to pause to replace its burned-out parts.

These two images capture a transitional configuration of authorship, in which the compositional act falls ambiguously and uneasily between creativity and productivity. Both images represent the author as a particularly generative node in a circuit of literary production, but in each instance there is a sense that the creative “impulse” (to recall Poe’s vocabulary in “The Power of Words”) is not autonomous but heteronomous, arriving at the author from some unfixable location in the causal circuit, in response to some demand that is reducible neither to a creative volition nor to an institutional dictate. These are some of the feverish and generative entailments of secondary authorship, the model of authorship made possible by the unique situation of a partially massified antebellum print culture.

My chapters are arranged along a straightforward historical trajectory that roughly spans the period of America’s pre-culture industrial print culture, beginning with the print explosion of the 1830s and ending just before the postbellum reorganization of American print culture on a national scale. Rather than continuing to elaborate upon the historical conditions of antebellum print culture, however, each of my individual chapters focuses on particular formal and literary historical developments that I take to be exemplary of these conditions. In this sense, the notion of secondary authorship provides me with a general historical and conceptual framework for the various critical analyses that comprise each chapter.

My first two chapters examine some new habits of readerly attention that emerged with the print explosion. My first chapter, “Revolution of Thought/Revulsion of Feeling: Poe and the Interest Concept,” considers Poe’s theory of interest as an early contribution

to the discourse of secondary authorship. This chapter argues that Poe recasts Kantian disinterest in affective, embodied, and interested terms in response to the idea of mass reading. Poe's tale "Berenice" (1835), in which the narrator, Egaeus, undergoes an experiential inversion that substantializes the objects of his mental life, functions as a parable for this materialization of the aesthetic effect. Egaeus's experiential inversion occasions a "nervous *intensity of interest*" (*Poetry and Tales* 225) that finds an object in his beloved's teeth, which he mistakes for his own disordered "ideas." Egaeus violently removes Berenice's teeth at the end of the tale, an act that gruesomely literalizes Poe's theory of the material effect, thus culminating the Kantian inversion by turning disinterested taste into that which Poe insists his readers crave: bad taste.

In my second chapter, "Convulsive Fictions: Lippard and Poe," I extend my discussion of Poe's aesthetics of interest to antebellum theorizations of the socially-transformative potential of writing. This chapter situates Poe's theory of the short prose tale and his associated critique of long-form serial fiction (what he calls "convulsive fiction" [*Essays and Reviews* 1404]) in the context of the city mysteries phenomenon. While Poe warns against "interven[tions]" into the reading experience from "worldly interests" (*Essays and Reviews* 572), Lippard encourages exactly these kinds of interactions between reading and other social practices in his reformist poetics of the story paper. I read Lippard's most successful city mysteries serial, *The Quaker City* (1844), as an experiment in reform-minded urban melodrama, in which the revelation of the hypocrisies of the rich and the miseries of the poor has the professed aim of effecting social change. I argue, conversely, that Poe takes exception to the efforts of city mysteries fictions to irritate the boundaries of social systems other than writing. In "The

Mystery of Marie Rogêt” (1843), Poe fictionalizes the historical case of Mary Rogers, but he makes the extraordinary claim that both cases exist in the same universe and that their similarities, moreover, can be chalked up to coincidence. In resisting the various (and for Poe, overly simplified) transpositions of fiction and reality that underpin the reformist imperative of city mysteries writing, Poe struggles to affirm, I argue, a measure of authorial control over the effects of reading.

My third and fourth chapters consider some more ambivalent responses to print circulation. In chapter three, “Melville’s Partial Revolt Against the Reader,” I take up Melville’s shifting affective relation to the public circulation of his own work. Beginning with the “shock of recognition” (*Pierre, Tales, and Billy Budd* 1165) that he experienced upon encountering Nathaniel Hawthorne’s tales for the first time, Melville configured writing as a mode of excited and enjoyable communion circulating among fellow men of genius. With *Pierre; or, the Ambiguities* (1852), however, Melville evinces a partial reduction in his enthusiasm for communication that registers in the novel as difficulty. I argue that *Pierre* belongs to the genre of city mysteries melodrama but for the absence, in Melville’s novel, of the melodramatic mode’s constitutive quest for moral (not to mention linguistic) clarity. In the place of clarity, *Pierre* offers only “mysteries interpierced with mysteries, and mysteries eluding mysteries” (169), an indication, I argue, of his ambivalent concession to participate in mass communication.

In my final chapter, “Moody Alcott,” I analyze Alcott’s novelistic experiments with transcendentalist philosophy and the work of Ralph Waldo Emerson. I invoke Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s notion of “minor literature” in arguing that Alcott both critiques and inhabits certain major strands of New England Transcendentalism in

her first novel, *Moods* (1865). Alcott's novel exploits two meanings of "mood": the first, which derives from nineteenth-century gender ideology, connotes the sullen and indecisive condition that is supposedly intrinsic to young women on the verge of adulthood; the second, which comes to Alcott from the idealist and transcendentalist philosophical traditions, connotes the subject's felt, pre-rational relation to the world. I argue that *Moods* stages a conflation of these two senses of "mood," which it plays against the implicatively misplaced confidence that the novel's male characters have in their autonomy and self-reliance.

Chapter 1: Revolution of Thought/Revulsion of Feeling: Poe and the Interest Concept

“Style to the idea is like enamel to the tooth.”

—Victor Hugo, qtd. in Edgar Allan Poe, “Critical Notices”

“[R]eally valuable ideas can only be had at the price of close attention.”

—Charles Sanders Peirce, “How to Make Our Ideas Clear”

There is no indifference to material reality in Edgar Allan Poe’s writing, despite an older critical tradition that took his well-known opposition to “the heresy of *The Didactic*” to suggest otherwise (*Essays and Reviews* 75). Poe’s protagonists—his lovers, his criminals, his cadavers and near-cadavers—almost always suffer from a variation of the “nervous *intensity of interest*” (*Poetry and Tales* 225) that leads Egaeus to fixate with ultimately disastrous consequences on the teeth of his eponymous beloved in “Berenice” (1835), the tale at the centre of my analysis in this chapter. In his cosmological essays and his tales of mesmerism, Poe’s narrators and dialogists evince what Agathos, in “The Power of Words” (1845), describes as a “deep interest” in the dizzying connectedness of the material universe (*Poetry and Tales* 824). In his critical essays and reviews, too, Poe displays an abiding concern with the ways that readers invest, sustain, and are rewarded for their interest in reading, the material response to which he names “the poetic effect.” In all these instances of interest in Poe’s work, the foundations of disinterested aesthetic contemplation are being unsettled. But, as I will argue in this chapter, Poe’s critique of disinterested contemplation should be read as a conformation or adaptation of the category of the aesthetic rather than a rejection of it. If, as Friedrich Schlegel observed near the end of the eighteenth century, the aesthetic turn toward “*das Interessante*” was

coeval with the historical emergence of the novel, Poe goes a step further by celebrating, in his own analyses of the psychological implications of Modernity on literary form, the forceful brevity and “unity or totality of effect” associated with the “short prose tale”:¹⁰ “[d]uring the hour of perusal,” he explains in a review of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s tales, “the soul of the reader is at the writer’s control” (*Essays and Reviews* 572). Readerly interest—and not disinterest, the more famous prerequisite of aesthetic judgment—turns out to be the key term for engaging Poe’s aesthetics of the literary commodity.

Some Poe scholars, including Meredith McGill and Terence Whalen, have minimized the significance and originality of Poe’s aesthetic theories, focusing instead on the ways his work responded to market instabilities, the cultures of piracy and reprinting, and other contingencies of antebellum authorship, as a kind of corrective to the long-running (and mostly Continental) trend of viewing Poe as an aesthete and an “isolato” (to borrow Herman Melville’s descriptor of himself and Hawthorne). Without contesting any of these historicizations, however, I’d like to suggest that Poe’s most enduring and innovative responses to what Jonathan Elmer calls “the figure of mass culture” (21) are aesthetic ones, that is, responses that treat the aesthetic as a field for experimentation with the new circumstances of authorship in the antebellum United States.¹¹ This chapter argues that Poe’s theory of interest—which he develops through a pattern of counterpoints to Kantian disinterest—constitutes one such significant structure of response to the bewildering state of aesthetic contemplation in mass culture. Poe’s writing can be figured, then, at the nexus of late eighteenth-century aesthetic discourses that are grounded through Kant’s disinterested and subjectively universal power of judgment and

an emergent nineteenth-century aesthetics of interest that is anti-foundational and more differentiable in its effects than the Kantian scheme.¹²

A surprising consequence of Poe's aesthetic adaptations, which I also examine, is that his theory of interest ends up resonating with some of the later nineteenth- and twentieth-century developments in American thought that have come to be grouped as Pragmatism. The pragmatists' recurring attention to interest, in this sense, can be understood as continuous—both conceptually and historically—with Poe's own interested manipulations of the eighteenth-century category of the aesthetic. Writing recently about Poe's frequent engagements with nineteenth-century theories of probability and chance, Maurice Lee ventures the somewhat counterintuitive argument that "Poe offers some literary and cultural roots to the story [of Pragmatism]" (247). Lee notes that "nineteenth century probability theorists recognized that feeling, intuition, and the unconscious cannot be purged from probabilistic determinations," and so amalgamated romantic and positivistic modes of knowing in ways that Lee sees as underpinning, for example, Dupin's hybrid inductive-deductive approach to ratiocination (230). Against a critical tradition that has read the Dupin tales as allegories of signification and its lack, Lee points to the pragmatic adaptability of the detective's method, which succeeds in navigating the emphatically pluralistic universe represented in the tales. "Thinking of Poe in terms of *pragmatism*," Lee continues,

helps to recast his work, particularly the tales of ratiocination. The subversive, ironic marplot of rationalism becomes more of a constructive critic in whose writings intuition looks more like unconscious calculation, skepticism more like science, and radical indeterminacy more like James's radical empiricism, insofar

as admissible evidence exists in a web of relations that includes inklings beyond the positivist pale. (247)

Pursuing Lee's suspicion that Poe's work anticipates some of the epistemological turns that will later become associated with Pragmatism, I will identify some pragmatist tendencies in Poe's adaptations of eighteenth-century aesthetic theory to his post-Romantic situation. When positioned within a genealogy of the interest concept, which can be traced from Kant's theory of disinterested contemplation through to the pragmatists' reflections on interest and effect, Poe's contributions to aesthetic theory acquire a new consistency, as well as an unexpected consonance with more recent critical engagements with aesthetics and affect.

Lee's demonstration of Poe's epistemological pluralism suggests a rationale for his tentative inclusion as a player in Joan Richardson's "natural history of pragmatism," which she traces through the works of Jonathan Edwards, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Charles Sanders Peirce, William and Henry James, Alfred North Whitehead, and others. Richardson describes Pragmatism as a "habit" and a "method of thinking" (1) that took root when Puritan writers and theologians were "forced to live in the world but outside of existing conceptions of it" (3). Following Whitehead's claim that Descartes and Locke unwittingly initiated the "unsettling of the subject-predicate, substance-quality distinction" that underwrote metaphysics since Aristotle (9), Richardson argues that early American thinkers actually performed this "unsettling" through their attempts to square the startling and new "incommensurability of nature" with their pre-existing languages and categories of description (2). Richardson calls these performances "aesthetic," in the "purest sense," insofar as they involved linguistic and formal experimentations as means

for tracking an “excess of experience” (3). She writes, of the pragmatists invoked in her study,

[e]ach of these writers built an aesthetic outpost in an endeavor that was at the same time Lucretian, in taking into account the order of things insofar as it could be known, and ministerial, in performing in language the ritual responses requisite to keeping a community together, an aspect distinguishing this line of American literary experiment. (3)

Readers of Poe would be hard-pressed to find in his work similar evidence of “Lucretian” encounters with nature or “ritual responses” to American communality, such as Richardson identifies in her pragmatists. But this is precisely why attending to Poe’s Pragmatism can reveal alternative histories of the pragmatist habit. Richardson explains that she excludes Poe from her study, despite the facts that he was well-read in natural history and science and was, in turn, read by Peirce, because his writing didn’t express the “ministerial purpose” that sought to make sense of the American encounter with itself through aesthetic experimentation (12). But Poe is such a compelling antebellum *other* to Emerson’s proto-pragmatist because Poe’s primal scene—his incommensurable encounter—was not with nature but with culture, with the startling and insistently new figure of an ephemeral, unstable, heterogeneous, and competitive mass print culture. Poe’s prescient attention to the aesthetic category of interest comes into focus in this context: for Poe, the interest concept served as a generalized point of entry for theorizing a relationship between aesthetics and commerce, as well as the ways in which antebellum authorship required the internalization of that relationship through particular acts of compositional experimentation.

Before examining how Poe transforms disinterested contemplation into a theory of interest and material effect, it is necessary to review the historical circumstances that led to the eighteenth-century emergence of disinterest as a lynchpin of the aesthetic in the first place. In the following survey of key moments in Kant's analysis of the beautiful, I track the emergence of disinterest as a measure against the anti-rationalist, sensualist implications of the aesthetic. Disinterest, in this sense, appears in Kant's critique at the moment when an autonomous conception of feeling threatens to overwhelm his transcendental conception of the subject. Interest, moreover, as it is articulated by Poe and certain pragmatist thinkers, can be thought as a post-Kantian affirmation of the novelty of experience, an affirmation, that is, of a radical conception of autonomous feeling theorized in, but ultimately withheld from, Kant's aesthetic scheme.

Looking for a sensual analogue to rational thought, Alexander Baumgarten introduced the terms "aesthetics" into philosophical discourse in the mid eighteenth-century. In his *Metaphysica* (1739), Baumgarten describes aesthetics as "the science of sensory cognition and presentation," while in a later work, the incomplete *Aesthetica* (1750), he calls aesthetics "the science of intuitive cognition," and defines its scope as "the theory of the liberal arts, the logic of the inferior categories of cognition, the art of beautiful thinking and the art of intuitive thinking, analogous to rational thinking" (qtd. in Guyer 360). So aesthetics was born as the "inferior" sibling to reason, the "sister," in Baumgarten's often gendering terminology, prompting Terry Eagleton to comment on its birth, if it "opens up in an innovative gesture the whole terrain of sensation, what it opens it up to is in effect the colonization of reason" (16). Kant did use Baumgarten's

Metaphysica as a textbook for his anthropology lectures, but evidently he was ambivalent about Baumgarten's aprioritization of sensation, arguing in the first edition of his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) that taste was "merely empirical" (xii), something acquired in society, through interaction with others, and that Baumgarten's vision of a science of the aesthetic rested on a "failed hope" of "bringing the critical judging of the beautiful under principles of reason" (xix).¹³

Kant would grow to doubt his earlier conviction that aesthetic judgments could only be empirical, however, eventually formulating a discrete faculty for judgment. In the first or "draft" introduction to *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790), Kant justifies his postulation of a transcendental power of judgment by pointing to the "multiplicity of empirical laws ... and [the] great heterogeneity of forms of nature" (9), which he sees as too "disturbingly unbounded" to be assimilated to experience either empirically or according to a narrow set of apriori laws (14). Nature, in other words, seemed to Kant neither purely chaotic nor rigidly law-abiding, an observation that begged the question of just how, exactly, the human subject might make judgments about forms that were encountered for the first time. His famous solution, which steers a middle course between Empiricism and Idealism, is the "reflecting power of judgment," which is "under the obligation of ascending from the particular in nature to the universal" (67). In contrast to the "determining power of judgment," in which a law or a universal is brought to the judgment of a particular, the reflecting power of judgment derives universals from particulars, negotiating, in this manner, the predicament of a transcendental mechanism tasked with assimilating the vast empirical breadth of the object world.

Even after Kant's formulation of the reflecting power of judgment, it remains unclear how such a mechanism that is able to treat objects as singularities—as novelties of experience—could function transcendently and, by implication, universally.

Baumgarten could initiate a science of the aesthetic because he saw aesthetic judgments as sensual conformations to laws actually existing in nature, but Kant's critique quickly eliminated from consideration the possibility that a faculty of the mind could have such unmediated access to the objects of the world. Kant needed to constitute the domain of the aesthetic, then, as "[w]hat is merely subjective in the representation of an object," all the while continuing to guard against the Humean sensualism that awoke him to his critical task in the first place (75). Out of this theoretical necessity emerges the notorious "as if" underpinning the power of judgment, namely, that "nature is represented ... as if an understanding contained the ground of the unity of the manifold of its empirical laws" (68). The aesthetic feeling, in other words, is the feeling of purposes in nature, regardless of whether those purposes exist or not; in fact, the aesthetic feeling cannot discover purposes (or "ends") in nature, but is constituted, nevertheless, by the feeling of nature's "purposiveness."

If Kant's innovative response to Baumgarten's untenable analogic/hierarchic organization of cognition and sensation offers a new degree of autonomy to feeling, this new conception of feeling is nevertheless a circumscribed one, hived off from its bodily dimensions. Insofar as the aesthetic sense is a transcendental given, according to the terms of Kant's critique, each act of judgment can be thought of as both subjective and universal; the power of judgment is a "*sensus communis*" (175) for Kant, a communal sense that interpellates the aesthetic subject as such. But Kant is forced to narrow the

scope of aesthetic judgment in order to guarantee that this feeling of purposiveness will apply to the same representations for everyone. And so, precisely at this moment when his aesthetic theory threatened to turn into a purely non-cognitive—a lawless or conceptless—theory of experience, Kant holds back, distinguishing interested from disinterested modes of judgment. “[I]t is readily to be seen,” Kant warns, in an exceptionally influential formulation of the problem of interest, “that to say that it is beautiful and to prove that I have taste what matters is what I make of this representation in myself, not how I depend on the existence of the object” (91). Kant proceeds to cut off “pure disinterested satisfaction in the judgment of taste” from various forms of “satisfaction” that are combined with interest, including satisfaction in “the agreeable,” which gratifies the senses, and satisfaction in “the good,” which satisfies for some objective purpose (91-95). Disinterested satisfaction, in contrast, is “merely contemplative” and it “merely pleases,” freely and with absolutely no (sensual or utilitarian) interest in the existence of the object (95).

It is at this crucial juncture in Kant’s argument, when the aesthetic and the sensual are dissociated according to a logic of interest, that an interested aesthetics can be made to intervene. Steven Shaviro has recently reimagined the Kantian beautiful as a “theory of affect and singularity,” a crucial precedent to Whitehead’s conception of “feeling” and Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of “affect” (1). But in his otherwise generative revisionist understanding of the lawless, conceptless, and singular character of the aesthetic encounter, Shaviro reaffirms Kant’s insistence that aesthetic judgment must be disinterested:

The beautiful object is unconcerned with me; and in return, I have no actual interest in it. I don't care what benefit it can offer me, or what empirical 'gratification' it can give me, or even if it exists at all. I am only concerned with how it makes me feel; that is to say, how it affects me. (4-5)

I suspect that Shaviro preserves the concept of disinterest because he wants to understand Kant's aesthetic feeling as continuous with Whiteheadian and Deleuzian ideas about affect, in elaboration of Whitehead's anti-cognitivist, anti-anthropocentric project of constructing a "critique of pure feeling" in the place of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (Whitehead 113). As productive as Shaviro's reimagining of the Kantian beautiful is, it remains insensible to the cognitivist bias that was already internal to the eighteenth-century conception of disinterest, which, as I will explain, collapsed the affective and pecuniary connotations of interest in order to produce a peculiarly bourgeois construction of disinterested thought/feeling as reason.

Because of the conceptual repressions lurking in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century deployments of the interest concept, some genealogical clarification is required in order to understand how Poe's mobilization of the concept so innovatively manipulates these internal tensions and historical slippages. The *OED* reveals "interest" to be a cagier signifier than Kant and his interpreters would have us believe, conceding that "there is much that is obscure in the history of the word." This obscurity derives in part from a shift in the fifteenth-century from the now obsolete "*interest*" to the modern "interest." The Latin root of "interest" provides further complication, with "*interesse*" combining "between" ("inter") and "to be" ("esse") to mean: i) "to be between, to differ, to make a difference, to concern, be of importance"; and ii) (in Medieval Latin) "compensation for

loss, compensatory payment.” The etymological associations of interest’s “being-between” is apparent in both Latin meanings, with the second referring originally to the “interval” or “period between” the granting and the repayment of a loan. The “being-between” of interest becomes less evident, however, in its early Modern meaning of “a relation of being objectively concerned in something, by having a right or title to, a claim upon, or a share in,” and, particularly, “a pecuniary share.” These and other usages from the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries suggest the newly standardized connotation of “interest” as a usually financial, objective, communally-recognized interest in something: a stake in a company, a concern in real estate, a political or legal agenda. “Self-interest” is the “selfish pursuit of one’s own welfare,” while “disinterest” is “an absence of interest” or an “impartiality.” Lost in the new meanings of “interest” is its connotation of a “being-between,” its various usages now suggesting, rather, a position or a perspective that is implicatively grounded in the intrinsic self-interest of the bourgeois subject. Interest, in this sense, could serve in the eighteenth century as “*the* explanation of the social world,” *the* key to an enormously complex logic of social relations and individual stakes (Swedburg 4).¹⁴

But the *OED* records another shift (which first appears in 1771) in the meaning of “interest”: “the feeling of one who is concerned or has a personal concern in any thing.” The words “personal” and “feeling” are good indicators of a broadening of the interest paradigm near the end of the eighteenth-century; in addition to objective and communally-recognized standards, “interest” may now, evidently, apply to private and subjective judgments. Interest, in other words, has begun to function, at least provisionally, as an emotion, not only the “feeling” of a “concern,” but the feeling of a

concern that might have a “personal” or a private aspect. Henry James, for instance, could write near the end of the nineteenth-century, that,

[t]he only obligation to which in advance we may hold a novel without incurring the accusation of being arbitrary, is that it be interesting The ways in which it is at liberty to accomplish this result (of interesting us) strike me as innumerable and such as can only suffer from being marked out, or fenced in, by prescription. They are as various as the temperament of man, and they are successful in proportion as they reveal a particular mind, different from others. (60)

Notably absent from James’s insistently subjectivist conception of the interesting is any sense of an objective stake that could link the concept to its eighteenth century connotations. Raymond Williams, conversely, does attend to the incongruity between the two meanings of “interest,” but his conclusion seems to overdetermine the objective connotations of the term, while leaving out its etymological “being-betweenness” altogether. He hypothesizes, in a *Keywords* entry on the term, that the psychological concepts of “attraction and concern” are “saturated with the experience of a society based on money-relationships” and could therefore easily serve to trope a broader and more subjectively constituted field of interesting objects (172).

Poe’s writing, almost uniquely among the commentaries on interest that I have encountered, assimilates the residual semantic connotations of “interest.” In the preamble to his analysis of his own writing practice in “The Philosophy of Composition” (1846), for example, Poe comments, “I have often thought how interesting a magazine paper might be written by any author who would—that is to say, who could—detail step by step the processes by which any of his compositions attained its ultimate point of

completion” (*Essays and Reviews* 14). I read Poe’s use of “interesting,” here and elsewhere, as opening interest to the tensions that I have attempted to draw out of it. Poe’s apparently offhand curiosity (“I have often thought how interesting ...”) playfully undersells the professional stake he in fact had in understanding the vagaries of a complex antebellum literary marketplace, where a fantasy “step by step” program for composition—a kind of literary production line—could help him to dependably manipulate audience interest. Gavin Jones has recently called Poe “[a]n icon of financial vulnerability in unstable times,” and it is precisely the instability of reader response—the apparently chaotic logic of consumer tastes—that Poe looks to counter with the theory of interest (1). The idea that writing needs to engage its reader’s interest—or, put another way, that it needs to be interesting—seems almost too banal to mention, but I want to argue that Poe’s theorizations and performances of the interest concept have helped to define its unmentionably common-sensical centrality to our ongoing post-Romantic aesthetics of the commodity. As Poe hints, a theory of interest that is attuned to the ways in which the concept manages to internalize its individuating versus its objectivizing tendencies promises productive aesthetic potential in the context of the emergent commodification of cultural objects in the early nineteenth-century, enabling a double-view of the cultural object—as commodity and as art work—that nevertheless retains a singular productive logic, the logic of interest.

Even if Poe’s rejection of disinterested contemplation struck him as a prerequisite to thinking aesthetics in a mass print culture, the terms of his rejection are instructive in a range of other contexts. Because of the impossible demands it places on the contemplating subject, Kantian disinterest has been a notorious bugbear for theorists and

aestheticians throughout the more than two centuries since its initial formulation, prompting the literary scholar Sean Gaston to go so far as to claim that the post-Romantic critical era has been lived among “the ruins of disinterest” (105). Gaston’s phrase, with its imagistic nod to Deconstruction, tellingly implies the status of interest proper as the mere negative to the dead ideal that was disinterest. To the extent, moreover, that a whole variety of critical theories in the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries (following the teachings of Kant, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, etc.) have grown into an imperative to critique the interest lurking in knowledge practices that present themselves as disinterested, the revelation of interest as such has too often coincided with the end-point of analysis, a dusting-off-the-hands moment whose analytical force is entirely negative.¹⁵ Herein lies the value of thinking interest, with Poe and some of the pragmatists, as a positive term, not only as always already present in knowledge practices but as necessarily enabling and guiding those practices.

Interest is an important keyword for the classical pragmatists, but, according to Richardson, the term did not enter into the vocabulary of Pragmatism until Henry and William James mobilized it for their respective (and related) literary and scientific purposes near the end of the nineteenth-century. Richardson traces the interest concept through Emerson’s idea of divine “affection,” which became naturalized over the course of the century, reappearing finally in William James’s *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) as that which, “through attention and expression,” established “feeling as a legitimate basis for thought and action” (Richardson 164).¹⁶ James, of course, names this “feeling” interest, and, as I will elaborate upon below, he deploys it as a virtual synonym for subjectivity as such, at least in the context of his psychological conception of what

motivates the human organism. A further development in the interest concept, very astutely noted by Richardson, comes from Whitehead's conceptions of "appetition" and "satisfaction," which together constitute what he names the "concrescence" of a "unity of aesthetic appreciation" (Whitehead 212). Building on James's conception of interest as that which carves out the subjective perspective from the "blooming, buzzing confusion" of unfiltered reality (1:488), Whitehead defines "appetition" as "immediate matter of fact including in itself the principle of unrest, involving what is not and may be" (33). "All physical experience," Whitehead continues, "is accompanied by an appetite for, or against its continuance," and he offers the example of "thirst" as one such "appetite," wherein the "immediate physical feeling" is combined with the idea of its quenching (32). The quenching, then, is the "satisfaction" of the "appetite," and one way in which Whitehead describes this "concrescence" is as an "aesthetic synthesis" (212). As my discussion of Poe's often antagonistic engagement with eighteenth-century discourses on taste will bear out, it is significant that "interest" and "appetite" constitute (more or less interchangeable) elements of the Whiteheadian aesthetic synthesis. A similar conclusion can be drawn from American psychologist Silvan Tomkins's descriptions of the affect interest-excitement. Interest counts among the positive affects, for Tomkins, and it is the prerequisite for literally every knowledge-producing activity:

The interrelationship between the affect of interest and the functions of thought and memory are so extensive that absence of the affective support of interest would jeopardize intellectual development no less than destruction of brain tissue. To think, as to engage in any other human activity, one must care, one must be excited, must be continually rewarded. There is no human competence, which

can be achieved in the absence of a sustaining interest, and the development of cognitive competence is peculiarly vulnerable to anomie. (*Shame and its Sisters* 77)

Like James and Whitehead, Tomkins simply assumes the omnipresence of interest without bothering to critique disinterest. Tomkins, like Whitehead, even saw himself as a Kantian revisionist, arguing that Kant neglected what he calls “a major filtering mechanism” for experience (Nathanson xii), namely, the affects, which produce their own “unique set of categorical imperatives” (Tomkins *Exploring Affect* 96). It can be extrapolated from the work of James, Whitehead, and Tomkins that the aesthetic event must be interested—must involve an appetite—in order to occur at all, and this is precisely how Poe treats interest: it functions not as a disqualifying but as a necessary condition to aesthetic encounters. For all these pragmatist and quasi-pragmatist thinkers—among whom I will include Poe as well, for his re-imaginings of the aesthetic—interest is the positive affect charged with directing attention to “what is *necessary* and ... what it is *possible* to be interested in,” and as such, interest speaks as much to the subject as to the object: it grounds, in a sense, their mutual aesthetic recognition (Tomkins *Shame and its Sisters* 76). Or, as Tomkins more simply puts it: “I am, above all, what interests me” (*Affect, Imagery, Consciousness* 1:191).

Poe almost certainly did not read *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Scholars agree that he did not read German with the level of proficiency required to penetrate the syntactical torsions of Kant’s prose, and no English translation of the Third Critique appeared until 1892, decades after Poe’s death. There are good reasons to believe,

however, that Poe could have acquired a functional understanding of Kant's transcendental project—as well as the position of disinterested contemplation within that project—from the abundance of sources on Kant and German philosophy that circulated in the antebellum United States, where German culture and thought were polarizing objects of curiosity and derision (Hansen and Pollin).¹⁷ Poe himself was frequently the target of charges of “Germanism,” a catchall pejorative whose connotations of abstruseness, mysticism, morbidity, and irreverent erudition provide a telling summary of how Continental obscurantism fared against clear-eyed American common sense in the nationalist politics of antebellum print culture.¹⁸ Of Poe's own familiarity with specific instances of Germanism, he is known to have read the works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Thomas Carlyle, perhaps the two most influential English-language assimilators of Idealist and Kantian thought in the nineteenth century.¹⁹ Poe was also a frequent reader of American and British periodicals that reviewed, commented on, and excerpted German texts, including *Foreign Quarterly Review*, *North American Review*, *The Christian Examiner*, *The Dial*, and, perhaps Poe's favorite, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. In addition to English-language sources, Poe had access to some prominent French-language publications dealing with Kant. Based on the existence of Poe's examination records from the University of Virginia and West Point, scholars are much more comfortable attributing to him a reading knowledge of French, which would have opened up to him texts like Germaine de Staël's enormously popular *De l'Allemagne* (1810/1813), Charles Viller's *Philosophie de Kant* (1801), and Victor Cousin's various published lectures on Kant and Idealism. Poe mentions Cousin and de Staël by name in his works, and it is possible that he was inspired to think about the relationship between

interest, in his own writing, and “les arguments de Kant contre la moral fondée sur l’interet personnel” (84) in the chapter from de Staël’s text that explicates the basics of Kantian critique.

Poe’s own mostly negative references to Kant are difficult to separate from his abiding dislike for American strains of Idealism, and especially from his dislike for Emerson and his fellow “Frogpondians” (as Poe was fond of calling the New England transcendentalists), which seems to have had at least as much to do with transcendentalist concepts themselves as with Poe’s irritation with the rarefied cultural atmosphere surrounding Concord and its literati.²⁰ Nevertheless, scholars have often been too satisfied to reduce Poe’s numerous jabs at Idealism to a personal edition of the more generic antebellum suspicion of Germanism without considering the possibility that a more sustained critique of the transcendentalist project may be found lurking in his writing. A notable exception to this critical trend is Joan Dayan’s work on Poe: Dayan observes in Poe’s writing an “eighteenth-century bent” (“Poe, Locke, and Kant” 31) for satire, which he deploys to wage “a program of literary purification” against the obfuscating romanticisms of Kant and the American transcendentalists (37). I agree with Dayan that Poe wants to burlesque aspects of Germanism and idealist thought at certain moments in his writing, but I am not convinced by her argument that Poe objects to the mystification of some idealized linguistic expressiveness.²¹ Rather, I argue that it is the mystification of effect—the abstraction or dematerialization of the mechanics of readerly response—that Poe labors to undermine in his critical and literary writing.

One particularly germane example where Poe seems to have some fun at the idealist’s expense comes with the tale “Bon-Bon” (1835), which was published just a few

months after “Berenice,” and which shares with the earlier tale a parodic engagement with the competing aesthetic and gustatory aspects of taste. Pierre Bon-Bon—whose name evokes both Leibnizian optimism (i.e. Good-Good) and edible treats (*bonbon* is a French word for candy)—is a metaphysician and a cook, for “[i]n his opinion the powers of the intellect held intimate connection with the capabilities of the stomach” (*Poetry and Tales* 165). The tale explains that “it is to Bon-Bon that Kant himself is mainly indebted for his metaphysics,” though a big difference between the two philosophers, Poe hints, is that, unlike Bon-Bon, Kant is no foodie: while his German protégé would later seek categorical imperatives outside the biasing machinations of the body, the fictional Frenchman would never “waste those precious hours which might be employed in the invention of a *fricasée*, or, *facili gradu*, the analysis of a sensation, in frivolous attempts at reconciling the obstinate oils and waters of ethical discussion” (164-65). Poe’s metaphysician-chef offers a compelling embodied alternative to Kantian cognitivism; in combining the “powers of mind” and the “capabilities of the stomach” into a single, seamless process (i.e. the process of “invention”), Bon-Bon undermines the Kantian distinction between aesthetic satisfaction and sensual agreeableness by grounding judgment in a power-sharing arrangement between mind and stomach.

Kantian taste gets even more thoroughly unsettled in “Berenice,” the *locus classicus* of interest in Poe’s canon. The tale is one of the first prose publications of Poe’s career, and it seems to capture him in the early stages of theorizing potential relationships between aesthetic and commercial considerations. “Berenice” first appeared in the *Southern Literary Messenger* in April 1835 and reappeared in the same form in Poe’s first prose collection, *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (1840). A

revised version of the tale was published in the April 5, 1845 number of the *Broadway Journal* with, among other minor changes, three particularly graphic paragraphs stricken (“mercifully,” for the faint-hearted Poe scholar Arthur Hobson Quinn [213]) from the earlier version, in which Egaeus visits Berenice’s tomb and sees the hint of a smile form on the face of his recently deceased wife. The *Broadway Journal* version of the tale, with the tomb visit absented, has since become the standard popular and academic edition.

Even without the smiling corpse scene, “Berenice” ranks among Poe’s most successful gross-out fictions. The tale follows Egaeus’s obsession with his wife/cousin’s teeth, all of which he pulls, at the end of the tale, from her mouth with dentist’s tools, after having disinterred her (evidently still breathing!) corpse. Critics have suggested a couple of newspaper sources for the tale, including a *Baltimore Saturday Visiter* article (February 23, 1833) about grave-robbers selling the teeth of disinterred corpses to dentists and a *New York Mirror* article (April 6, 1833) detailing the ordeal of a young girl getting her teeth pulled (Forclaz 25-27; Mabbott, 2:207). Poe himself claims (in a letter I’ll quote below) to have been inspired to write the tale after betting an acquaintance that he could produce something both earnest and successful on the subject of dental horror. But whatever actually inspired Poe to violate Berenice’s mouth, he evidently stumbled upon a subject fit to move his contemporary readers. One reviewer complained of “Berenice” (and the similarly-themed “Morella”), that “such overwrought delineations of the passions are injurious to correct taste” (qtd. in Thomas and Jackson 156), while another observed of the “repulsive subjects” of the poem “Ulalume” and the tales “The Fall of the House of Usher” and “Berenice,” that “we remember his story or poem precisely as we would recall a cancer or tumor under which we had suffered, with

feelings of absolute pain, terror, and horror, if not disgust” (qtd. in Thomas and Jackson 718). Both review snippets suggestively lump in the affective (“overwrought passions,” “repulsive,” “terror ... horror ... disgust”) and the physiological (“injurious,” “pain,” “cancer ... tumor”) against and below the implicatively cognitive faculty of “correct taste,” in more or less conventional accord with the Kantian schematization of “pure disinterested satisfaction” over and above the sensual. Yet neither reviewer seems particularly attuned, at any point in their respective reviews, to the irony of invoking a metaphysics of food and taste in the context of a tale whose violation of aesthetic norms presumably derives from its culminating scene of dental torture.

Poe *is* attuned to the stakes for “correct taste” of a tale where an injured mouth and its teeth are the primary objects of readerly attention.²² Responding to a (now lost) letter from *Southern Literary Messenger* publisher Thomas Willis White, who evidently expressed concerns about the decorousness of the recently published “Berenice,” Poe takes the opportunity to sketch out an ostensibly ad hoc aesthetic theory that might be best described as post-taste:

A word or two in relation to Berenice. Your opinion of it is very just. The subject is by far too horrible, and I confess I hesitate in sending it you especially as a specimen of my capabilities. The Tale originated in a bet that I could produce nothing effective on a subject so singular, provided I treated it seriously. But what I wish to say relates to the character of your Magazine more than to any articles I may offer, and I beg you to believe that I have no intention of giving you *advice*, being fully confident that, upon consideration, you will agree with me. The history of all Magazines shows plainly that those which have attained

celebrity were indebted for it to articles *similar in nature*—to *Berenice*—although, I grant you, far superior in style and execution. I say similar in *nature*. You ask me in what does this nature consist? In the ludicrous heightened into the grotesque: the fearful coloured into the horrible: the witty exaggerated into the burlesque: the singular wrought into the strange and mystical. You may say all this is bad taste. I have my doubts about it. Nobody is more aware than I am that simplicity is the cant of the day—but take my word for it no one cares any thing about simplicity in their hearts. Believe me also, in spite of what people say to the contrary, that there is nothing easier in the world than to be extremely simple. But whether the articles of which I speak are, or are not in bad taste is little to the purpose. To be appreciated you must be *read*, and these things are invariably sought after with avidity In respect to *Berenice* individually I allow that it approaches the very verge of bad taste—but I will not sin quite so egregiously again. I propose to furnish you every month with a Tale of the nature which I have alluded to. The effect—if any—will be estimated better by the circulation of the Magazine than by any comments upon its contents. This much, however, it is necessary to premise, that no two of these Tales will have the slightest resemblance one to the other either in matter or manner—still however preserving the character which I speak of. (*Letters* 1:57-58)

As a pitch to a prospective employer, Poe's letter to White is remarkably presumptuous, even condescending; nevertheless, Poe was working as the full-time editor of the *Messenger* within a few months, so something in his comments evidently convinced the publisher that he was particularly knowledgeable about antebellum reading habits.²³

Poe's specific argument about antebellum reading seems in some of its details to anticipate the Henry James comments on the interesting that I quoted above, insofar as both authors put a premium on variety—with James going so far as to claim that the forms of interest are as numerous and variable as the “temperaments” or “minds” of individual novel readers. Poe, for his part, dismisses aesthetic “simplicity” as “the cant of the day,” to be replaced by one or another form of aesthetic “heightening,” “colouring,” or “exaggerating,” with the consequence being a kind of eruption at the limits of good taste. “But whether the articles of which I speak are, or are not in bad taste is little to the purpose,” Poe hastily reminds his presumably skeptical publisher, for “to be appreciated you must be *read*.” Poe ends the letter with a remarkable display of rhetorical manipulation, parlaying what evidently began as criticism directed at his tale into a commercial gambit: he offers White one tale a month, effectively transforming the question of (disinterested) taste into one of readerly “avidity.” (The question of why, exactly, bad taste occupies such a prominent position in Poe's aesthetics of readerly attention needs to remain open for the moment; I will return to it in my reading of “Berenice.”) With Poe's emphasis on “avidity,” the difference between his and James's respective commentaries on the varieties of interest becomes clearer: where James seems satisfied by limiting the interesting to a psychologized spectrum of potential readers, Poe's version of the interest-concept carries a baldly economic connotation as well, suggesting that the variability of mental dispositions and the diversification of cultural commodities constitute flip-sides of the same equation for the intellectual laborer in a competitive literary marketplace.

The following passage from the Third Critique, in which Kant gives an example to illustrate the incompatibility of taste and interest, suggests the degree to which Poe's playful reversals of taste and bad taste should be read in explicit relation to Kant's aesthetic theory:

Concerning the interest of inclination in the case of the agreeable, everyone says that hunger is the best cook, and people with a healthy appetite relish everything that is edible at all; thus such a satisfaction demonstrates no choice in accordance with taste. Only when the need is satisfied can one distinguish who among the many has taste or does not. (95-96)

When juxtaposed with passages like this one, Poe's letter to White reads like a rebuke to Kant for formulating taste in isolation from hunger, with the argument that no such state of zero degree "need" as Kant insists upon is practicable in a literary culture so overwhelmingly glutted with print materials, alternatives for readerly attention. But Kant's passage is also notable in the broader context of how interest fits with the pragmatist habits of thought. Recalling that "appetite" and "satisfaction" are the two terms that constitute, for Whitehead, the event of "aesthetic synthesis," it is notable that Kant deploys the very same two terms here to exemplify precisely that which discounts the aesthetic dimension in a given encounter. Poe's Kantian reversals, I am arguing, anticipate the pragmatist conception of the aesthetic, especially as Richardson draws it out of Jamesian interest and Whiteheadian appetite/satisfaction. The irony inhabiting Poe's particular aesthetic inversion, however, is that bad taste ends up claiming a privileged position in his new aesthetic landscape, with the consequence that readerly appetite itself becomes threatened by purgation.

Poe introduces his “Berenice” narrator Egaeus as a caricature of the Coleridgean philosopher-mystic type—as a figure, that is, who would fit right in narrating a Gothic tale in *Blackwood’s*. Descending from “a race of visionaries,” Egaeus awakens from “the long night of what seemed, but was not, nonidentity, at once into the very regions of fairy land—into a palace of the imagination—into the wild dominions of thought and erudition” (*Poetry and Tales* 225-26). But after having “loitered away [his] boyhood in books, and dissipated [his] youth in reveries” (226), Egaeus’s mystical *Bildung* takes a sharp turn to the concrete with the onset of a “disease” or “monomania” that unexpectedly inverts his idealist habits of thought (227). Egaeus describes his disease in terms that resonate across Poe’s canon of diseased narrators, as a “morbid irritability of the nerves immediately affecting those properties of mind, in metaphysical science termed the *attentive*,” or, even more to the point of my argument, as a “nervous *intensity of interest*” (227). “It is wonderful,” Egaeus reports of the onset of his disease,

how total an inversion took place in the character of my commonest thought. The realities of the world affected me as visions, and as visions only, while the wild ideas of the land of dreams became, in turn,—not the material of my every-day existence—but in very deed that existence utterly and solely in itself. (227)

Egaeus’s wonderful inversion conflates representations and objects, thereby dramatizing an “inversion” in the basic epistemological orientation underwriting Kant’s transcendental critique: “visions,” the “mere appearances” of experience in Kant’s account, are traded for the “realities of the world,” so that Kant’s “thing-in-itself” (“*Ding an sich*”) comes to constitute “in very deed” Egaeus’s subjective experience. Poe even seems to reference Kant’s famous “thing-in-itself” when he explains how Egaeus’s

experience, post-inversion, comes to be composed of reality “utterly and solely in itself.” Egaeus’s flipped relation to the objects of the world and their representations in his mind has dramatic implications for the aesthetic encounter, and most immediately, for the Kantian subject’s prescribed indifference to the thing-in-itself, which suddenly acquires, for Egaeus, the felt and palpable intimacy of subjective experience. Egaeus’s disease, in other words, presses him into a very un-Kantian encounter with the aesthetic object—which in the case of “Berenice,” will turn out to be the eponymous beloved herself, and, more specifically, her teeth.

While Egaeus suffers with his intense interest, Berenice is introduced in the throes of her own disease, a kind of degenerative epilepsy that weirdly conforms her body to the impressive demands of Egaeus’s attention:

Disease—a fatal disease, fell like the simoon upon her frame, and, even while I gazed upon her, the spirit of change swept over her, pervading her mind, her habits, and her character, and, in a manner the most subtle and terrible, disturbing even the identity of her person! Alas! the destroyer came and went, and the victim—where is she? I knew her not—or knew her no longer as Berenice. (226)

Unlike Egaeus’s diseased interest, which, as Elmer has noted, is tracked by the “halting, stuttering fashion” in which the tale is written (104), Berenice’s condition is at a narratological remove from the reader insofar as it is embedded in Egaeus’s first-person account. Accordingly, Berenice’s abiding ontological condition throughout the tale—of change, and, more specifically, of reduction—is inseparable from Egaeus’s “gaz[e].” If, as I have been laboring to suggest, Egaeus’s interest represents a recasting of the Kantian aesthetic encounter, his obsession with Berenice, in particular, puts a grotesque kind of

pressure on the mandated disinterest in the existence of the aesthetic object. While describing aesthetic disinterest, Shaviro explains that “[a]esthetic judgment is a kind of *recognition*: it’s an appreciation of how the object ‘adapts itself to the way we apprehend it,’ even though, at the same time, it remains indifferent to us” (2). Kant’s idea that the object “adapts itself to the way we apprehend it,” paired with Shaviro’s comment that this constitutes the aesthetic “recognition” or its “uncoerced *response*” (2), seems to hold in the case of Egaeus’s encounter with Berenice: each character’s disease, as I already observed, seems to conform to demands of the other’s, with the effect of a seeming recognition of purposiveness. Egaeus is not disinterested in relation to Berenice, however, nor will Berenice remain indifferent for long to the fact of Egaeus’s contemplation.

Berenice’s reduction, her withering away throughout the course of the tale, in fact, appears as the flip-side of the revelation of her teeth, and so registers, in a gruesome literalization of the Kantian “adaptation” of the object to the subject’s apprehension, as an effect of Egaeus’s interest:

The forehead was high, and very pale, and singularly placid; and the once jetty hair fell partially over it, and overshadowed the hollow temples with innumerable ringlets now of a vivid yellow, and jarring discordantly, in their fantastic character, with the reigning melancholy of the countenance. The eyes were lifeless, and lustreless, and seemingly pupil-less, and I shrank involuntarily from their glassy stare to the contemplation of the thin and shrunken lips. They parted; and in a smile of peculiar meaning, *the teeth* of the changed Berenice disclosed themselves slowly to my view. (230)

This passage contains the first mention in the tale of Berenice's teeth, and it is remarkable that they are passively "disclosed" to Egaeus and to the reader, as if in disinterested or "uncoerced" relation to Egaeus's contemplation. Again, Berenice seems to be in a process of reduction, her pupils disappearing, her hair retreating back over her forehead and losing its pigment, her temples caving inward, and her lips, finally, shrinking back, offering up the teeth. Berenice herself—her identity, her entire body excluding the teeth—functions in this encounter analogously to what Kant variously describes as the "frame," the "charm," or the "decoration," all of which are superfluous "addenda" or "augmentations" to the real aesthetic object, the "pure form." And Poe actually refers to Berenice's "frame" a number of times in the tale, as if her withering self were merely the rotting wooden frame charged with "disclosing" some timeless art object. The grotesque irony of Egaeus's aesthetic encounter is thus that Egaeus's ideally disinterested "gaze" has the material effect of de-emphasizing the organic relationship between Berenice and her teeth, thereby cultivating the conditions of their removal from Berenice's mouth.

But why *teeth*? I have been arguing that Berenice's teeth can be understood as horrifying instances of Kant's "pure form," "disclosed" to the aesthetic subject on condition of their abstraction from Berenice's body. But the peculiar organic relation of Berenice's teeth to the rest of Berenice begs alternative interpretations to the near critical consensus that they be read psychoanalytically and in accordance with sexual repression's logic of "transpositions from a lower to an upper part of the body" (Freud 5:387).²⁴ Marie Bonaparte, for example, argues that the violent removal of Berenice's teeth should be read as a figure for castration anxiety, but there is a dissonance between the penis (and its castration) and Poe's representation of teeth that makes me skeptical of

this evaluation: for one thing, teeth in the tale are enduring, hard, ultimately removable from the decaying body. It is noteworthy, moreover, that teeth are, for Freud, in odd excess to the otherwise symmetrical logic of organ symbolization, which makes me want to emphasize their ambiguous objecthood in relation to the rest of the subject.²⁵ It is relevant that for many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century anatomists teeth possessed a similarly asymmetrical character in relation to the other parts of the body. The influential Scottish surgeon John Hunter, for example, observes of the human tooth, “[i]t would seem to be an earth united with a portion of animal substance, as it is not reducible to quick lime by fire, till it has been first dissolved in an acid” (34).²⁶ After detailing some experiments showing the evident lack of vascular circulation in teeth and observing that they “never change by age, and seem never to undergo any alteration, when completely formed, but by abrasion,” Hunter concludes that teeth are best described as ambivalently “extraneous bodies” in their relation to the rest of the human anatomy:

From these experiments it would appear, that the Teeth are to be considered as extraneous bodies, with respect to a circulation through their substance; but they have most certainly a living principle, by which means they make part of the body, and are capable of unity with any part of a living body ... and it is to be observed, that affections of the whole body have less influence upon the Teeth than any other part of the body. Thus, in children affected with the rickets, the Teeth grow equally well as in health, though all the other bones are much affected; and hence their Teeth being of a larger size in proportion to the other parts, their mouths are protuberant. (39-40)

Hunter's hypothetical patient could be Berenice, whose withering frame seems to magnify and make "protuberant" her teeth—at least in Egaeus's experience of them. Even more, the composite animal-earth morphology of teeth, the possibility of their removal and replacement in the mouths of other patients, and their only semi-reliance on the "living principle" animating the rest of the body makes them weirdly compelling instances of the Kantian "pure form" that constitutes the essence of the aesthetic representation when freed from all its distracting ornaments, charms, or decorations. Human teeth, in short, were able to function, in eighteenth and nineteenth century anatomical discourse, as body-artifact hybrids, ambivalently living yet potentially aesthetic objects. Simultaneously autonomous object and component of an organic subject, the tooth is thus an ideal figure for Poe's prescient illustration of the material—the lived and living—effect of what earlier aestheticians might have called "mere" contemplation.

Berenice's teeth are disturbing instances of Kant's "pure form," then, not only because they are not indifferent to Egaeus's contemplation, but because they represent potential occasions for pain and suffering; they are aesthetic objects that are literally rooted in a subject, in a "living principle." The following passage from "Berenice," which I quote at some length, confirms these noumenal implications of Egaeus's aesthetic encounter:

Not a speck on their surface—not a shade on their enamel—not an indenture in their edges—but what that brief period of her smile had sufficed to brand in upon my memory. I saw them *now* even more unequivocally than I beheld them *then*. The teeth!—the teeth!—they were here, and there, and everywhere, and visibly and

palpably before me; long, narrow, and excessively white, with the pale lips writhing about them, as in the very moment of their first terrible development. Then came the full fury of my *monomania*, and I struggled in vain against its strange and irresistible influence. In the multiplied objects of the external world I had no thoughts but for the teeth. For these I longed with a phrenzied desire. All other matters and all different interest became absorbed in their single contemplation. They—they alone were present to the mental eye, and they, in their sole individuality, became the essence of my mental life. I held them in every light. I turned them in every attitude. I surveyed their characteristics. I dwelt upon their peculiarities. I pondered upon their conformation. I mused upon the alteration in their nature. I shuddered as I assigned to them in imagination a sensitive and sentient power, and even when unassisted by the lips, a capability of moral expression. Of Mad'selle Sallé it has been well said, "*que tous ses pas etaient [sic] des sentiments,*" and of Berenice I more seriously believed *que tous ses dents etaient [sic] des idées. Des idées!*—ah here was the idiotic thought that destroyed me! *Des idées!*—ah *therefore* it was that I coveted them so madly! I felt that their possession could alone ever restore me to peace, in giving me back to reason. (230-31)

Egaeus's "idiotic thought" is that the possession of Berenice's teeth will return him to sanity, a conclusion that is tracked throughout the tale, as Dayan has elegantly observed, by a string of lexical associations between "identity," "*idées*," and "*dents*," or "I/dent/idées" in Dayan's reconstruction of the meaning of the string. Whereas Dayan argues that Berenice's identity is lost through the force of Egaeus's interest, however, I

have been working to suggest that the association between *dents* and *idées* represents the logical culmination of Egaeus's experiential inversion that was signalled near the beginning of the tale, wherein a representation, an idea, can have an existence and a meaning in noumenal reality. Not only does Egaeus's "idiotic thought" make good on the Kantian inversion that was predicted by the structure of his disease of the senses, but it suggests a bridge between disinterested contemplation and the pragmatist association between thought and its effects, or what Peirce more specifically refers to as the movement from "doubt" or "hesitancy" to a "clear idea."

Compare Poe's description of Egaeus's contemplation of the teeth to the following passage from William James's famous "Stream of Thought" chapter from *The Principles of Psychology*:

the important thing about a train of thought is its conclusion. That is the *meaning*, or as we say, the topic of the thought. That is what abides when all its other members have faded from memory. Usually this conclusion is a word or phrase or particular image, or practical attitude or resolve, whether rising to answer a problem or fill a pre-existing gap that worried us, or whether accidentally stumbled on in reverie. In either case it stands out from the other segments of the stream by reason of the peculiar interest attaching to it. The interest *arrests* it, makes a sort of crisis of it when it comes, induces attention upon it and makes us treat it in a substantive way. (1:260)

The organism's experience, for James, is guided by its attention to objects that have what he calls "an immediate sting of *interest* for our Ego in them" (2:297), an observation that will be broadened by James later in his career when he articulates the inclusive

epistemological claims of radical empiricism. Already in the passage from the *Principles*, though, there seems to be an implicit denial of disinterested contemplation, which is motivated in this context by James's attempts to defeat the associationist psychological notion that ideas progress logically, one building, through association, upon another. For James (as well as for Tomkins), thought alone is too grey to be motivating and too confusing to be interpreted without the guiding/amplifying forces of interest and other affects. A thought, for James, has a "*meaning*," insofar as the organism becomes interested in a "problem" or "pre-existing gap" which it is motivated to attend to, to "treat ... in a substantive way." The immanence of James's conception of thoughts, which can only be measured in their effects, seems to be eerily anticipated in Egaeus's attention to Berenice's teeth—James's "word" and "particular image" together. Egaeus, of course, discovers the "meaning" of his thoughts/Berenice's teeth through the "substantive" attention he gives them, concluding that his sanity relies on performing an insane act of restoration/removal that paradoxically constitutes the logical becoming-clear of his confused train of thought.

James's psychology of interest bristles, of course, with a debt to the pragmatist understanding of the relationship between thought and action, which is articulated in one of its earliest forms by Peirce in his epochal essay "How to Make our Ideas Clear" (1878). As I said, Peirce argues—as James will later on—that our ideas begin with "doubt," and they become "clear" to the degree that we become aware of their "effects." "Our idea of anything *is* our idea of its sensible effects" (1:132), Peirce writes, and conversely, "whatever there is connected to a thought, but irrelevant to its purpose, is an accretion to it, but not part of it" (1:131). Peirce was an avid reader of Poe's work, and it is

conceivable that he might even have seen in Poe's doctrine of "the unity or totality of effect" the germ for his conception of the inseparability of ideas and their effects. Poe writes, for instance, "[i]t is only with the *dénouement* constantly in view that we can give a plot its indispensable air of consequence, or causation, by making the incidents, and especially the tone at all points, tend to the development of the intention" (*Essays and Reviews* 13). In relation to "Berenice," Poe follows his own advice (before he even formalized it), by establishing an "indispensable air of consequence" between Egaeus's experiential inversion and his violation of Berenice's mouth. Egaeus's interest in Berenice's teeth, moreover, both zeroes in on the meaning of the idea (i.e. that possession of the teeth will restore his sanity) and disabuses itself of all that is ancillary to that idea (i.e. Berenice herself, the mere frame for her teeth), so that his realization that he must remove her teeth is—on a diegetic level—the clarification of his idea and—on a metacritical level—the ultimate unification or totalization of the tale's plot through a "poetic effect." "Berenice" is a strange sort of parable of immanent aesthetics, then, in the sense that it takes a counterintuitive example of an idea and makes it "substantive" in its diegetic world: Egaeus's idea does effect the violation of Berenice's mouth.

An example offered by Peirce to help him illustrate the axiomatic relationship between idea and sensible effect is surprisingly relevant to this dimension of "Berenice." Peirce points to the logical incoherence of the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, which holds that the elements of the sacrament are "literally just meat and blood." He maintains that this doctrine is "senseless jargon," a meaningless linguistic obfuscation, because, logically, "we ... can mean nothing by wine but what has certain effects, direct or indirect, upon our senses" (132). We might similarly expect that Egaeus's own

personal transubstantiation of *idées* into *dents* is “senseless jargon,” an alliterative play that can’t actually effect real-world action—but of course, Egaeus does remove the teeth. The final paragraphs of the tale, in which Egaeus appears to wake up, finally, from the dream-pathology that had been materializing his mental life, dramatize this effect of Egaeus’s ideas:

There came a light tap at the library door, and pale as the tenant of a tomb, a menial entered upon tiptoe. His looks were wild with terror, and he spoke to me in a voice tremulous, husky, and very low. What said he?—some broken sentences I heard. He told of a wild cry disturbing the silence of the night—of the gathering together of the household—of a search in the direction of the sound;—and then his tones grew thrillingly distinct as he whispered me of a violated grave—of a disfigured body enshrouded, yet still breathing, still palpitating, *still alive!*

He pointed to garments;—they were muddy and clotted with gore. I spoke not, and he took me gently by the hand;—it was indented with the impress of human nails. He directed my attention to some object against the wall;—I looked at it for some minutes;—it was a spade. With a shriek I bounded to the table, and grasped the box that lay upon it. But I could not force it open; and in my tremor, it slipped from my hands, and fell heavily, and burst into pieces; and from it, with a rattling sound, there rolled out some instruments of dental surgery, intermingled with thirty-two small, white and ivory-looking substances that were scattered to and fro about the floor. (232-33)

Egaeus asks himself, just before the action represented in this passage, “I had done a deed—what was it?” “[D]eed” here, recalls Poe’s earlier use of the word, when, in

describing Egaeus's experiential inversion, he explains that Egaeus's "ideas" became "in very deed [his] existence utterly and solely in itself." The alliterative association between "idea" and "deed," another lexical string this time not picked out by Dayan, can be added to the associations between "*dents*" and "*idées*" to constitute the tale's pragmatist response to Kantian indifference toward the objects of the world.

But there remains an incongruity between the substantialization of Egaeus's ideas (note how Poe refers to the teeth as "substances") and what Peirce refers to as the "tropical" level of meaning in reference to the Protestant view of the sacrament as purely figural or literary. Egaeus's "idiotic thought" does turn out to be wrong, illogical, a failure which stems, perhaps, from a kind of "Catholic" misidentification of the relationship between the "tropical" and the real. Egaeus's attempt at pragmatist practice, in other words, is marked, definitively, as pathological. Poe's compositional strategy, which similarly seeks to trace ideas to their effects, should be understood as a success for the pragmatist habit, however, insofar as it successfully articulates a "tropical" relationship between Egaeus's ideas and his actions. Two aesthetic encounters are mirrored, in a sense, yet one fails and the other succeeds: one encounter, between Egaeus and Berenice's teeth, results in Egaeus's ultimate recoiling from the Kantian aesthetic, which has proven too real, while another, between reader and text, coheres to the degree that a relationship between (lexical, figural) ideas and a "unity or totality of effect" is established. The tale's "meaning" (in James's and Peirce's sense of the meaning of an idea) or its "aesthetic synthesis" (to recall Whitehead's vocabulary) seems to rest, then, on a tension inhabiting the very concept of the aesthetic itself, which is forced to confront the conditions of its failure. The particular pressure that Poe exerts on

the aesthetic in order to draw out this tension, I will argue in a final section, comes from the specter of beauty's *other*, namely, "bad taste."

"How is it that from beauty I have derived a type of unloveliness" (225)? This is the question that a mournful and contrite Egaeus asks himself at the beginning of his narration. The question could be put to Poe's aesthetic theory, generally, however. It is certainly the one asked by his contemporary reviewers, who saw in the tale "cancers," "tumors" and "pain" in the place of "correct taste." Poe himself dwells on the question in the letter to White when he explains, almost in resignation, that what magazine readers want is "bad taste," and he offers, later in his career, the notorious aesthetic opinion that "the death ... of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world" (*Essays and Reviews* 19). For Elmer, Egaeus's question really comes down to considerations of genre expectation and their manifestation in Poe's poetics of the material effect; he argues that the insistent return to the material site of the body in "Berenice" makes the tale an ideal illustration of the mechanics of sensational effect in antebellum writing, in contrast to sentimentalism's tendency to look past the material and onward toward the spiritual at the moment of death. Of the particular effect of the tale, Elmer claims that it creates the expectation of sentimental withdrawal (through Berenice's "death") before returning abruptly to the scene of the body (through Berenice's disinterment and the removal of her teeth), capitalizing thus on "the modulation of a primed sentimental affect into excess and shock" (94). Elmer's convincing analysis has contributed a lot to my own understanding of Poe's materialism, but I agree with Adam Frank that confining the discussion of Poe's writing to the

implicitly gendering categories of sentimentalism and sensationalism can effect a loss of the kind of analytic precision available in schemes such as Tomkins's that attend to particular affects rather than affect as an undifferentiated—or at best, a minimally differentiated—category (Frank 661). What is remarkable about Egaeus's question, then, is that it allows—and actually creates an expectation—for an un-beautiful aesthetic encounter that nevertheless retains the linguistic and conceptual residues of some kind of a relation to the more classically aesthetic category of the beautiful. As in Poe's generalization about the death of a beautiful woman, the dialectical struggle between “beauty” and “unloveliness” in “Berenice” ends with a kind of Whiteheadian “aesthetic synthesis” that is the “poetic effect.” The tale enacts, in other words, an aesthetic encounter that is un-Kantian to the degree that it has no particular allegiance to the beautiful above and beyond the demands of the interesting: the aesthetic synthesis, as Poe would seem to remind us later in his letter to White, ends up being grotesque, disgusting—in bad taste—but it is also the meaning of Egaeus's idea, the action suggested by his interest.

In contradistinction to Kant, for whom the pure aesthetic encounter is associated with a mental “calm,” Poe allows for a range of responses that are not often reducible to either mind or body. In “The Philosophy of Composition,” Poe remarks on the ideal of a coordination between reader and character in the climactic moment of “The Raven” (1845) when the narrator finally turns against the bird: “[t]his revolution of thought, or fancy, on the lover's part, is intended to induce a similar one on the part of the reader—to bring the mind into a proper frame for the *dénouement*” (*Essays and Reviews* 23). Insofar as it tropes his idea of the “poetic effect,” Poe's phrase “revolution of thought” can be

positioned beside another similar trope, which appears in an 1845 self-review of his *Tales* that he wrote for the *Aristidean*: “[t]he thesis of [“The Fall of the House of Usher”], is the revulsion of feeling consequent upon discovering that for a long period of time we have been mistaking sounds of agony, for those of mirth or indifference” (*Essays and Reviews* 870). Significantly, the “revulsion of feeling,” in the case of “Usher” is a turn away from “mirth or indifference,” an affective reversal that forcefully imposes horror in the place of noticeably milder phenomenologies of response. It is difficult to decide whether to collapse “revolution of thought” and “revulsion of feeling” into a deconstructed mind-body, thinking-feeling articulation of the poetic feeling, or to attend to the descriptively generative phenomenological distance between these two schematizations of the event of response, the turn, the revolt, the revolution, the revulsion: the former can be a feeling of thinking, an intellectual motion; while the latter can be the becoming-conscious of a viscosity, a gut-feeling. Herein lies the value of thinking of Poe’s “poetic effect” in terms of individual affects: a particular dialectical structure is allowed to emerge that is always and immanently aesthetic. The “poetic effect,” in this sense, admits good and bad taste into the domain of the aesthetic, unlike the Kantian beautiful, which ends up with the additional role of guarding the limit-points of transcendental experience.²⁷

Not surprisingly, Kant reserves a privileged position for disgust outside of transcendental experience. In his book *Disgust*, Winfried Menninghaus situates Kant’s meditations on disgust (*Ekel*) within a theoretical debate, dating back as far as the 1760s, between German thinkers including Moses Mendelssohn, Gotthold Lessing, and Johann Herder, that eventually saw disgust emerge as “the outer limit of the aesthetic” (25-26). Menninghaus imagines Kant as firing one of the culminating volleys in that debate with

this extraordinary passage from the “Deduction of Pure Aesthetic Judgments” section of his Third Critique:

Beautiful art displays its excellence precisely by describing beautiful things that in nature would be ugly or displeasing. The furies, diseases, devastations of war, and the like can, as harmful things, be very beautifully described, indeed even represented in painting; only one kind of ugliness cannot be represented in a way adequate to nature without destroying all aesthetic satisfaction, hence beauty in art, namely, that which arouses loathing. For since in this strange sensation, resting on sheer imagination, the object is represented as if it were imposing the enjoyment which we are nevertheless forcibly resisting, the artistic representation of the object is no longer distinguished in our sensation itself from the nature of the object itself, and it then becomes impossible for the former to be taken as beautiful. (190)²⁸

Disgust appears to register, for Kant, as a visceral response that refuses to respect the basic distinction between mere representation and thing-in-itself, making this “strong sensation” a potential problem for the limits that he has so carefully inscribed into his aesthetic theory. The case of disgust, in this sense, might constitute an example of one of the “departure[s]” that Michel Foucault observes in Kant’s critical writing (“What Is Enlightenment?” 38), wherein the paradoxical “possibility” of a transgression of limits is inscribed within the structure of that self-same limit (50). Kantian contemplation, in other words, is assailed by the possibility that disgust constitutes an aesthetic judgment, a possibility that is rapidly foreclosed by the suggestion that disgust is too felt to qualify as disinterested. Kant continues to affirm this position, Menninghaus explains, in his late

work *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798), in which he distinguishes the “higher senses” of touch, sight, and hearing, which all work through different modes of “mechanical operation,” from the “lower senses” of taste and smell, which “work through a chemical intake” of their objects into the subject’s physical interiority (qtd. in Menninghaus 109). His scientific distinction between higher and lower senses allows Kant to formulate as rigid what might be better described as a merely phenomenological difference between more and less sensual forms of sensation—and this imposition of a limit allows him, in turn, to hive off the aesthetic from the too-bodily, the disgusting. Kant consolidates this limit with another similar opposition, between “organic” and “vital” sensations, explaining, somewhat vaguely, that the vital sensation affects the body’s “whole system of nerves,” while the organic sensation affects “only those nerves that belong to a certain part of the body.” Of the vital sensation, which includes disgust, Kant offers the following examples:

Sensations of warm and cold, even those that are aroused by the mind (e.g., by quickly rising hope or fear), belong to *vital sensation*. The *shudder* that seizes the human being himself at the representation of the sublime, and the *horror*, with which nurses’ tales drive children to bed late at night, belong to vital sensation; they penetrate the body as far as there is life in it. (*Anthropology, History, and Education* 265)

Whereas disgust “penetrate[s] the body,” the “organic sensation” strikes only at the mind; the representation of a beautiful object is represented by the higher senses *as representation*, while the corresponding objects of the lower senses penetrate the body, annihilating the otherwise intractable distinction between representation and object. It is

interesting, moreover, that Kant's examples of the vital sensation—fear, the sublime shudder, horror at the nurse's tale—seem oddly to conform to a typical profile of responses to one of Poe's horror tales, particularly as they are articulated in his letter to White.

The “organic sensation” of aesthetic feeling can be assimilated to Poe's “revolution of thought,” and, indeed, Poe's phrase conjures the image of “the free play of the faculties of cognition” to which Kant attributes the feeling of aesthetic pleasure (*Critique of the Power of Judgment* 102-04). But insofar as Poe's “revulsion of feeling” disgusts, it must be excluded from Kant's carefully circumscribed domain of aesthetic feeling. No such exclusion is necessary—or even possible, for that matter—in Tomkins's systems theoretical approach to the interrelationships of cognitions and affects, where the hopeless entanglement of the two systems can only be separated for the purely heuristic purpose of describing their respective characteristics.²⁹ In a charming moment of metacritical hypothesizing on this interimplicating relationship, Tomkins supposes that Charles Darwin neglected to count interest in his taxonomy of the emotions because his own “primary affective investments in perceiving and in thinking” led him to overlook the amplifying effects of interest on the otherwise unmotivated mechanisms of “pure” cognition (*Shame and its Sisters* 75). Interest, in the sense that Darwin might have experienced it, would seem to possess a phenomenological proximity to “thinking” that can give the interested individual the impression that they are engaging in a disinterested activity—such as collecting an empirically-deduced catalogue of emotions, for instance—rather than an interested, an aesthetic activity.³⁰ Disgust, on the other hand, is on the verge of not being counted as an affect at all in Tomkins's reckoning, owing to its

evolutionary origin as an “auxiliary mechanism” to the hunger, thirst, and oxygen drives, charged with a purgative function (*Shame and its Sisters* 135). Significantly, however, Tomkins allows disgust a far greater motivational breadth than Kant by dint of its object freedoms, that is, its capacity to attach to “a wide spectrum of entities which need not be tasted, smelled, or ingested.” Disgust, then, is not only a drive auxiliary but an affect in its own right, able to function, in addition to its purgative role, as “a signa[l] and motiv[e] to others, as well as to the self, of feelings of rejection” (*Affect, Imagery, Consciousness* 3:629). Without discriminating between representation and thing-in-itself, then, the Tomkinsian disgust response seeks in all cases to “maximize the distance between the face and the object which disgusts the self” (*Shame and its Sisters* 135).

Segueing from Tomkins’s disgusted face back to Poe’s parable of the aesthetic, I will consider Egaeus’s anagnorisis, his disgusted recognition, in a brief gesture at summation. The scattered teeth that Poe leaves as the tale’s culminating image are often read as Egaeus’s scattered mind, but maybe they more accurately configure the projectile splattering of the contents of his stomach, so tremulously does he revolt from the teeth and what their presence in his room implies. But Egaeus’s anagnorisis is still an (aesthetic) recognition, and his revulsion is therefore, unavoidably, an effect of this recognition. Egaeus’s disgust—like Poe’s bad taste—is a revolt against the aesthetic that also belongs to the aesthetic, in the same sense that the subject’s disgusted face withdraws from the disgusting object as the “signal” of a particular affective disposition toward that object. I refer to “Berenice” as a parable of an interested aesthetics—that is, a pragmatist aesthetics—for precisely this reason: because it dramatizes aesthetics in action, *as action*; it turns idea into deed.

Chapter 2: Convulsive Fictions: Lippard and Poe

The Quaker City; or, the Monks of Monk Hall (1844), a city mysteries fiction written by George Lippard, caused a sensation that very nearly erupted into riot in Philadelphia on the evening of November 11, 1844. Lippard, a crime reporter and sensational author, as well as a labour and land reform activist and secret society organizer, had been contracted by Francis C. Wemyss, manager of the Chestnut Street Theatre, to write and produce a dramatization of his already-notorious fiction after only a few installments of its serial run had appeared. However, a number of eminent Philadelphians who discovered thinly-disguised versions of themselves populating the oyster bars and brothels of *The Quaker City* were displeased with the prospect that their purported crimes and hypocrisies would soon be getting the theatrical treatment. As reported by the New York *Herald*, a certain “Judge ——,” “threatened that if he were not left out of the piece,” he would make “an uncomfortable incision into the epiglottis” (“Singular Theatrical Events”) of the beleaguered Wemyss. The recently-acquitted Singleton Mercer, Lippard’s historical model for the vengeful brother who murders his sister’s “seducer” at the end of *The Quaker City*, bought 300 tickets, to be distributed to a “number of regular Southwark rioters,” and he warned that “the demolition or conflagration of the theatre would be the consequence of the representation of the drama.” The same day, “several other persons who felt aggrieved by this attempt of a theatrical manager to make a few dollars by blackening the character of some of our most respectable citizens” implored Philadelphia’s mayor to stop the performance, alleging that it constituted “an outrage on the sanctity of private life” and was “adapted to occasion a fearful breach of the peace.” In a memoir of his life in the theatre, Wemyss

claims that it was, in fact, the mayor's eventual decision to cancel the show, only hours before its opening performance, that provoked "[t]hreats of tearing down the theatre, sacking it, &c" from disappointed ticket-holders (395). The entire Philadelphia police force was finally called in to pacify the crowd, whose blood was still warm, Wemyss opines, in the wake of a recent election that had threatened the whole city with "riot and bloodshed" (396). Lippard, for his part, is said to have arrived at the theatre "in ecstasies" ("Singular Theatrical Events") and armed with a pistol and sword-cane (Reynolds "Introduction" xii), though it isn't clear whether Lippard's intent was to mollify or rally the gathered mass.³¹

The scene outside the Chestnut Street Theatre represents an alternate version of Edgar Allan Poe's poetics of effect that probably would have made Poe uneasy. The image of an "ecsta[ti]c" Lippard, thrown outside of himself by the effects of his own work, recalls some of Poe's experimental or accidental authors, including Agathos, the planet-authoring angel who can only marvel at the effects of his "passionate" (*Poetry and Tales* 825) speech act, and Egaeus, who, after having pulled Berenice's teeth during a kind of ecstatic trance, is left asking, "I had done a deed—what was it?" (*Poetry and Tales* 232). There is a disjunction, however, between Poe's formal-aesthetic theory of the effect and Lippard's project for the development and circulation of "certain views of social reform, through the medium of popular literature" ("The Quaker City"). Few readers would cite Poe as an inspiration for Lippard's reformist story-paper poetics, which tasks the popular medium with political mandates ranging from labour and land reform to western expansionism. Despite New Historicist efforts to locate repressed commentaries on contemporary debates concerning slavery, secession, imperialism, and

so on, Poe remains a figure of political quietism, loathe to associate the material effects of reading with any specific agenda for social or political change. Poe's impatience with long and episodic literary forms illustrates this peculiar relationship he imagines between aesthetic experience and the social. Of the novel, for instance, he explains, "[w]orldly interests intervening during the pauses of perusal, modify, annul, or counteract, in a greater or lesser degree, the impressions of the book" (*Essays and Reviews* 572).

The Quaker City, as a cultural phenomenon, was rife with "interven[tions]" from various "worldly interests." Most conventionally, the lapse between serial installments would allow the everyday lives of readers to intervene, periodically, in the reading experience. Somewhat more auspiciously, the thinly-disguised representation of numerous actual Philadelphians in Lippard's narrative (including the main players in the historical murder, as well as various judges, merchants, bank directors, clergymen, politicians, journalists, and other local power-brokers) constituted an intervention of some intimate and purportedly secret details of public life in Philadelphia into the fictional world of *The Quaker City*.³² This fact should be contrasted to what Meredith McGill describes as Poe's "secondarity," the strategic dislocation of historical and geographical referents characterizing many of his tales and poems (151-164). Unlike Poe, Lippard invites his readers to locate his fiction in the real-world "records" (3) of Philadelphia—an invitation that rankled a number of citizens (as is attested to by the *Herald* article). The Chestnut Street Theatre incident—which occurred, indirectly at least, as a consequence of Lippard's invitation to readers to transpose his fiction over the historical Philadelphia—constitutes another intervention, a public, near-violent response that itself circulated in print, in New York's and Philadelphia's penny papers. The

incident outside the Chestnut Street Theatre took place, moreover, mere weeks into the long serial run of Lippard's fiction, and thus provided a powerful source of publicity for Lippard's tremendously successful serial.

Though I've probably sketched these instances of worldly intervention far too schematically, it seems fair to assume that *The Quaker City* accrued much of its meaning through these and other interventions in the months-long processes of its serial composition and consumption. If Poe would insist that such interventions "annul, or counteract ... the impressions of the book," I will argue that Lippard comes to embrace reciprocating irritations or perturbations of the boundaries between fiction writing and other social systems. For Poe, interventions threaten the already meager control that is the secondary author's portion; for Lippard, conversely, they will constitute the theoretical ground of his project "to make the Literature of Fact and Fiction ... an effective instrument in the cause of human progress" ("With Regard to the Press").

Since David S. Reynolds began to revive scholarly interest in Lippard in the early-1980s, an increasing number of Americanist scholars have been drawn to Lippard's attractive combination of mass appeal and radical politics.³³ As I mentioned in my introduction, Michael Denning figures Lippard as an *auteur* of the early days of the American print culture industry for his attempts to "fuse the role of the hack novelist with that of labor tribune" (86)—an ultimately troubled attempt that nevertheless provided later nineteenth-century dime novels with some of their "mechanic accents" (117). Shelley Streeby is even more explicit about the political expediency of Lippard's story paper poetics, contrasting the insular experience of novel-reading with the ways that the story paper "breaks the reading experience into fragments and interrupts the story with news of

the outside world” (185). Streeby continues, observing that the plurality of authorial voices gathered in Lippard’s story papers enabled a “contingent, fractal structuring of class” (202) that offers a useful conceptual alternative to late twentieth-century representations that isolate and oppose the interests of “white male workers, women, and people of color” (203). Streeby celebrates, in other words, precisely the kinds of interventions into authorship and reading that Poe recoils from, suggesting along the way that we, today, might learn something by revisiting Lippard’s long neglected alternative to Poe’s theorizations of readerly attention and interest.

This chapter contrasts Poe’s and Lippard’s respective visions of transformative writing. In her enthusiasm for the politics of Lippard’s story paper poetics, Streeby minimizes potential differences between fiction and other story paper genres, such as editorials, police columns, and transcripts of political speeches, on the way to arguing for the generative “promiscuity” of their interactions (187). I will argue, however, that these interactions—between, for instance, fiction, particular journalistic genres, and the “records” of public life—were far less stable and legible for antebellum readers than Streeby assumes. The threat of violence outside the Chestnut Street Theatre suggests that Poe’s prohibition against the intervention of worldly interests had some purchase for antebellum readers, for whom transactions between fiction and the “secret life of Philadelphia” (*The Quaker City* 4) seem to have been a source of some anxiety. Against Streeby’s optimistic account of Lippard’s open, fragmentary, and multi-vocal story paper poetics, I will draw out some incongruities and inconsistencies in his experiments at the boundaries both between fictional and non-fictional modes of representation and between writing and other social practices.

Poe uses the term “convulsive fictions” (*Essays and Reviews* 1404) to describe serial narratives (including city mysteries narratives) that seem to encourage interventions from worldly interests, and I will argue that his critique of convulsive fiction should be read as the obverse of his celebration of the poetic effect. As I will demonstrate, there is evidence in his critical writings to suggest that Poe’s preoccupation with the brevity and the unity of the tale emerged, in part at least, as a response to the convulsions intrinsic to serial reading. I will also read Poe’s tale “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt” (1842) in relation to the city mysteries genre that emerged contemporaneously with it. Like *The Quaker City* (and unlike most of the rest of Poe’s fiction), “Marie Rogêt” transposes the details of a historical event (the death of Mary Rogers) onto its narrative world, but Poe’s tale makes the outrageous claim that *both* events (i.e., the deaths of Mary Rogers and Marie Roget) exist in the same universe and that the parallels between the two events are “*coincidences*” (*Poetry and Tales* 506). I will argue that Poe’s strange gambit in “Marie Rogêt” makes visible a desire to reassert some degree of authorial control over the unpredictable incursions of worldly interests that are encouraged in the city mysteries genre.

In contrasting Lippard and Poe, this chapter seeks to understand how antebellum authors imagined and articulated their social agency. The city mysteries genre is of literary historical significance for its coupling of radical politics and popular form, a coupling that was unprecedented, at least in the American context. The genre’s politics relies, I argue, on an unspoken faith in the “revelations” (*The Quaker City* 4) that structure its purported relation to reality; however, few critics of the genre have investigated the terms of its rhetoric of the real. Poe’s critique of urban melodrama, as it

emerges from some review articles and “Marie Rogêt,” is interesting for extending his critique of Idealism (which I examined in Chapter 1) to the seemingly un-idealist topic of city life. Poe’s judgment of the genre is that its endless train of revelations—of serial and serialized convulsions—disrupts and ultimately annuls the poetic effect; a consequence of this judgment is the apparent foreclosure of a promising avenue for the reform-minded author. In contrasting Poe and Lippard, this chapter investigates the possibilities and the limits of antebellum constructions of authorial intervention in the social.

The Quaker City was not only Lippard’s most popular work; it was also the best-selling work of fiction in American publishing history before *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) (Reynolds *Beneath the American Renaissance* 207). The text first appeared in ten yellow-covered pamphlet installments between the fall of 1844 and the spring of 1845, at which point the first two-thirds of the text’s serial run was bound and quickly sold 48,000 copies; a complete and expanded edition, with original engravings by noted illustrators, was published shortly thereafter and sold 60,000 copies within the year (Denning 88). The success of *The Quaker City* led to Lippard’s steady (if brief) employment as a journalist at the *Saturday Courier*, whose circulation reportedly increased from 30,000 to 70,000 through the course of his tenure (Denning 88). Over the next decade, Lippard would capitalize on his literary fame in founding two socialist-themed story papers, the *Quaker City* weekly (confusingly so-named to exploit the name-recognition garnered by his earlier best-seller), which ran for two years, and *The White Banner*, a quarterly devoted to his secret labour society, The Brotherhood of the Union, which would only last for a single issue. Lippard’s fiction successes subsequent to *The Quaker City*,

moreover, allowed him to earn between \$3,000 and \$4,000 a year throughout most of the 1840s, which was a huge sum for an antebellum author (Streeby *American Sensations* 40). In the preface to an 1849 edition of *The Quaker City* that looked back over its half-decade of influence, Lippard bragged that the book was “more attacked, and more read, than any work of American fiction ever published” (2).

Despite the antebellum fame of Lippard and his best-seller, it is not easy to fix the generic coordinates of *The Quaker City* for today’s readers, whose most proximate signifier for a text like Lippard’s might be “novel.” Like many fictions of the day, *The Quaker City* appeared in a number of publishing situations, including its original circulation in pamphlet installments, its subsequent circulation in various complete and incomplete, authorized and reprinted, English-language and translated book forms, and, finally, its serialization in the pages of Lippard’s *Quaker City* weekly (a run which ended, without comment, after only a single installment). Another factor complicating the kinship of *The Quaker City* both to antebellum and modern conceptions of the novel is the context of its original consumption: like so much antebellum cheap fiction, *The Quaker City* was often read by “mechanics,” either at home, at work, or, while travelling, silently or out loud, and its installments were frequently circulated among friends and co-workers (Denning 30-40). The classic critical image of the novel as a corollary product of the rise of the bourgeois private sphere, in other words, extends only problematically to antebellum urban and other cheap fictions, which probably had modes of transit between public and private spheres that had more in common with cheap daily and weekly newspapers.³⁴

Similarly, the baroque plotlines and exuberant, inconsistent modes of address on display in *The Quaker City* can be seen to traverse a number of novelistic and journalistic traditions. Of the barely-intersecting plotlines that make up the text, the most prominent is the seduction-revenge plot that involves the rape of Mary Arlington by Gus Lorrimer and Gus's murder at the hands of Mary's brother, Byrnewood Arlington. As Denning notes, Lippard's staging of the seduction plot can help place the text in a novelistic tradition dating back to Samuel Richardson; he even goes so far as to describe *The Quaker City* as "a minor and belated version of the *Clarissa* story" (94). As I will elaborate upon below, however, an additional and perhaps more abiding modal touchstone for *The Quaker City* is theatrical and novelistic melodrama, wherein the signature thematics of manichean morality, vindicated virtue, and revenge are expressed through a poetics of excess. Regardless of these novelistic and theatrical influences on *The Quaker City*, however, the most immediate details of its seduction-revenge plot were drawn straight from the pages of Philadelphia's penny papers, which had been fervently detailing and editorializing the Mercer murder trial throughout 1843. The text's palimpsestic narrative and rhetorical constructions, as well as the situations of its circulation and consumption, then, seem to make legible its various novelistic, theatrical, and journalistic aspects. The terms of these interactions between different social systems and the endgame implicit in this particular rendering of mass communication remain to be investigated.

Lippard's apprenticeship to writing as a crime journalist with Philadelphia's *Spirit of the Times* in 1842 offers some early indications of what will be enabled by his subsequent hybridizations of novel-writing and journalism. Lippard wrote two crime

columns for *Spirit of the Times* that conform, respectively, to the conventions of episodic and serial crime reporting in antebellum penny papers, as these are described by Carol Stabile. Lippard's "City Police" column represents a more or less conventional instance of episodic crime reporting, which usually consisted of brief, discrete, one-off narratives, derived from the daily proceedings at the police station or the courthouse (404). The episodic genre of crime reporting was pioneered by George Wisner in his New York *Sun* "Police Gazette" column of mid-1830s, and it had become a ubiquitous feature of the penny papers by Lippard's time (404). By contrast, serial crime reporting, a slightly later addition to the penny paper repertoire, consisted of far longer and more detailed stories and opinion pieces aggregating around a single, high-profile crime (405). The violent and mysterious deaths of Helen Jewett and Mary Rogers catalyzed two of the earliest instances of serial crime reporting, wherein penny press reporters and editors would launch months- and years-long print crusades consisting of graphic descriptions (and illustrations) of the crime, interviews with witnesses, frequent updates, and all manner of editorial commentary ranging from pet theories to vituperative indictments of the police, the judiciary, and rival newspapers. Carl Ostrowski argues that Lippard gradually developed a more sustained critical voice in his crime reporting over the course of his year writing the "City Police" columns, with the theme of systemic corruption providing a leitmotif through many of his later reports (127-28). Ostrowski notes, however, that Lippard's "Our Talisman" column, which also appeared in *Spirit of the Times* in 1842, represented his first substantial experiment in serial journalism—and, significantly, the column also displays early signs of the integration of novelistic and journalistic elements that will eventually come to characterize his longer serial fictions.

“Our Talisman,” which appeared in twelve installments through the first two months of 1842, follows the adventures of Flib, a young “red-headed devil” who works as an errand-boy at the offices of *Spirit of the Times* (“Our Talisman, No. 1”). In the first installment, Flib is introduced lounging in the author’s armchair, an invasion suggestive of his status as a kind of trickster-avatar for Lippard himself. More importantly, Flib appears for the first time in the thrall of a “peculiarly shaped ring,” which, he explains, confers upon him the powers of invisibility and telepathy, among a host of other magical abilities. Flib reports that “the ring is a talisman—it was brought to me by a spirit,” explaining that it was “a rale, regular, bona fide spirit, with a tail and two horns” (“Our Talisman, No. 1”). Over the course of the column’s nine installments, this talismanic ring will enable Flib to witness the various secret criminal doings of Philadelphia, which then find their way into the pages of *Spirit of the Times*, much to the consternation of the city’s increasingly paranoid criminal element. Individual columns have Flib out a stingy theatre manager for withholding wages (“Our Talisman, No. 1”), “peep” into the Court Sessions from a vantage point behind the judge (“Our Talisman, No. 2”), and listen-in on the “festering corruption” (“Our Talisman, No. 4”) on display at the meetings of bank directors, whose “injunction to secresy [sic]” (“Our Talisman, No. 5”) will be (for them, inexplicably) recorded in *Spirit of the Times*. Flib capitalizes, in short, on the journalistic possibilities offered by his talisman, which enables an omniscient perspective that would otherwise be impossible for the crime reporter. Lippard’s recourse to fabulism in uncovering an ostensibly deeper account of the economic and judicial realities of Philadelphia in his “Our Talisman” column represents a decisive shift, I would argue, away from the prosaic language and ethically facetious and non-committal viewpoint of

most penny press police or court columns of the time and toward a melodramatic poetics that will characterize Lippard's own subsequent journalistic fictions, beginning with *The Quaker City*.

As I hinted, much of Lippard's writing can be assimilated to melodramatic modes of expression and address, especially as these are articulated by Peter Brooks in his epochal study of melodrama's "mode of excess." Brooks begins his analysis of melodrama with an example taken from Honoré de Balzac's *La peau de chagrin* (1831): upon entering a gambling house, the novel's protagonist, Raphaël de Valentin, is asked to remove his hat—an ostensibly benign request that becomes the occasion for an almost manic interrogation, on the part of the narrator, of the possible "meanings" of this everyday "gesture" (1). For Brooks, this example evinces "a narrative voice [that] is not content to describe and record gesture," but which is intent, rather, on making it "yield meaning" (1). "There is always a moment in Balzac's descriptions of the world," Brooks continues, "where the eye's photographic registration of objects yields to the mind's effort to pierce surface, to interrogate appearances" (2). In the particular example of *La peau de chagrin*, the titular scrap of shagreen facilitates the text's penetration into "the world of spirit" by granting the wishes of its owner; this power, however, is gained through a Faustian pact in which the act of wishing gradually saps the life of the wisher. It seems an auspicious detail, moreover, that the first section of Balzac's novel, in which the magical shagreen is introduced, is called "Le talisman," a title which reappears in Lippard's own journalistic take on the Faust parable in "Our Talisman." The modal similarities between Balzac's and Lippard's texts don't end there, either: Flib, like Balzac's Raphaël, acquires the capacity to penetrate "the banal stuff of reality" (Brooks

2) with his talisman, a capacity which enables “the eye’s photographic registration of objects” to yield to the deeper, more profound revelation of the structures undergirding social relations in Philadelphia. Flib’s talisman, in other words, enables a journalistic perspective that is far more “penetrating” than that of, for instance, the conventional antebellum crime reporter, who merely observes and reports upon the surface details of police and judicial procedure in episodic columns like “City Police.”

Another, somewhat more cryptic piece that Lippard wrote for *Spirit of the Times* similarly anticipates the idiosyncratic combination of journalistic exposé and genre fiction that will come to characterize much of his subsequent writing. Entitled simply “Mysterious Story,” the one-off piece turns out to be less of a narrative than a journalistic exposé of a certain “large and magnificent mansion” in Philadelphia, which, the author reveals, is in fact “a decoy for all young men of wealth, whether merchant’s clerks, law students, medical students, or even *divinity* students.” Under the pretense that the mansion is a “private dwelling,” an “ostensibly” magnanimous host establishes “a great familiarity” with his “crowd of young and wealthy dupes,” before he “gradually sounds the passions of each of his dupes, and as he finds them inclined, so he uses them.” The results, Lippard writes, are predictable:

One by one [the dupes] are introduced to scenes of revelry and debauchery, that realize the dreams of the Arabian tales. Luxurious banquets are succeeded by the society of beautiful though shameless females; the poor dupe becomes lost to morality, then forgetful of his honor, and in the end a robber, and a swindler. Once again, Lippard’s journalism thematizes hidden corruption; or, more accurately, it stages journalism *as* revelation, as the exposure of hidden corruption. The Gothic or

melodramatic elements in the short piece, which are on display in his moody representation of the “mysterious” mansion in question, moreover, are oddly mitigated by Lippard’s insistent recourse to facticity. In the face of “the thousand and one rumors which are flying around the community,” Lippard’s article promises “some glimpses at the facts,” and he ends by reaffirming that “this rumor is supported by much plausible testimony.” “What we have said,” Lippard’s continues, by way of conclusion, is but a glimpse of these dark and fearful truths. We shall resume the subject again. Should the owner of the establishment pursue his shameless course, we shall feel it our duty to *give his name* and thus set the police authorities on the proper track.” The melodramatic penetration of “dark and fearful truths,” in Lippard’s journalism, then, seems to partake both of Balzacian Idealism, in which the revealed truths take the form of spiritual or moral absolutes, on the one hand, and of a kind of quasi-materialism, on the other hand, in which the exposure is meant to reveal actual relations between actual individuals in *this* society. The threat that concludes “Mysterious Story,” in other words, would seem to imply a kind of nascent activist imperative on Lippard’s part, but it is still not clear how literally—or, rather, how materially—we are meant to take that imperative.

While the “revelery and debauchery” alluded to in “Mysterious Story” are redolent of similar scenes that run through *La peau de chagrin*, Lippard’s mansion probably also represents, as Christopher Looby observes, an early draft of Monk-hall, the sub-titular den of iniquity at the heart of *The Quaker City*.³⁵ As most commentators on the novel have pointed out, the figures of Monk-hall and the Quaker City constitute two of the antebellum period’s most powerful instances of the European Gothic idiom transplanted into the urban, industrialized, and American present. In this context,

Lippard's dedication of *The Quaker City* to "the memory of Charles Brockden Brown" makes some sense, since it was Brown who first articulated the need for an American instantiation of the Gothic. In the preface to *Edgar Huntley* (1799), Brown promises a narrative that "grow[s] out of the condition of our country," rather than out of the "puerile superstitions and exploded manners; Gothic castles and chimeras" usually associated with European Gothic fiction (641). One version of Brown's attempt to gothicize American life is his depiction of the Philadelphia yellow fever epidemic of 1793, which plays a significant role in his novels *Ormond* (1799) and *Arthur Mervyn* (1799-1800). In both novels, Brown subverts Philadelphia's reputation as a manifestation of European Enlightenment principles by representing the city as made uncanny by the outbreak of yellow fever, an epidemic that is represented as gnawing at the city's touted communitarianism and democratic social relations. The structuring irony underpinning Brown's representation of Philadelphia in *Ormond* and *Arthur Mervyn*, namely, of diseased sociality infecting the city of brotherly love, seems a source of inspiration for Lippard's own representation of the ironically-named Quaker City, whose reputation for piety is undermined by each successive revelation of hypocrisy and vice.

Against the image of an orderly and rational Philadelphia, with its transparent and legible grid layout, Monk-hall is depicted as a sort of repressed excess, hidden away in the southern suburbs. A visitor unfamiliar with Monk-hall, the narrator observes, would "have a devil of a time finding the way" (48). In the tradition of the Gothic castle or monastery, moreover, whose mysteries have featured in the landscape and community for time immemorial, Monk-hall can be dated back to a murky period "long before the Revolution" (46). Its original proprietor is unknown outside of certain "[s]trange

traditions,” but the narrator does concede that the mysterious construction of the mansion, including three stories built underground, “where wine was drunken without stint, and beauty ruined without remorse,” suggests “a mind rendered whimsical and capricious by excessive wealth” (46). Lippard’s emphasis on the proprietor’s “excessive wealth” as a cause for his perversions is perhaps the first hint that capitalism—instead of, say, medieval Catholicism, or “puerile superstitions” more generally—is a primary target of Lippard’s revisionist Gothic. This hint becomes more explicit in Lippard’s description of the tenants of Monk-hall, where he plays on the expectations of readers who might be more accustomed to evil monks than corrupt elites:

And the Monks of Monk-Hall—who are they?

Grim-faced personages in long black robes and drooping cowls? Stern old men with beads around their necks and crucifix in hand? Blood-thirsty characters, perhaps, or black-browed ruffians, or wan-faced outcasts of society? Ah no, ah no! From the eloquent, the learned, and—don’t you laugh—from the pious of the Quaker City, the old Skeleton-Monk has selected the members of his band. Here were lawyers from the court, doctors from the school, and judges from the bench. Here too, ruddy and round faced, sate a demure parson, whose white hands and soft words, had made him the idol of his wealthy congregation. Here was a puffy-faced Editor side by side with a Magazine Proprietor; here were sleek-visaged tradesmen, with round faces and gouty hands, whose voices, now shouting the drinking song had re-echoed the prayer and the psalm in the aristocratic church, not longer than a Sunday ago. (55-56)

The monks of Monk-hall are revealed all to be capitalists of one or another stripe, and their hypocritical pieties meant to mirror the similar hypocrisies of Ambrosio, for example, the lecherous monk whose reputation for piety provides a central irony in Matthew Gregory Lewis's classic Gothic novel, *The Monk* (1796). (If Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* [1794] offered a model title for other city mysteries authors, perhaps Lewis's title similarly inspired Lippard.) The removal of the Gothic from a remote, pre-modern past to an industrialized, urbanized, and capitalistic present is undoubtedly what enables Lippard to levy his critique of the uncanny social relations haunting Philadelphia. The Gothic mode's thematics of exposure, however, which Lippard carries over into *The Quaker City*, will have quite different implications in their new, urban environment.

Brooks is quick to point out the affiliation between the Gothic and melodramatic modes, which represent, he argues, alternative but complementary formal responses to Enlightenment-era "rationalism" and "desacralization" (17). The Gothic novel's version of the "moral occult," Brooks continues, is hidden inside "the Gothic castle, with its pinnacles and dungeons, crenellations, moats, drawbridges, spiraling staircases and concealed doors," and the imperative of the Gothic novel is to mine these "depths" and reveal them to "man's waking, social existence" (19). "The frenzy of the Gothic," Brooks writes, (using *The Monk* as his example), "the thunder of its rhetoric, and the excess of its situations image both the difficulty and the importance of the breaking through of repression, where victory is achieved, as in melodrama, by finding the true stakes of the drama" (19). The frenzied, excessive, and thundering rhetoric of *The Quaker City* has the identical goal of "breaking through" particular latent structures, and

like the Gothic novel, it uses a labyrinthine dwelling, full of secrets waiting to be revealed, as its figure for Freudian repression.

When it comes to “the true stakes of the drama,” however, attempts to assimilate *The Quaker City* to the Gothic-melodramatic mode, as Brooks describes it, become strained. In the passage that I already quoted, in which the narrator reveals the true nature of each of the tenants of Monk-hall, it is clear that the monks are meant to embody evil as a melodramatic and moral absolute and, furthermore, that this revelation is meant to lay bare a deeper and more true version of reality than the one represented through their superficial pieties. But what are the implications of these acts of revelation, articulation, and clarification when they seem to be claiming to reveal true structures of social relations under capitalism? As post-Marxist moderns, we are accustomed to discovering material explanations for the structures of given social relations, but Lippard’s text—and his reformist poetics, more generally—asks that we assimilate his particular, pre-Marxist critique of capitalism to a version of the universe that still has recourse to immaterial versions of the moral occult. In brief, it is unclear whether the expressive imperative of *The Quaker City* is to reveal a moral occult that penetrates deeper into the spiritual realm than the “eye’s photographic registration of objects,” or whether its purported revelation of the actual (i.e. hypocritical) social relations under capitalism is, in fact, *enough* for this narrative that claims such a powerful reformist agenda. The best answer that the text provides to this problem, as far as I can tell, is that these imperatives are identical, and it is this identification of true social relations with an idealizing moral occult that makes *The Quaker City* such a strange and insistently *antebellum* artifact.

Before pursuing these idealist underpinnings of Lippard's activist poetics any further, it seems useful to take a broader view of the transnational city mysteries phenomenon, as well as some of the contemporary responses to this avowedly political genre that dominated the cheap fiction industry through the 1840s and early-1850s. The city mysteries genre has developed a reputation among scholars for its stridently political, often revolutionary social agenda, which prompts Denning to describe it as "the genre of 1848, the sensational reading of Chartists and Revolutionaries" (86). I have started to demonstrate, through the example of Lippard's career, how the city mysteries genre embodies the convergence of a number of journalistic, theatrical, non-fiction, and fiction modes, dating at least as far back as the mid eighteenth-century. In this respect, the genre could be understood as radicalizing as it collated a heterogeneous set of cultural sources, including the British Newgate novels of the nineteenth-century, early nineteenth-century biographical and journalistic accounts of city life, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic and melodramatic fiction and theatre, and nineteenth-century urban crime journalism.

Scholars tend to agree that it was the enormous popularity of Eugène Sue's *Les mystères de Paris* that catalyzed the political turn in urban writing that would come to characterize the city mysteries phenomenon in Europe, North America, and even as far afield as Australia.³⁶ Sue's text, which ran from June 9, 1842 to October 15, 1843 in the Parisian newspaper *Journal des débats*, represented one of the very earliest instances of *romans-feuilletons*, the popular serial fiction form that emerged out of and in response to France's more staid cultural miscellanies (Grossir 108). Like *The Quaker City*, *Les mystères de Paris* follows an outsider's revelatory encounters with urban criminality. In

Sue's narrative, the mystery man, Rodolphe, wanders the city disguised as a Parisian labourer, only to reveal, in the end, his true identity as a compassionate German aristocrat, the Grand Duke of Gerolstein. Claudine Grossir argues that Sue, who was an ardent reader of the Parisian dailies, as well as a close follower of France's political process, was the first *feuilletoniste* to recognize the potential political expediency of a fictional form that could respond quickly to the fluctuating opinions and interests of the public. She claims that the serial form of Sue's texts mirrored the "news" content it was published alongside in its periodic and ephemeral aspects and in its capacity to respond quickly to the social and political concerns of the day (109). Sue's politicization of popular serial fiction proved enormously successful and influential, both in Paris and around the world. Its politics, moreover, inspired admiration and debate from all quarters of society, making surprising bedfellows, for instance of Poe and a young Karl Marx, both of whom would write trenchant critiques of Sue's poetics.

Following the extraordinary success of *The Quaker City*, Lippard came to be known in American newspapers as "the Eugene Sue of America" and "the American Sue," a characterization that he alternately embraced and contested.³⁷ But he was far from the only author to take up the mantle of mysteries from Sue. In Europe, G.W.M Reynolds's *The Mysteries of London* (1844) and F. Thiele's *Die Geheimnisse von Berlin* (1845) quickly followed Sue's *roman-feuilleton*, while in North America, practically every urban centre (and some not-so-urban centres) found itself the namesake of a mysteries fiction, from New York, Boston, and Montreal, to Cincinnati, St. Louis, and San Francisco, with stops in Troy, Rochester, and Worcester along the way.³⁸ Some of the more popular American mysteries fictions included Ned Buntline's *The Mysteries*

and Miseries of New York (1848), A.J.H. Duganne's *The Knights of the Seal; or, The Mysteries of Three Cities* (1846), and Justin Jones's *Big Dick, the King of the Negroes. Or Virtue and Vice Contrasted* (1849), the latter of which was noteworthy for being one of the very few city mysteries to feature an African American hero. City mysteries authors and publishers also catered to America's growing non-English speaking populations, with a pirated German translation of *The Quaker City* appearing in 1846, and other German-language city mysteries, including Heinrich Börnstein's *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis* (1851) and Emil Klauprecht's *Cincinnati: oder, Geheimnisse des Westens* (1854-55), soon following suit.

George Foster's popular city sketches, ostensibly non-fictional urban exposés, can help unfold the peculiar rhetoric of reality that we find in city mysteries fiction. Foster wrote a column called "New York in Slices" for Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune* in 1848, which he then collected and published as a nationally-circulating paper-bound book called *New York in Slices: By an Experienced Carver* (1849). The following year, Foster published a sequel, *New York by Gaslight*, which, like its progenitor column, claimed to

penetrate beneath the thick veil of night and lay bare the fearful mysteries of darkness in the metropolis—the festivities of prostitution, the orgies of pauperism, the haunts of theft and murder, the scenes of drunkenness and beastly debauch, and all the sad realities that go to make up the lower stratum—the under-ground story—of life in New York. (69)

Besides sharing with Lippard and other city mysteries authors a barely-controlled poetics of excess, Foster performs the characteristic city mysteries move of claiming to reveal the real city. In his introduction to a scholarly edition of Foster's writing, Stuart Blumin lists

city mysteries authors, including Sue and Lippard, as among the chief influences on Foster, although he does make a hard distinction between Foster and these “romancers” of city life: “Foster,” he claims, “supplies a city that is far more real, far more complete” (27). In making this claim, Blumin is operating with a distinction between romance and non-fictional journalism that was actually more troubled in the antebellum moment than he acknowledges. While Foster’s descriptions of the “sad realities” of the “lower-stratum” can sometimes read like a proto-journalistic realism, his metaphors of penetration remain firmly rooted in the rhetoric of melodramatic exposure. His “slices,” in this sense, would be better described as short-form journalistic riffs on the older Gothic and melodramatic narratives of revelation than proto-realist “snapshots” of city life.

A few examples from city mysteries fictions written in the half-decade or so before Foster’s “slices” began appearing can demonstrate the degree to which Foster’s journalistic exposure of the sad realities of urban life had become a structuring trope in urban writing by the end of the 1840s. In *The Mysteries of Philadelphia: or, Scenes of Real Life in the Quaker City* (1848), for example, the anonymous author (“an old amateur”) describes the “great expense of time, labor, and money” he has spent “in order to expose to the world the nefarious and secret haunts of the gay and fashionable of Philadelphia’s sons” (“Preface”). The author goes on to explain how the “secret mysteries” of life in Philadelphia, which he will reveal in his narrative, are all “recorded facts seen by his own eye” (viii), observations made “upon his notebook, of many hundred pages” (“Preface”).

Ned Buntline similarly represents himself as a kind of flâneur-cum-gritty-beat-reporter in the preface to his hugely successful city mysteries fiction, *The Mysteries and Miseries of New York* (1849):

As a general thing, I dislike prefatory remarks, but so singular is the work I now have to write, so strange its scenes and incidents, so various and peculiar the characters which I have to delineate, that I feel bound to tell the reader that, strange as all may be, it is drawn from *life*, heart-sickening, *too-real* life. Not one scene of vice or horror is given in the following pages which has not been enacted over and over again in this city, nor is there one character which has not its counterpart in our very midst. I have sought out and studied the reality of each person and scene which I portray. Accompanied by several kind and efficient police officers, whom, were it proper, I would gratefully name, I have visited every den of vice which is hereinafter described, and have chosen each character for this work during these visits. Therefore, though this book bears the title of a *novel*, it is written with the ink of truth and deserves the name of a *history* more than that of a *romance*. (5)

Buntline's claim that he "visited every den of vice which is hereinafter described" is neatly hedged by his explanation that each "scene of vice or horror" in his text represents an abstraction or archetype of events that are "enacted over and over again in this city," an ambiguous caveat that withholds the pragmatic meaning of his truth-claim. It is left conveniently unclear, in other words, whether it is the ideal or the empirical "truth" that is penetrated by his "ink."

Buntline's boast that his narrative is "drawn from *life*, heart-sickening, *too-real* life" represents another recurring figure in city mysteries writing, whereby the excessively romantic character of the narrative derives, paradoxically, from its overly-faithful historicity, its conformation to a reality that proves "*too-real*." Another instance of this figure occurs in the preface to George Thompson's city mysteries serial *City Crimes* (1849), a fiction that includes pleasure domes inhabited by robot sex slaves, criminal masterminds who burn their faces beyond recognition with acid, and prostitute mothers who murder their children to save money. Thompson's pamphlet fiction is the most self-delightedly lurid, gory, and hyper-sexual example of antebellum urban writing that I have encountered (David M. Stewart refers to Thompson simply as a "pornographer" [80]), but, still, Thompson conforms to the strictures of the city mysteries preface genre by insisting that his text should be described as a "romance of reality" for its commitment to a "natural" style:

I conceive it to be a prominent fault of most of the tales of fiction that are written and published at the present day, that they are not sufficiently *natural*—their style is too much exaggerated—and in aiming to produce startling effects, they depart too widely from the range of probability to engage the undivided interest of the enlightened and judicious reader. Believing as I do that the romance of reality—the details of common, everyday life—the secret history of things hidden from the public gaze, but of the existence of which there can be no manner of doubt—are endowed with a more powerful and absorbing interest than any extravagant flight of the imagination can be, it shall be my aim in the following pages to adhere as closely as possible to truth and reality; and to depict scenes and adventures which

have actually occurred, and which have come to my knowledge in the course of an experience no means limited—an experience replete with facilities for acquiring a perfect insight into human nature, and a knowledge of the many secret springs of human action. (3)

Thompson's particularly excessive version of the mode of excess reads like Brooksonian melodrama filtered through the American exploitation movies of the 1960s and 1970s, but Thompson insists, nevertheless, that his project is naturalistic in its representational strategies.

The exaggerated, even shrill, rhetoric of sensational reality, of "*too-real* life," that is found in so many antebellum urban melodramas suggests how important it was for these authors to straddle historicity and excess in marketing their work. In this sense, the genre seems almost bound by market pressures to present a paradoxical rhetoric of reality, wherein, for instance, the revelation of the particular "den of vice" and of the abstract "secret history of things hidden" compete for their share of the real that is the ultimate stake of the drama.

Brooks situates the melodramatic quest for essential reality in the larger context of the "systems of conflict" that have dominated Western culture for the past two hundred years (201). Significantly, Brooks argues that these systems of conflict "are also systems of expressionistic clarification" (201), and he lists both Hegelian and Marxist dialectics, as well as Freudian psychoanalysis, among the most influential of these systems that strive for some form of clarification in a secularized world (202). As I mentioned above, Brooks is most interested in melodrama's anti-repressive imperative, but the explicit social dimension of city mysteries melodramas suggests the usefulness of considering the

genre's relationship to dialectical modes of clarification as well. In fact, the often conflicting endgame of urban melodrama's mechanics of exposure, whereby the abstract *and* the material or historical are presented as ultimate revelations, suggests that the genre is in some sense caught between the diverging Hegelian and Marxist aims of dialectical clarification.

Marx's discussion of *Les mystères de Paris* in *The Holy Family* (1844) is useful on this count for combining a critique of Sue's fiction with a polemical articulation of some of his burgeoning issues with Hegel and the Young Hegelians.³⁹ Marx embeds his critique of *Les mystères de Paris* in the critique of an overly-enthusiastic review article about Sue's text, written by a certain Young Hegelian philosopher and journalist, Szeliga (pseudonym of Franz Zychlinski). Marx's main problem with Sue and Szeliga is their shared tendency to abstract away the same social conditions that they claim to reveal, a tendency that he finds most persistently in their reification of the category of "mystery." "Herr Szeliga conceives all present world conditions as mysteries," Marx explains, "but whereas *Feuerbach* disclosed *real mysteries*, Herr *Szeliga* makes *mysteries* out of real *trivialities*" (56). The "*real mysteries*" disclosed by Feuerbach all concern aspects of Christian spiritualism, including "the mystery of the Incarnation, the mystery of the Trinity, the mystery of Immortality," etc., and they are real, according to Marx's only somewhat facetious reasoning, only to the degree that they are appropriately situated outside "all present world conditions" (56). Szeliga and Sue, on the other hand, are guilty of "mystery-mongering," for representing "as *mysteries* degeneracy ... within civilisation and rightlessness and inequality in the state" (56). The latest "socialist literature, which has revealed these mysteries" concerning the truth of social relations, Marx continues,

must be “still a mystery to Herr Szeliga” (56). Having distinguished the socialist from the idealist explanations of inequality, Marx summarizes the troubling Hegelianism of Sue’s text:

Only now, after dissolving real relations, e.g., law and civilisation, in the category of mystery and thereby making “*Mystery*” into Substance, does he rise to the true *Hegelian* height and transforms “*Mystery*” into a self-existing Subject *incarnating* itself in real situations and persons so that the manifestations of its life are countesses, marquises, grisettes, porters, notaries, charlatans, and love intrigues, balls, wooden doors, etc. Having produced “*Mystery*” out of the real world, he produces the real world out of this category. (60)

For Marx, the entire fictional universe in which Sue’s text operates is a manifestation that follows from the incarnation of mystery as “Substance,” and all the characters, settings, and events that populate this fictional universe are merely stops along the “speculative career” (60) of the category “mystery.”

Marx’s deft analysis of *Les mystères de Paris* is useful for situating some key distinctions between two of Brooks’s systems of expressionistic clarification (i.e., Hegelian and Marxist dialectics) in the contemporary debates surrounding city mysteries fiction. Marx cuts right through the conflicting constructions of the real that I described above as a central aspect of the genre’s melodramatic representation of city life, but his philosophical approach is not attuned to the role that seriality and other modes of intervention play in the genre’s poetics—especially as these poetics are explicitly linked, in Lippard’s work, to particular reform agendas. For a consideration of the effect of city mysteries writing, then, it is necessary to turn once again to Poe.

Despite his reputation as an innovator of urban fiction, Poe, like Marx, did not approve of the city mysteries genre. It is likely that Poe was familiar with Lippard's fiction, since he knew Lippard, worked across the street from him for a time, and would surely have been aware of the sensation caused by *The Quaker City*. Still, there are no specific references to Lippard's work in any of Poe's journalistic or critical writings.

Poe did write two reviews of Sue's fiction, however, besides frequently disparaging the episodic and serial structure employed by most cheap fiction authors of the time. Poe accuses Sue of violating the vaunted "totality of effect" in his review of *The Mysteries of Paris* (Poe read Sue's book in translation), a work that he describes as "a paradox of childish folly and consummate skill" for its "laughably incredible" plot (*Essays and Reviews* 1404). "The incidents are *consequential* from the premises," Poe explains, but he cannot abide such basic premises as the existence of a man like Rodolphe or the existence of a society that would tolerate his "perpetual interference" (1404). Poe's critique of the faulty premises governing Sue's narrative could be understood as another instantiation of his critical obsession with tracing effects back to poetic causes (an obsession that I considered in detail in my introduction and first chapter). This particular version of Poe's attention to effects is significant, of course, for the critique of cheap fiction serials that it implies. Sue's text has this "in common with all the 'convulsive' fictions," Poe explains: it is episodic, incoherent, a "museum of novel and ingenious incident" wholly lacking in unity and totality (1404). Poe's phrase "convulsive fiction" neatly sums up his problem with episodic and serial modes of sensationalism, which convulse the reader again and again to the detriment of the total, culminating

convulsion, i.e., the poetic effect. We can begin to distinguish Poe's sensationalism from that of the city mysteries authors, then, according to this logic of the convulsion: episodic convulsions, administered serially, Poe would seem to argue, obviate the ultimate aesthetic convulsion, the revolution of thought/revulsion of feeling. To further generalize from Poe's critique, we could suppose that episodic convulsions, in enabling the possibility of rhythmic, fluctuating, digressive modes of attention, not to mention the possibility of "intervention" from "worldly interests" or other extrinsic stimuli, detract from the manipulative prerogative that should, by rights, belong to the author. It is not difficult to derive from this distinction between unified and episodic convulsions the distinction that Poe himself frequently makes, between the tale and other, less ideally temporalized modes of writing, which include the epigram, the novel, the news, and, of course, the hybrid form of city mysteries writing.

Poe elaborates upon his critique of episodic convulsion with the following complaint that all such narratives as *The Mysteries of Paris* dispense with the "*ars celare artem*" ("the art of concealing art"):

Another point which distinguishes the Sue school, is the total want of the *ars celare artem*. In effect the writer is saying to the reader, "Now—in one moment—you shall see what you shall see. Prepare to have your imagination, or your pity, greatly excited." The wires are not only not concealed, but displayed as things to be admired, equally, with the puppets they set in motion. The result is, that in perusing, for example, a pathetic chapter in "The Mysteries of Paris" we say to ourselves, without shedding a tear—"Now, here is something which will be sure to move every reader to tears." (1404)

Poe mirrors aspects of Marx, here, who complains of Szeliga and Sue: “His art is not that of disclosing what is hidden, but of hiding what is disclosed” (56). However, while Poe and Marx both accuse Sue of reifying the mystery/revelation structure, for Marx this reification has the undesirable consequence of abstracting Sue’s narrative from the real relations governing social life. Conversely, Poe takes issue with Sue’s slavish adherence to the principle of revelation because it excludes the possibility of surprise. For Poe, the fact of mystery and the expectation of revelation are always already exposed structures in Sue’s text, despite the pretense of mystery: *because* readers know they are being pressed to cry, in other words, they read on “without shedding a tear.”

It is not surprising that Poe should complain about the transparent execution of Sue’s revelations, since, as Walter Benjamin has so effectively explained, Poe’s own urban fictions are premised on the illegibility of the modern cityscape, which withholds revelation from all but analyst-detective-author figures such as Dupin and Poe himself. A representative illustration of this point comes in the opening paragraph of “The Man of the Crowd” (1840), a tale which Benjamin describes as “the X-ray picture of a detective story” (48):

Men die nightly in their beds, wringing the hands of ghostly confessors, and looking them piteously in the eyes—die with despair of heart and convulsion of throat, on account of the hideousness of mysteries which will not *suffer themselves* to be revealed.... And thus the essence of all crime is undivulged.

(388)

Poe anticipates his own accusation about the incessant revelations structuring convulsive fiction in this passage by constructing what is, for him, the paradigmatic scene of

criminal revelation, a guilty “convulsion of throat” moments before death that leaves the crime, finally, “undivulged.” For Poe, then, the problem with narratives such as Sue’s, in which mystery/revelation is abstracted to point of becoming an ur-structure, is not that real social conditions are mystified; rather, the problem is that the author’s unique capacity to read effects is compromised, a potential forfeiture of agency that is a recurring source of anxiety for secondary authors such as Poe.

Poe ends his review of *The Mysteries of Paris* with another move that should be familiar to readers of his criticism: an accusation of plagiarism. In this instance, Poe compares a plotline in *The Mysteries of Paris* in which a man trains an ape to kill someone with a barber’s razor to the final revelation, in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841), that the “murders” had been committed in a similar manner by an escaped orangutan. After assuring readers that a French translation of “Rue Morgue” had, in fact, appeared in a Parisian magazine *before* the appearance of Sue’s serial, Poe explains, “I do not wish, of course, to look upon M. Sue’s adaptation of my property in any other light than that of a compliment. The similarity *may* have been entirely accidental” (1404). The illogical rhetoric of Poe’s accusation, which simultaneously suggests homage (“adaptation,” “compliment”) and oversight (“*may* have been entirely accidental”), registers an ambivalent propriety claim, on Poe’s part, over the city mysteries genre, whose plots, he hints, might well be thought of as “convulsive” exaggerations of his own urban tales. Indeed, there are a number of interesting similarities between city mysteries fictions and Poe’s urban tales (among which we could list “The Man of the Crowd,” the three Dupin tales, and even his murder tales such as “The Tell-Tale Heart” [1843], “The Black Cat” [1843], and “The Imp of the Perverse”

[1845]⁴⁰). Not only were all of Poe's urban tales published during a five-year span just predating the city mysteries sensation, but many of them share some of the recurring features of city mysteries fiction, including depictions of flâneur/reporter/detective figures, gothicized representations of criminality, crowds, and the modern cityscape, and a preoccupation with the penny press as a vehicle for antebellum sensation. I am not trying to suggest that city mysteries authors actually owe an aesthetic debt to Poe; in fact, the similarities between these two corpora of texts probably have more to do with their shared derivation from Gothic and *Blackwood's* fiction, early Newgate novels, and antebellum crime reporting. Rather, I want to register the fact that Poe seems to have imagined that such a debt to his own writing existed, a proprietary claim that hints at a self-conscious relationship between his urban fiction and city mysteries fiction. I turn now to the second of Poe's three Dupin tales in order to elaborate upon the terms of his rejection of urban melodrama.

“The Mystery of Marie Rogêt” is an anomaly in Poe's canon for a number of reasons that end up being quite germane to the context of a comparison of his urban writing to city mysteries and other cheap, serialized antebellum urban formats. First of all, “Marie Rogêt” is one of Poe's very few longer-form serial fictions, and it is arguably the only example of serialization in his career that went off without any obvious hitches. I have already rehearsed some of Poe's objections to both long-form and serial writing, and it might be that these objections were influenced by some of his own disastrous personal experiences with serialization. To invoke only two examples, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838) and “The Journal of Julius Rodman” (1840)

were originally conceived as serial novels, and both were to be serialized in magazines that Poe was at the time editing, namely, the *Southern Literary Messenger* and *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*. Unfortunately (but not surprisingly), Poe seems to have been fired from each editorial position mid-way through the serial run of each novel, and while he later completed *Pym* and published it in book-form, "Rodman" was left unfinished. By contrast, "Marie Rogêt" was published in its entirety over three issues of *Snowden's Ladies' Companion* between late 1842 and early 1843, and its serial run seems to have been a hit for both Poe and the magazine. In addition to its uncharacteristic length (the tale comes in at 50-plus pages in most editions of Poe's work) and its original serial circulation, "Marie Rogêt" has been taken by the majority of its critics to violate a number of Poe's sternest aesthetic principles, the most obvious of which, of course, concerns the unity of effect: compared to the quick, self-contained thrill of a Poe classic such as "The Tell-Tale Heart," for example, "Marie Rogêt" would seem to be convulsive in all sorts of ways that Poe claims not to like.

In "Marie Rogêt," Poe dissects the relationship between fiction, newspaper journalism, and reality. If Lippard's activist poetics is invested in strategic interactions at the boundaries between fiction, journalism, and all sorts of other social systems, Poe establishes a peculiarly visible and self-conscious relationship between "romance" and "the real" in "Marie Rogêt," a fiction that, like *The Quaker City* and a number of other city mysteries texts, is based on the details of a historical case.⁴¹ With "Marie Rogêt," Poe performs what Mark Seltzer calls a "perverse transposition" (562) of the fictional Marie Roget case over the historical Mary Rogers case, and, as if this ruse were not already entirely legible to readers, he inserts (at least) two editorial apparatuses into the

tale to make its epistemological gambit explicitly visible: to borrow Poe's own description of *The Mysteries of Paris*, in "Marie Rogêt," "[t]he wires are not only not concealed, but displayed as things to be admired, equally, with the puppets they set in motion." The first of these editorial apparatuses is the one that "Marie Rogêt" shares with the two other Dupin tales, namely, the narratorial frame provided by Dupin's unnamed companion. The second editorial apparatus, ostensibly inserted by the editors ("Eds.") "[o]f the Magazine in which the article was originally published" (553), consists of a series of footnotes and a bracketed aside that *re-transpose* the locations, characters, and newspaper sources, from Dupin's fictitious Paris back onto the "real" New York. This second editorial apparatus was added to "Marie Rogêt" at the time of its 1845 reprinting in Poe's *Tales* in order to remind readers of the details of the now three-year-old case, but it has since become a standard feature of scholarly and popular editions of the tale.

"Marie Rogêt" begins with a footnote from Novalis, and, while it is not necessarily decideable whether to attribute this particular frame to "Poe," to the "Eds.," or to the unnamed narrator, it does project editorial commentary onto the subsequent narrative:

There are ideal series of events which run parallel with the real ones. They rarely coincide. Men and circumstances generally modify the ideal train of events, so that it seems imperfect, and its consequences are equally imperfect. Thus with the Reformation; instead of Protestantism came Lutheranism. (506)

The epigraph provides the narrator with the opportunity to launch the strange disquisition on "coincidences" that the tale opens with, but it also hints at Poe's fraught relationship

to German Idealism (which I considered in Chapter One). Apparently following Hegel's dialectical abstraction of the material stuff of historical events, Novalis distinguishes "ideal" from "real" events, using the difference between the ideal (i.e., theoretical, speculative) and the real outcomes of the Reformation as his example. As an editorial frame for the tale, then, the epigraph would seem to make the argument that Dupin's investigation into the Marie Roget case represents an ideal instantiation of the real facts of the case of Mary Rogers. Bracketing Poe's evocation of a kind of Hegelian model of history, for the moment, it is notable that the narrator introduces the "mystery" of Marie Roget as existing in the same (fictional?) universe as the historical case of Mary Rogers, an absurdity that the narrator chalks up to "*coincidences* of so seemingly marvelous a character that, as *mere* coincidences, the intellect has been unable to receive them" (506-07). Still, the narrator admits the theoretical possibility of such "scarcely intelligible *coincidences*" between the two cases by referring to "the doctrine of chance, or, as it is technically termed, the Calculus of Probabilities" (507).⁴² The narrator continues, however, by pointing out the cognitive dissonance involved in such an epistemological stance as the tale adheres to, remarking that such coincidences are more likely to evoke "a vague yet thrilling half-credence in the supernatural" than a rational observance of "the doctrine of chance" (506). Nevertheless, it is precisely this theoretical ground upon which the narrator constructs his narrative, with an explicitly expressed expectation of disbelief on the part of his readers.

As I began to explain, the second editorial apparatus that intervenes in the narrative of Marie Roget is supposedly supplied by the "*Eds.*" of the original tale, who

explain the supplements to the revised edition in a footnote appended to the title of the tale:

On the original publication of “Marie Roget,” the foot-notes now appended were considered unnecessary; but the lapse of several years since the tragedy upon which the tale is based, renders it expedient to give them, and also to say a few words of the general design.... Herein, under the pretense of relating the fate of a Parisian *grisette*, the author has followed, in minute detail, the essential while merely paralleling the inessential facts of the real murder of Mary Rogers. Thus all argument founded upon the fiction is applicable to the truth; and the investigation of the truth was the object. (506)

This footnote offers a third explanation for the apparent co-existence of a Marie Roget and a Mary Rogers. After the distinction between the ideal and the real series of events and the argument that such coincidences *are* theoretically plausible, this third explanation offers perhaps the most common-sensical account of the relationship between Mary and Marie, namely, that the author of a tale of ratiocination used the “pretense” of fiction to solve a “real murder.” “Truth,” the “*Eds.*” explain, “was the object” of the Marie Roget narrative, and “Truth,” we will recall from Poe’s Hawthorne review, “is the aim of the tale” (573).

The long introductory footnote continues with the boast that the “general conclusion” and “chief hypothetical details” suggested in the original tale were all confirmed by subsequent evidence in the real case, in spite of the author’s reliance entirely on newspaper sources for his investigation into the alleged crime:

The “Mystery of Marie Roget” was composed at a distance from the scene of the atrocity, and with no other means of investigation than the newspapers afforded. Thus much escaped the writer of which he could have availed himself had he been on the spot, and visited the localities. It may not be improper to record, nevertheless, that the confessions of *two* persons, (one of them the Madame Deluc of the narrative) made, at different periods, long subsequent to the publication, confirmed, in full, not only the general conclusion, but absolutely *all* the chief hypothetical details by which that conclusion was attained. (506)

This claim is not true: not only does the original tale *not* refer to what was by 1845—and what continues to be—the near-consensus solution to the real mystery, namely, that Mary Rogers died from the effects of an unsuccessful abortion at Madame Restell’s clinic, but when it *does* refer to this possibility, in the 1845 revision of the tale, it is suggested as one of two possibilities (along with the lingering possibility of Marie’s murder by a spurned lover [550]). A “general conclusion,” in other words, is never reached in either edition of “Marie Rogêt,” and when solutions are offered, they are offered as modalities, offhand possibilities lacking entirely in what Poe himself describes as the “force” derivable from a unity of effect.

The editorial voice responsible for the introductory footnote returns near the end of “Marie Rogêt” in order to elaborate upon the promised “general conclusion,” at a moment in the tale when Dupin seems on the verge of unraveling the mystery. After hypothesizing the existence of a getaway boat since removed by the hypothetical murderer of Marie, Dupin explains breathlessly to the narrator: “This boat shall guide us, with a rapidity which will surprise even ourselves, to him who employed it in the

midnight of the fatal Sabbath. Corroboration will rise upon corroboration, and the murderer will be traced” (552). Dupin suggests that this crucial boat will be rudderless, since his hypothetical murderer wouldn’t have dared to ask anyone for the rudder before absconding with the incriminating vessel. Not surprisingly, however, Dupin’s rudderless boat is never found, nor is it even mentioned again. Immediately following the boat passage, the “*Eds.*” intervene in the narrative with the following:

[For reasons which we shall not specify, but which to many readers will appear obvious, we have taken the liberty of here omitting, from the MSS. placed in our hands, such portion as details the *following up* of the apparently slight clew observed by Dupin. We feel it advisable only to state, in brief, that the result desired was brought to pass; and that the Prefect fulfilled punctually, although with reluctance, the terms of his compact with the Chevalier. Mr. Poe’s article concludes with the following word.—*Eds.*] (553)

No more mention is made of any other details of the case after this point, for reasons “which to many readers will appear obvious.” Many other readers will be forgiven for not picking up on the “obvious,” since it rests *outside* of the textual boundaries of the tale.⁴³ The omission in question constitutes nothing less than the solution to the “mystery” of Marie Roget, the “*following up* of the apparently slight clew [i.e. the rudderless boat] observed by Dupin.” The “*Eds.*” make sure to comfort their readers with the knowledge that Dupin *did* solve the mystery, after all, and that he was compensated accordingly by the Prefect. But again: no revelation of the mystery appears in the pages of the text; the mystery is solved somewhere else.

I want to return briefly to Dupin's rudderless boat, which appears in the tale as the culminating, crucial clue—the Ariadne's thread that is supposed to “guide” Dupin to the solution of the mystery.⁴⁴ I'm tempted to suggest that Poe has violated his strict interdiction against allegory here, by offering an image of flailing misdirection that would not be out of place in that “ludicrously over-rated book” (*Essays and Reviews* 583), *The Pilgrim's Progress*. In one of his reviews of Hawthorne's tales, Poe complains that allegory “completely overwhelms the greater number of his subjects” by dividing the otherwise unified effect into “a suggested meaning” and “an obvious one” (*Essays and Reviews* 582). Allegory—about which “there is scarcely one respectable word to be said” (582)—seems to offend Poe for a similar reason that multiple convulsions offend him, namely, that it both waters down and prematurely exposes the culminating effect. An unexpected corollary of this argument, in both instances, is that Poe ends up defending “verisimilitude” (582) against these incursions of the “unreal” into the “real” (583). Again, since the “aim” of the tale—and the ratiocinative tale, in particular—is “Truth,” abstractions from that truth, whether in the form of too frequent and predictable revelations or too idealizing allegories, must necessarily detract from the effect of the tale. Why, then, does “Marie Rogêt” offer only an allegorical image of misdirection when it should be offering a disentangled truth? The answer to this question might be found in a reconsideration of the distinction that Poe/the narrator/Novalis makes between the ideal and the real series of events.

“Marie Rogêt” ends with a return to the discussion of coincidence and chance that opened the tale, and it is at this moment that the significance of the distinction between the ideal and the real series of events comes into focus:

I repeat, then, that I speak of these things only as of coincidences. And farther: in what I relate it will be seen that between the fate of the unhappy Mary Cecilia Rogers, so far as that fate is known, and the fate of one Marie Roget up to a certain epoch in her history, there has existed a parallel in the contemplation of whose wonderful exactitude the reason becomes embarrassed. I say all this will be seen. But let it not for a moment be supposed that, in proceeding with the sad narrative of Marie from the epoch just mentioned, and in tracing to its *dénouement* the mystery which enshrouded her, it is my covert design to hint at an extension of the parallel, or even to suggest that the measures adopted in Paris for the discovery of the assassin of a grisette, or measures founded in any similar ratiocination, would produce any similar result.

For, in respect to the latter branch of the supposition, it should be considered that the most trifling variation in the facts of the two cases might give rise to the most important miscalculations, by diverting thoroughly the two courses of events.... Nothing, for example, is more difficult than to convince the merely general reader that the fact of sixes having been thrown twice in succession by a player at dice, is sufficient cause for betting the largest odds that sixes will not be thrown in the third attempt. A suggestion to this effect is usually rejected by the intellect at once.... The error here involved—a gross error, redolent of mischief—I cannot pretend to expose within the limits assigned me at present; and with the philosophical it needs no exposure. It may be sufficient here to say that it forms one of an infinite series of mistakes which arise in the path of Reason through her propensity for seeking truth *in detail*. (553-54)

Poe warns that in spite of such “scarcely intelligible *coincidences*” there is absolutely no guarantee that a seemingly exact representation of reality will have any power to predict the *next* historical event. “Marie Rogêt” can be read, in the context of this warning, as an extreme illustration of the statistical truth that past events have no predictive power over the future; the tale, in other words, is an absurd string of “sixes,” with each successive six serving as yet another reminder that there is no natural reason why such coincidences shouldn’t take place. Poe directs this illustration, moreover, at “the merely general reader,” that is, at the reader who is wont to conflate the ideal and the real series of events (or, at least, to assume a necessary relation between the two). Poe’s “merely general reader,” I would argue, is the reader of antebellum city writing, the reader trained by urban melodrama to seek explanations for the mysteries of social existence in literary tropes. With the self-consciously clumsy removal of the solution to the mystery of Marie Rogêt to some domain outside of his text, Poe seems to be playing a joke at the expense of the general reader, who, we can imagine, approaches mystery with the expectation of revelation. Poe’s insistence that there *is* a solution, and, furthermore, that the solution has been worked out both by Dupin and by the author himself and should also be obvious to many readers, taunts the general reader who is gullible enough to believe that the inside and the outside of the text can interact.

I don’t want to suggest that there is anything triumphant about Poe’s solutionless mystery story; I’m not arguing that it manages to hoodwink its naïve readers. If Poe’s writing is often understood as affecting a posture of superiority or contempt in relation to a print culture that it only begrudgingly belongs to, I want to mark how desperate this posture appears in the case of “Marie Rogêt.”⁴⁵ In order to succeed as a critique of the

transformative promise of city mysteries fiction, “Marie Rogêt” must fail to reveal anything.

Chapter 3: Melville's Partial Revolt Against the Reader

Near the end of *Pierre; or, the Ambiguities* (1852), the eponymous hero of Herman Melville's novel arrives at the conclusion that murder is his only possible defense against the plots that threaten to overwhelm him: "murder, done in the act of warding off their ignominious public blow, seemed the one only congenial sequence to such a desperate career" (*Pierre, Tales, and Billy-Budd* 391). This exclamation would not be out of place coming from Byrnewood Arlington, the vengeful brother who murders his sister's "seducer" at the end of George Lippard's *The Quaker City* (1844). Coming, as it does, however, from *Pierre*, it strikes me as unclearly motivated. The terms of the "ignominious public blow" that Pierre foresees are never actually made clear, nor is it easy to decide who "they" are in this instance, Pierre having alienated so many people by this point in the narrative. All the explanation that Pierre offers to explain his resolution to murder *someone* is that "ambiguities hemmed him in" (391), a cryptic rationale that nevertheless implies that the decisive act will have some kind of clarifying effect. In the end, though, it doesn't. If any reader were to approach *Pierre* with the expectation of revelation, of some expression of the "moral occult" (5) that Peter Brooks identifies as the ultimate truth underpinning the melodramatic imagination, disappointment would ensue: in the place of what Brooks calls "expressionistic clarification" (201), *Pierre* offers only "mysteries interpierced with mysteries, and mysteries eluding mysteries" (169).

Pierre deals with seduction, revenge, murder, and an abundance of mysteries, though, so it seems reasonable to propose a relationship between Melville's novel and

antebellum urban and crime writing. The terms of this relationship between Melville's novel and popular antebellum sensationalism, however, are far from self-evident. For David S. Reynolds, *Pierre* possesses a "dark metaphysics and gloomy psychology" (*Beneath the American Renaissance* 294) that far exceeds anything to be found in the more popular examples of city mysteries writing, but I think that the vagueness in Reynolds's terminology hints at perhaps the more abiding and compelling distinction between Melville's novel and city mysteries fictions, namely, the constitutive lack of clarity that makes *Pierre* such an odd version of urban melodrama. One aspect of this distinction between Melville's and the more conventional versions of urban melodrama is that the typical city mysteries fiction externalizes all its conflicts, manifesting them in the forms of objective miseries and objectively villainous antagonists and virtuous protagonists. As is suggested by his complaint that "ambiguities hemmed him in," however, *Pierre*'s resolution to murder someone is presented as an attempt to externalize a crisis that is fundamentally interior (not to mention subjective in its "ambiguous" epistemology). *Pierre*'s resolution, in other words, has to do with a particular negative affective relation to the self that he is desperately trying to remove from his self. Or, in the language of Silvan Tomkins's affect theory: he is attempting to annul his shame by transforming it into a kind of projectile or "ballistic" anger (*Shames and its Sisters* 211).⁴⁶

I want to suggest that Melville's own "desperate career" can be read into *Pierre*'s resolution. *Pierre*, as I will show, seems to have been (ill-)conceived as a kind of populist gambit, a last-ditch effort to salvage Melville's reputation as a bankable author: murder, in this sense, was the "only congenial sequence" to Melville's literary career, which had taken a series of increasingly desperate turns since the height of his fame in

the late 1840s. This chapter will chart some moments in the trajectory of Melville's increasingly desperate literary career, starting with a recognition of fellow genius that led to the expressive excesses of *Moby-Dick* (1851), and culminating in Melville's ambivalent attempts, in *Pierre*, to re-establish communication in the face of shame.

The distinctions between three of Silvan Tomkins's negative affects—contempt, shame, and anger—can help me to illustrate the intervention I want to make in some influential currents in twentieth-century Melville criticism.⁴⁷ To begin with, the shame response corresponds to a partial renunciation of some object that *had* inspired positive affective investment, while the contempt response corresponds to a total renunciation.

“In contrast to shame,” Tomkins explains,

contempt is a response in which there is least self-consciousness, with the most intense consciousness of the object, which is experienced as disgusting. Although the face and nostrils and throat and even the stomach are unpleasantly involved in disgust and nausea yet attention is most likely to be referred to the source, the object, rather than to the self or the face. This happens because the response intends to maximize the distance between the face and the object which disgusts the self. It is a literal pulling away from the object. (*Shame and its Sisters* 135)

The object in question, when it comes to the early and mid twentieth-century Melville Revival critics, is the sentimental reader. D.H. Lawrence, Raymond Weaver, and Lewis Mumford, to name a few influential Revival scholars, constructed Melville as a heroic prophet for the Modernist aesthetics they themselves were busy constructing and advertising, in large part because of Melville's perceived disgust for the cultural politics

of sentimentalism.⁴⁸ Similarly, for the Modernist critics of the post-War era, including Charles Olson and Henry A. Murray, and the early Cold-War Americanists, such as Perry Miller and F.O. Matthiessen, Melville's apparent contempt for populist and "feminine" print cultures made him an anti-Victorian iconoclast, a hero of manly individualism. In Olson's words, the force of Melville's legacy came from his being "homeless in his land, his society, his self" (14). More recently, Reynolds and Ann Douglas have celebrated Melville's "ambiguity" for its power to resist the easy didacticisms and moralisms of nineteenth-century sentimental writing. In the final chapter of *The Feminization of American Culture*, for instance, Douglas applauds Melville for his "revolt against the reader" (289), which both renounced the "feminization" of culture and helped plant germinal seeds for the manlier, more confident, and more formally and ethically ambiguous American writing that was to come in the next century.⁴⁹

Two currents in more recent Melville criticism strike me as responding to the gendering vision of Melville's proto-Modernist contempt. On the one hand, Gillian Silverman and Cindy Weinstein have argued for more nuanced ways of reading Melville's relationship to sentimental and other popular nineteenth century print cultures, locating in his work and life numerous ambiguous and even positive configurations of sentimental reader-writer relations. (I will return to these sentimental versions of Melville below.) The other notable critical trend to turn the heroic Melville on his head reimagines Melvillean contempt for feminization and sentimentalism as misogynistic anger. One example is Richard Brodhead's short essay "Melville; or Aggression," a revisionist piece that looks to square Melville's long-accepted contempt for popular sentimentalism with more general feminist-oriented critiques of anti-sentimentalism.

Brodhead identifies numerous instances of anger and rage—what he calls the most “obvious” of Melville’s affects—in the life and work of this “poet laureate of aggression” (181). Elizabeth Renker offers a comparable but far more elaborate revision of Melvillean contempt in a study which she begins by tracking a pattern of denial—through the early Revival decades—of the facts of the author’s misogyny, as well as of the physical and emotional abuse he inflicted on his wife and children. Renker convincingly argues that Melville’s writing registers his frustration and anger with the “scene of writing,” that is, with his own “physical struggle to produce writing” (xviii), including his mistreatments of the material page, his stabbings and rippings of paper, his misspellings and strikings-out of words and sentences, and, above all, his tyrannical exploitation of female labour (his wife and daughters) for copy-editing and scrivening. Though she doesn’t necessarily articulate it in these terms, Renker’s revisionist project has the effect of shifting the emphasis from contempt, i.e. renunciation of sentimental culture, to anger, i.e., the deflection or redirection of negative affect outwards, toward, in this instance, women and the idea of (mass) writing—not to mention the interimplication of the two in Melville’s imagination. Tomkins’s distinction between anger and the other negative affects is informative on this count: “[m]y terror, my distress, and my shame ... [are] ... first of all, my problems,” while “my anger, and especially my rage ... threatens violence for you, your friends, and above all, for our society” (*Shame and its Sisters* 197). Against the heroically contemptuous Melville, Renker makes it quite clear that there are dangerous blind spots when imagining a Melville who is hermetically sealed off from “his land, his society, his self” in a self-satisfied bubble of contempt.

In the context of the reception history of Melville's work, it seems productive to distinguish the fruits of his shame from the miscarriages of his contempt and his anger.⁵⁰ If we are to read Tomkins's distinction between the "total" renunciation of the contempt response and the "partial" renunciation of the shame response as respective structures of the aesthetic encounter—as I'm suggesting we do—we would be left with a dearth of communication from the contemptuous Melville. Examples of the total renunciation of writing and the literary marketplace recur throughout Melville's life: the fearsome writer's blocks, the years upon decades of zero productivity, the destroyed pages and entire manuscripts, the refusals to publish later works. These total renunciations are informative, of course (as Renker elegantly demonstrates), but all that they really can inform are the partial renunciations that constitute a good deal of Melville's written legacy from the early-1850s until his death in 1891. Melville's partial renunciations—or his "botches," as he himself labels them in a letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne⁵¹—are fascinating in the context of a literary culture that craved excessive and emphatically communicative models of writing, and it is precisely this conflict—between excited, joyful, excessively and even distressingly expressive modes of communication, on the one hand, and shamed and often angry modes of communication, on the other—that this chapter will explore in relation to Melville's encounters with antebellum print culture.

In charting Melville's shifting relations to the idea of mass reading, this chapter considers excitement, enjoyment, distress, shame, and anger—as well as different combinations of these affects—as varieties of aesthetic encounter. I first examine the positive model of author-reader relations that Melville constructed and experimented with before and during the composition of *Moby-Dick*, before moving on to *Pierre*, a novel

that registers, I argue, a reduced excitement and enjoyment toward communication that can be situated in relation to the vagaries of labouring in a confusing and competitive new print marketplace.

Melville enjoyed a brief period of positive affective engagement with the idea of writing in the very early 1850s, and it was during this period that he would formulate his own peculiar variety of what I have called, in my first two chapters, an aesthetics of interest—though, as I will demonstrate, the Tomkinsian affect enjoyment-joy also figures significantly in the way Melville theorizes writing at this moment. The most extended publicly-circulated articulation of this aesthetics appears in “Hawthorne and his Mosses,” an ardent review-*cum*-encomium that tracks Melville’s first encounter with Hawthorne’s tales. The article, which was published in successive issues of the *New York Literary World* in 1850, constricts the conventionally universalizing aesthetic encounter to moments of “recognition” between kindred geniuses:

Give not over to future generations the glad duty of acknowledging [Hawthorne] for what he is. Take that joy to your self, in your own generation; and so shall he feel those grateful impulses in him, that may possibly prompt him to the full flower of some greater achievement in your eyes. And by confessing him, you thereby confess others; you brace the whole brotherhood. For genius, all over the world, stands hand in hand, and one shock of recognition runs the whole circuit round. (*Pierre, Tales, and Billy Budd* 1165)

Melville’s “shock of recognition” functions much like the re-setting mechanism in Tomkins’s affect theory, startling the subject into a new affective configuration with a

new object of attention. As a *re*-cognition, it is also the shock of recognizing an (alienated, uncanny) aspect of the self in the other and the other in the self. In this sense, Melvillean recognition is not unlike the Kantian recognition that constitutes the aesthetic encounter, insofar as Kantian judgment is likewise premised on a particular mode of concordance or mutual recognition (i.e. the feeling of “purposiveness”) between subject and object. If Poe unfolds this mode of concordance in terms of a circular causality between composition and mass readerly interest (as I argued in Chapter 1), Melville is invested, at least in this moment of his career, in a quite different configuration of authors and readers, whereby the causal circle is made up of the de-differentiated bodies of fellow male authors of genius.

Some scholars of nineteenth century American literature have often described this kind of de-differentiation of subjects as “sentimental.” As I mentioned, Silverman names the mode of (emphatically male) interaction between geniuses that Melville constructs, here and elsewhere, “textual sentimentalism,” while Elizabeth Maddock Dillon uses the phrase “sentimental aesthetics” to describe the more general historical and conceptual overlaps in the discourses of sentiment and aesthetics, respectively, in nineteenth-century America. Dillon observes that “[a]esthetics aims at producing feeling subjects who, insofar as they feel, are able to understand their own subjectivity as free–personal, unconditioned, and creative,” a (Kantian) construction of the feeling subject, Dillon argues, that is also a feature of the discourse of sentiment, which “links the capacity of individuals to feel deeply (often, to suffer) to an essential, shared humanity” (500). For Dillon, Friedrich Schiller’s elaboration of Kantian aesthetics in his *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1794) most convincingly articulates the community-building and -

binding potentialities of late eighteenth-century German aesthetic theory. According to Dillon, it is Schiller's shift away from the "subjectively universal" Kantian feeling of the beautiful to a conception of the innate value of the beautiful object that underpins his project for an "aesthetic education," a project of cultivation that amends Kant's innate *sensus communis* with the ideal of a "community of taste." In the context of his "circle of genius," Melville's aesthetics takes on some of the characteristics of Schiller's "community of taste," a connection which Melville will himself eventually make (in a letter I quote below). "Hawthorne and his Mosses" represents, in this sense, a peculiarly American manifestation of the Schillerian "community of taste," a call, that is, for a literary community organized around comparable recognitions of 'homegrown' American genius. It is not surprising, then, that Edmund Wilson should have named his influential anthology of American writing *The Shock of Recognition*, nor that he should gloss Melville's phrase as the seminal moment in American letters when "genius becomes aware of its kin" (viii).

Still, there is a significant aspect of Melville's "shock of recognition" that is not accounted for in Dillon's and Silverman's descriptions of the circulation of sentimental feeling. Silverman does insist that Melville's circle of genius is a boy's club, limited in its membership to males of talent; yet, the very invocation of sentimentalism would seem to threaten the exclusivity of that club, since, as Dillon notes, feeling, in sentimental discourse, serves as the crucial ground for "an essential, shared humanity." There is no theoretical necessity for exclusion, in other words, in either Silverman's description of textual sentimentalism or in the broader Schillerian notion of a community of taste, which likewise capitalizes on the Kantian possibility of universal cultivation.

I would like to turn to Tomkins, then, in an attempt to provide a more precise analysis of the problem of Melville's sentimental exclusivity. A passage in one of Tomkins's chapters on enjoyment-joy that unexpectedly cites Melvillean recognition may offer some clues:

Any recollection or anticipation which produces present excitement which is sufficiently intense and which is suddenly reduced either through remembered, imagined or anticipated consequences may invoke the smile of joy. Such would be the case if I anticipated meeting someone who excited me whom I had not seen for many years. If this generated present excitement, the shock of recognition, in visualizing such a reunion, might sufficiently reduce the excitement so that the smile of joy might be invoked. (*Shames and its Sisters* 82)

Like Melville's own shock of recognition, the shock in Tomkins's vignette derives from an internalized object, a version of the self that has to do with an internalized other. In both images, moreover, a particular combination of the affects interest-excitement and enjoyment-joy is developed, with the respective affects being symbolized in Melville's image, perhaps, by the startling and exciting shock and the enjoyable handholding. For Tomkins, enjoyment is activated by the "steep reduction of the density of stimulation and neural firing," or, in more experiential terms, "sudden relief from such negative stimulation as pain, or fear or distress or aggression" (81). Significantly, as is the case in the anticipated meeting vignette, the reduction of an intense excitement—an excitement that could even verge on, or fold into, distress—can also result in the smile of enjoyment or joy, so that the imagined meeting with the exciting object might result in the enjoyable relaxation of that excitement. Melville's image, then, of a brotherhood of geniuses,

standing hand in hand, with a shock of recognition running between them, can be understood as representing a variation on what Tomkins frequently refers to as “communion,” but it is a particular mode of communion that is not entirely assimilable to the universalizing and de-differentiating effects of sympathy. In contrast to sympathy, Tomkinsian enjoyment is far more local and delicate, motivated by a temporally-sensitive mutuality which can—and, ultimately, *will*, in Melville’s case—disappear. “The embrace,” Tomkins explains, “provides mutual enjoyment when each wishes to hug the other, or to hug and be hugged simultaneously, to achieve a claustral interpenetration in which each is inside the other” (86). Thinking of Melvillean recognition in terms of the “claustral interpenetration” that Tomkins allows for in such scenes of mutual enjoyment enables the introduction of distinctions and complex systems relations into the otherwise blandly de-differentiating language of sympathy and sentimental feeling. Such boundary relations are always implicated, this chapter argues, in Melville’s configurations of author-reader relations, whether those relations be claustrophobically intimate—as is the case with his early written relation to Hawthorne—or whether they be—as will later prove to be the case—reactionary, uneasy, and alienated.

There are more moments in “Hawthorne and his Mosses” when the exclusionary aspect of Melville’s configurations of literary communion seems to trump their broad expressions of textual sentimentalism. Contrasting Hawthorne’s insularity and relative obscurity, for example, with the spectacle of the Elizabethan theatre, Melville writes:

unlike Shakespeare, who was forced to the contrary course by circumstances, Hawthorne (either from simple disinclination, or else from inaptitude) refrains from all the popularizing noise and show of broad farce, and blood-besmeared

tragedy; content with the still, rich utterances of a great intellect in repose, and which sends few thoughts into circulation, except they be arterialized at his warm lungs, and expanded in his honest heart. (1160-61)

Melville's association of Shakespearean theatre with "popularizing noise" and "broad farce" makes some sense in the context of his response to the Astor Place Riot, which took place the year before he published "Hawthorne and his Mosses." The riot began as a grudge between the two Shakespearean actors, Edwin Forrest and William Charles Macready, that escalated into a culture war between nativist, working-class Forrest supporters and Macready's own mostly genteel and highbrow Anglophile supporters.⁵² In the days before the May 10, 1850 massacre of at least 25 rioters by the state militia, a handful of prominent New York citizens wrote a letter imploring the beleaguered Macready not to bow to his opponents by cancelling his performance. Among the signatories of the letter (which was reprinted in the New York *Herald* before the riot) were Washington Irving, a number of "Young Americans," including Cornelius Matthews and Evert Duyckinck, and, of course, Melville himself.⁵³ Unlike Lippard, for whom the Astor Place Riot seems to have made legible the sensational possibilities of writing as a kind of "popularizing" medium, Melville and his peers appear to shrink from the prospect that what Mary Esteve describes as the "unmotivated city crowd" (3) may usurp the serious and exclusive business of cultural production.

Hawthorne's "great intellect in repose" functions, then, as a kind of counter-image to the promiscuously-circulating affect that Melville associates with the Elizabethan theatre's "popularizing noise," not to mention, perhaps, the antebellum analogue furnished by the so-called "Shakespeare Riot" at the Astor Place Theatre.

Against the noisy and excited spectacle of the theatre, in other words, Hawthorne's intellect in repose signifies, for Melville, the kind of relaxation of intensity that Tomkins associates with enjoyment. Here, again, the distinction between Melville's ideal of textual communion as a kind of "claustral interpenetration" and both the sentimental and the sensational ideals of affective de-differentiation becomes visible. In his description of Hawthorne's intellect, "which sends few thoughts into circulation," Melville invites a boundary confusion into the metaphors of the circulating body: circulation, in Melville's figures for Hawthorne's writing, is tasked with connoting, simultaneously, the necessarily interior, operationally closed motions of cardiovascular circulation and the theoretically unlimited circulation of print materials. The conditions of interiority and closure, in other words, which enable the arterialization and expansion of Hawthorne's "thoughts," are necessarily violated when those thoughts make their appearance on the stage of the marketplace. I want to suggest, in short, that Melville's classed and homoerotic instantiation of Schiller's community of taste, at least as it emerges from "Hawthorne and his Mosses," configures textual communion in terms of the claustral interpenetration of mutual enjoyers, against and as distinct from the invisible audiences, populist critical apparatus, and unchecked technologies of production and reproduction, of re-printing and mass circulation, that had become the norms of literary culture in the United States of the 1850s.

If the spectacle of the theatre constitutes an undesirable limit-case of publicly-circulating affect for Melville, his private correspondence with Hawthorne could be thought of as an antidote, a mode of textual communion that enacts excited, enjoyable recognition as private and limited in its audience. The most vivid instance of this kind of

private recognition in the Hawthorne letters comes in the aftermath of the elder author's evidently positive response to *Moby-Dick*. In his excitement at Hawthorne's apparent reciprocation of his own "shock of recognition," Melville proclaims, "Appreciation! Recognition!" (*Correspondence* 212). Later in the same letter, Melville returns to his earlier figurations of the private, interior spaces of his and Hawthorne's bodies in elaborating upon the claustral interpenetration of their mutual recognition: "I felt pantheistic then—your heart beat in my ribs and mine in yours, and both in God's. A sense of unspeakable security is in me this moment, on account of your having understood the book" (212). It seems significant that Melville should place such emphasis on Hawthorne's "having understood" *Moby-Dick*—rather than, say, having enjoyed it, having been compelled or interested by it—since it is precisely communication which is at stake here, in Melville's perception of Hawthorne's response. Melville's enjoyment, in other words, concerns a feeling of "pantheistic" intimacy with Hawthorne that is premised on the construction of a particular mode of writing whose ideal horizon is the reduction of distance between two bodies.

The first of two postscripts in the same letter demonstrates the degree to which Melville's recognition of "kindred genius" occasions the interimplication of communion, community, and communication according to the logic of writing:

I can't stop yet. If the world was entirely made up of Magians, I'll tell you what I should do. I should have a paper-mill established at one end of the house, and so have an endless riband of foolscap rolling in upon my desk and upon that endless riband I should write a thousand—a million—a billion thoughts, all under the form of a letter to you. (213)

Comfortable at last with the mutuality of his and Hawthorne's private textual communion, Melville imagines a fantasy writing machine that is equipped to register the full plenitude of his feeling. The epistle serves as the ideal medium for this mode of textual communion for the obvious reason of its privacy, a form of purity, for Melville, that enables communication that exceeds the ordinary technical limitations of writing. Melville's fantasy writing machine can be contextualized, in this sense, within Friedrich Kittler's "1800 discourse network," which, Kittler argues, grasped at the romantic possibility of a pure communication (i.e. of "thoughts," in Melville's case) that is directly transcribable through the medium of writing.⁵⁴ The subsequent shift in Melville's writing, which I will examine in relation to *Pierre*, can be situated in the larger context of the historical loss of faith in such romantic conceptualizations of writing as Kittler describes. Before I arrive *Pierre* and Melville's fallen recognition, however, I will first identify some features of his poetics of communion in *Moby-Dick*.

Moby-Dick was Melville's first major work of fiction written in the thrall of his shock of recognition and the heightened sense of literary imperative that it entailed, and the novel can be read, accordingly, as a formal experiment in the poetics of enjoyment and excitement. Near the end of the letter to Hawthorne that I have been quoting from, Melville exclaims, "[w]hat a pity, that for your plain, bluff letter, you should get such gibberish" (213). Melville's self-delighted performance of "gibberish," throughout the letter, at Hawthorne's "having understood" *Moby-Dick* might give us pause to consider his odd association between legible communication (i.e., understanding) and excessive, non-communicating speech (i.e., gibberish), especially when Hawthorne's own "plain,

bluff,” and implicatively meaningful, communicative speech is offered as the alternative. Melville’s gibberish is anticipated early in *Moby-Dick* through another onomatopoeia that enacts excessive speech. After another lengthy digression during the novel’s long prolegomenon to the whale hunt, Ishmael (the narrator) punningly chides himself: “But no more of this blubbering now, we are going a-whaling, and there is plenty of that yet to come” (34). Like “gibberish,” “blubbering” enacts an indexical relation to Tomkinsian communion, formalizing enjoyment and excitement as modes of speaking or writing that push at the limits of meaningful communication.

This odd situation for meaning in which Melville’s writing finds itself, wherein excessive communication becomes a form of gibberish or blubbering, gains some coherence when situated alongside Tomkins’s description of the relationships between excitement, enjoyment, and distress. If blubbering describes excessive speech, it also describes the crying, wailing, complaining sounds of the distressed subject, whose blubbering pushes communication even further beyond the reach of verbal reference. The birth cry is the human being’s first affective response, explains Tomkins, and it is “a response of distress at the excessive level of stimulation to which the neonate is suddenly exposed upon being born” (*Shame and its Sisters* 109). Tomkins’s suggestion that stimulation, the pre-condition for the excitement response, can so overwhelm as to eventuate in distress makes good intuitive sense in the context of reading Melville, a fun experience that nevertheless rarely fails to inspire some degree of intellectual and emotional fatigue, in me at least. Reading *Moby-Dick* has never reduced me to the state of a blubbering neonate, mind you, but its excesses can easily overwhelm in ways that

seem to combine Kant's mathematical sublime (i.e. being overwhelmed by scale) and Tomkins's distress response (i.e. being irritated by over-stimulation).

The punning relation between verbal excitement and distress, on the one hand, and whale parts, the blubber that the men will eventually convene around on the Pequod's forecastle, on the other hand, literalizes one significant generic orientation of *Moby-Dick*. Northrop Frye famously takes up the literary anatomy in *Anatomy of Criticism*, distinguishing the novelist's "exhaustive analysis of human relationship ... or of social phenomena" from the "encyclopedic farrago" of the anatomist, "who shows his exuberance in intellectual ways, by piling up an enormous mass of erudition about his theme or in overwhelming his pedantic targets with an avalanche of their own jargon" (291). Frye's description of "exuberant" literary production resonates with my sense of Melville's excess of positive affectivity in relation to an ideal of textual communion, with the etymological root of "exuberance" as superabundant fertility (i.e. "*uberare*": "to be fruitful") connecting to Melville's superabundant prolificness and prolixity at this stage in his career. Frye cites *Moby-Dick*, moreover, as his example of a particular combination of encyclopedic and fictional modes that he calls romance-anatomy, where "the romantic theme of the wild hunt expands into an encyclopedic anatomy of a whale" (293). As Frye and Samuel Otter both point out, the abiding effect of the novel's form is that it anatomizes the whale at the same time that it represents all manner of configurations of whale insides, a "dissection and analysis" (Frye 292) of the massive mammal that works to minimize the distance between the form (i.e. anatomy) and content (i.e. anatomy) of the novel.⁵⁵ The "enormous mass" that characterizes the Fryean anatomy in the example of *Moby-Dick*, then, is both the enormous mass of words used to

approach the subject ‘whale’ and the enormous mass of the corporeal whale itself, possessor of the largest anatomy of all animals.

The most vivid materialization of Ishmael’s promise that there is plenty of blubber to come comes with the famous sperm-squeezing scene that follows the first successful whale hunt. In order to prevent the whale’s spermaceti—a precious wax found in the sperm whale’s head—from hardening, the sailors must continually squeeze and manipulate the oozy material with their hands, a sensual “avocation” that excites Ishmael:

Squeeze! Squeeze! Squeeze! All the morning long; I squeezed till I myself almost melted into it; I squeezed that sperm till a strange sort of insanity came over me; and I found myself unwittingly squeezing my co-laborers’ hands in it, mistaking their hands for gentle globules. Such an abounding, affectionate, friendly, living feeling did this avocation beget; that at last I was continually squeezing their hands, and looking into their eyes sentimentally; as much as to say,—Oh! My dear fellow beings, why should we longer cherish any social acerbities, or know the slightest ill-humor or envy! Come, let us squeeze hands all round; nay, let us squeeze ourselves into each other; let us squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of human kindness. (469)

The sibilant rhythm of the passage, effected by the refrains “squeeze” and “sperm,” with “strange sort of insanity,” “sentimentally,” “social acerbities,” and “kindness” providing variations, tracks the “strange sort of insanity” that passes like a soft trance over Ishmael as he labours in the whale’s anatomy and finds himself de-differentiated from the whale parts and his fellows in the milky, opaque medium of “human kindness.” The hissing repetitions are enhanced by the passage’s fluent and yielding parataxes, which likewise

register the gentle effects of the labour. As an insistently material conceptualization of sentimental mediation, the scene should recall Melville's circle of geniuses standing "hand in hand," eroticized and recorporealized as a circle jerk: sentimental tears, the paradigmatic medium of sympathy, in other words, congeal, in this scene, into a medium that only men may use to communicate.

It is also remarkable how the sperm-squeezing scene stages intersubjectivity—the "sentimenta[l]" looking and touching that passes between the men—as shameless. Tomkins identifies a "universal taboo on looking" (*Shame and its Sisters* 144) as one of the earliest socializing sources of shame, arising "[a]s soon as the infant learns to differentiate the face of the mother from the face of the stranger" (140). The taboo on unashamed looking and being looked at derives, in the first instance, from the extreme and contagious communicativeness of the eyes, and it has its specific sources in taboos on intimacy, and in particular culturally-specific affect taboos (including taboos on affectivity as such) and sexual taboos (144-45). Looking—one of the solitary individual's primary means of fishing for intersubjective communion—is allowed to take place shamelessly around the sperm vat, thereby annulling shame-inducing boundaries between self and other that otherwise conspire to make of looking a charged and potentially fraught identificatory relation. The circulation of affect in the scene is, moreover, irreducible to either psychical or physical forms of communion, with the ocular and the haptic providing seamlessly analogous registers of what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick would call "touching feeling." In this sense, the scene configures aesthetic recognition, once again, in terms of the de-differentiation of bodies (or body parts), making of communication a "milk," an immanent, opaque, immediating medium.

Melville theorizes writing, during this enjoyable period of the very early-1850s, in terms of the claustral interpenetration of select aesthetic subjects. Melville's various images for this configuration of the aesthetic scene—the circle of geniuses holding hands, the impossibly accessible interior spaces of Hawthorne's body, the fantasy writing machine that communicates directly with Hawthorne's mind, and, finally, the erotic looking, holding, and squeezing that passes between the Pequod's sailors—all contribute to a particular vision of homosocial communion predicated upon an (at times barely tenable) conceptual economy of interiority and exteriority. As I will argue in the following sections, Melville's strictly regulated, andro-centric instantiation of a community of taste will break down in the period following the publication of *Moby-Dick*, forcing him to re-imagine recognition not as joyful and erotic but as fallen and troubled—as an occasion, that is, for shame.

If the enjoyment which followed Melville's shock of recognition led him to model writing as a potentially intimate and erotic mode of communion, the series of personal, professional, and economic crises that afflicted him following the publication of *Moby-Dick* may have helped to (re)assert, for him, the epistemological boundaries between authors and readers. The increasingly negative reception of his more formally experimental work (i.e., *Mardi* [1849] and *Moby-Dick*), the consequent loss of faith in him by publishers on both sides of the Atlantic, and the sudden alienation of his intimacy with Hawthorne may have all contributed to the epistemological rupture in Melville's writing, wherein his relation to even his most idealized reader becomes strained, ambivalent, and often acrimonious.

The growing alienation between Melville and Hawthorne around the time of his composition and publication of *Pierre* is perhaps the situation most emblematic of the crisis or rupture which I will explore in this period of Melville's writing. The terms of the notorious cooling-off between the two friends have been well-documented by scholars, but I want to consider, briefly, a few uncharacteristically shy and circumspect letters Melville wrote to Hawthorne that together comprise a particularly chilly chapter in the story of that cooling-off. In the so-called Agatha letters, Melville attempts to share a story with Hawthorne that Melville had heard from a lawyer (probably John H. Clifford) while in Nantucket. The purportedly true story involved a sailor who abandoned his pregnant and impoverished wife (Agatha), only to return seventeen years later, rich and without any explanation for his absence (*Correspondence* 622-25). Melville explains that the lawyer's story put him in mind of "Wakefield" (1837), Hawthorne's own tale of matrimonial abandonment, and he encourages Hawthorne to fictionalize the Agatha story himself—which, he notes, "should of right belong to you" (234). There could be a hint of passive-aggressive rebuke in Melville's association of Hawthorne with abandonment—it was Hawthorne, after all, who seems to have initiated their disenchantment, at least from Melville's perspective. More significant than the content of the Agatha story, however, is the literary estrangement displayed in the rhetorical and figural construction of the letters, which forego the former language of pantheism and erotic oneness in favour of a stiff, almost legalistic, formality. Melville even apologizes for his "strange impertinent officiousness," as he works to explain that "I am but restoring to you your own property, which you would quickly enough have identified as your own—had you been on the spot as I happened to be" (237). Indeed, Melville's Agatha letters *are* remarkable for their

officiousness, his treatment of the hypothetical fiction dressed up in a strange legalese, with invocations of rights, property, entitlement, and the submission of documents (232-37). Having offered a few suggestions on how Hawthorne might proceed, moreover, Melville quickly withdraws his stake in the story, which would, he concedes, be “all the better, perhaps, for my not intermeddling” (235).

If Melville’s letters to Hawthorne in the two years prior to the Agatha letters were characterized by their textual communion, that is, their erotic convening around and through the medium of (in this case, epistolary) writing, the Agatha letters represent a kind of literary divorce: writing, again, is the medium and the subject of communion, but in this case it is remarkable for its officiousness, and it functions to lay out the terms of certain property relations. We could say that the epistolary genre has shifted, in other words, from the love letter to the legal correspondence or contract: instead of diminishing the distance between two bodies and minds, writing has come to mediate a relationship between estranged parties, to clarify the distinctions between two discrete entities. I will return to the significance of the epistolary genre to Melville’s imagination when I arrive at my analysis of *Pierre*, but for now it is enough to note that this most intimate mode of written communion has become an occasion for a diminished recognition—a recognition, that is, of difference or distinction. Needless to say, Hawthorne repeatedly turned down Melville’s offer to fictionalize the Agatha story. Melville seems to have written the story himself under the title “The Isle of the Cross,” but no manuscript evidence remains of that text.

Melville began composing *Pierre* in the months before *Moby-Dick* was published and reviewed, and the early moments of the project evince a far less ambivalent desire to communicate with an audience of readers than what we find in the published product. *Pierre*, of course, represents a significant sea change in Melville's career, being his first (and ultimately only) land-locked novel—a fact which he playfully points out in a letter to Sophia Peabody Hawthorne that promises “a rural bowl of milk” rather than another “bowl of salt water” (*Correspondence* 219). Melville continues to play on the gendered reception of his earlier works in the same letter to Hawthorne, professing amazement that she had found “any satisfaction” in *Moby-Dick*: “[i]t is true that some *men* have said they were pleased with it,” he observes, “but you are the only *woman*—for as a general thing, women have small taste for the sea” (219). Melville's evident inclination toward the domestic mode (i.e. “rural bowl of milk”) in preparing *Pierre* should contrast not only with the content of his sea romances but with his andro-centric construction of a community of taste, the boundaries of which he proposes expanding here. Letters from the same period to his British publisher Richard Bentley give a similar impression of Melville's desire to reach a broader and more emphatically female audience with *Pierre*. Melville assures Bentley, for example, that his new book is “very much more calculated for popularity than anything you have yet published of mine” (227), and he even goes so far as to suggest that Bentley publish the novel “anonymously, or under an assumed name” (228), in order to distance it from his sea romances (and their recent disrepute).

The text that Melville would eventually submit to his publisher, however, neither seems at all “calculated for popularity” nor goes down as smoothly as “a rural bowl of milk.”⁵⁶ The novel was published by Harper and Brothers in the United States, but

Melville and Bentley did not settle on terms for the British publication of the novel.

After despairing of the state of Melville's manuscript, Bentley wrote the author with an admonition that would mark the end of their professional relationship: "[i]f you had ... restrained your imagination somewhat and had written in a style to be understood by the great mass of readers—nay if you had not sometimes offended the feelings of many sensitive readers you would have succeeded in England" (qtd. in Dowling 150).

As Bentley's reaction to the manuscript correctly predicts, many feelings would in fact be offended by *Pierre*, and very few readers would profess to "having understood" it in the way that Hawthorne apparently understood *Moby-Dick*. Melville's one-time friend Evert Duyckink writes, for example, of the novel's apparent moral of "the impracticability of virtue," that "a leering, demoniacal spectre of an idea seems to be speering [sic] at us through the dim obscure of this dark book, and mocking us with this dismal falsehood" (*Melville: Contemporary Reviews* 430). Duyckink also complains that *Pierre* is "alone intelligible as an unintelligibility" (432), a communication paradox that will resonate throughout critical appraisals of the beleaguered novel.

Similarly, George Washington Peck laments, in a notoriously vitriolic review (opening sentence: "A bad book!" [*Melville: Contemporary Reviews* 441]), "no matter how energetically [Melville] strives to wrap the mystery in a cloud of high-sounding but meaningless words, the main conception remains still unaltered in all its moral deformity" (445). Peck next chides Melville for his (admittedly odd) diction in *Pierre*, writing "[t]he English language he seems to think is capable of improvement ... [and] ... [t]he essence of this great eureka, this philological reform, consists in "est" and "ness," added to every word to which they have no earthly right to belong" (448). Peck helpfully

provides a list of the more egregious of Melville's "philological reform[s]," including "flushfulness," "patriarchalness," "intermarryingly," and "electricalness"; of another example, "instantaneousness," Peck writes, "[t]he hieroglyph on the Rosetta stone was not more puzzling than this noun of Mr. Melville's" (449). The Rosetta Stone analogy, here, is felicitous for suggesting something of Duyckink's paradox of a non-communicating writing; substituting the presumed ideal of proper and direct style with an encrypted, impossible writing, Peck's analogy elaborates on the virtual critical chorus that *Pierre* simply fails to communicate with its readers. Additionally felicitous is the transcription surface in Peck's figure—namely, a stone—insofar as this suggests what we could call, in the spirit of Melville's "philological reforms," the *impenetrableness* of the novel. That "*pierre*" is the French word for stone presents even more complications when attempting to understand how the novel communicates—i.e., even the joke that it communicates *stonily* requires a Rosetta Stone-like transcription from a language other than the one the novel is written in.

It is interesting that Peck's and Duyckink's reviews both associate the novel's intimations of incest with its perceived linguistic obfuscations—an association that is quite trenchant, I would argue, despite its moralizing intent. It is also interesting that the novel's reception history has rarely deviated from this crucial association, despite the substantial critical revisions undergone by Melville's other major works in the twentieth-century. *Pierre* constitutes, in this sense, an odd case in the context of Melville's reception history, which has been so influenced by the Modernist narrative of the contemptuous Melville: for a novel whose subtitle names perhaps *the* signature literary

figure for the Melville Revivalists, as well as for the New Critics, more generally, the ambiguities in *Pierre* have *not* often been taken as signs of formal-aesthetic achievement.

“Ambiguity,” in the sense that the New Critics usually use the term, implies a kind of mastery over language. In *Practical Criticism*, for example, I.A. Richards argues that “the one and only goal of all critical endeavors ... is improvement in communication” (11), a conception of the possibilities of criticism that rests on certain convictions about the meaningfulness of language, including the conviction that “[a]mbiguity in fact is systematic” (10). Richards maintains that an ultimately objective “perspective” on ambiguous meanings may be reached through the work of criticism, a perspective “which will include and enable us to control and ‘place’ the rival meanings that bewilder us in discussion and hide our minds from one another” (10). This conviction, which is positivistic in its epistemology (and which equates criticism with scientific knowledge-making procedures at other moments in Richards’s work⁵⁷), seems to re-purpose the older aesthetic theoretical concepts of subjective universality and aesthetic education on behalf of a New Critical project that likewise blurs the lines between communication and cultivation: in mastering the rival but ultimately systematic meanings comprising any ambiguous utterance, our minds might finally be revealed to one another. In *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, another key text in the close reader’s canon, Richards’s student William Empson extends the “ordinary” meaning of “ambiguity” (“something very pronounced, and as a rule witty or deceitful”) to “any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language” (1), adding that its “machinations” are “among the very roots of poetry” (3). Yet neither Richards’s conception of ambiguity as systematic nor Empson’s conception of ambiguity

as a deliberate nuance (or even, deceit) resonates with critical appraisals of *Pierre*. To the contrary, most formalist sensibilities were disturbed by the novel, discovering in it not sublimely controlled ambiguities but symptoms of authorial exhaustion, slippages in sense and design.

Charles Olson and Henry A. Murray, for example, both incorporate an assumption of exhaustion, on Melville's part, into their interpretations—or, what could be more accurately described as their rationalizations—of *Pierre*. Significantly, and not coincidentally, both critics hint that shame might underpin the novel's slippery relation to meaningful linguistic utterance. In *Call Me Ishmael*, Olson argues (in an unreflexively colonial mood) that Melville brought back with him from the South Pacific “a number of shames, social shames to add to earlier ones reaching back to his father's sins and failures” (88). Of the connection between these shames and what he refers to the novel's “fatty prose” (97), Olson declares: “there was shock in him ... *Pierre* is document enough” (88). Similarly, in his long introduction to the 1949 Hendricks House edition of *Pierre* (probably the earliest sustained commentary on the novel), Murray opines, “*Pierre* is the burning out of Melville's volcano” (414), an image of exhaustion that resonates with Tomkins's account of the possibility of acute excitement tipping the threshold into distress before ultimately folding in on itself in the form of speechless fatigue. Bringing his personality psychology (or “personology”) to bear on a reading of the novel that connects Melville's precarious post-*Moby-Dick* mental state and the ambiguous characterization of Pierre, Murray explains:

Moral conflict, if radical and stubborn, results in a division, an inflexible dualism, in all branches of feeling and thought, which so influences the sufferer's

apperceptions, that every significant object becomes *ambivalent* to him, that is, both attracts and repels him, being composed, as he sees it, of two contrary elements, one good and one evil, which can not be reconciled or blended. He discovers in due time a radical defect in every person who has appealed to him and begins hating what he has loved, though, unconsciously, he continues loving the object of his hate. Thus no whole-hearted embracement of anyone is possible, and the constructive tendency towards synthesis and integration is perpetually obstructed. This accounts for the majority of ambiguities (almost synonymous with “ambivalences”) in *Pierre*. (414)

Like Olson, Murray supposes that the numerous linguistic, characterological, and narratological oddities in *Pierre* are traceable to ambivalences deeply rooted in Melville’s apperceptions, which had lately been expressing themselves as one consequence of a kind of post-*Moby-Dick* depression. What is strange about this analogy between Melville’s supposed psychological ambivalences and the novel’s ambiguities, however, is that the association hinges on a non-canonical conception of modernist ambiguity, that is, a conception of ambiguity as issuing not from formal control but from unconscious slippage, psychological rupture.

Despite Murray’s synonymization of ambivalence and ambiguity, it is instructive to attend to the differences between the critical conception of ambiguity and the psychological conception of ambivalence, in order to arrive at a clearer idea of the weird conflations of the two terms in the *Pierre* criticism. “Ambivalence” is a word that comes to the English language via early-twentieth century psychoanalytic theory (hence its unavailability to Melville); the term derives from the German “*ambivalenz*,” which was

coined by the Swiss psychoanalyst Eugen Bleuler in order to describe the “coexistence in one person of contradictory emotions or attitudes (such as love or hatred) towards a person or thing” (*OED*). Unlike “ambiguity,” at least as it is defined by Empson, this psychoanalytic conception of “ambivalence” conforms quite readily to Murray’s description of Melville’s “inflexible dualism.” It also conforms to Tomkinsian shame, which could be described as a special case of ambivalence in which the coexistence of shame and excitement conspire to make affective experience itself ambivalent, contradictory. Shame, Tomkins writes, is “literally an ambivalent turning of the eyes away from the object toward the face, toward the self” (*Shame and its Sisters* 137). The Tomkinsian resonances in Murray’s description, moreover, are not surprising: Murray was Tomkins’s mentor and his post-doctoral supervisor at Harvard, and Tomkins’s own affect scheme could be understood as providing (much needed) cybernetic inflections to Murray’s depth models of personality.⁵⁸

Ambivalence can constitute a kind of psychoanalytic amendment to formalist and New Critical conceptions of ambiguity, an amendment that can help re-frame the affective economies of Melville’s novel and its eponymous “ambiguities.” If there is, in fact, a disjunction in the critical history of *Pierre* which fails to reconcile its formal, stylistic, and/or rhetorical ambiguities with its perceived slippages in authorial control (not to mention sanity⁵⁹), this is perhaps because the novel so fascinatingly presses at the limits of Revivalist and New Critical constructions of formal sophistication.

A corollary concept to the ambiguity/ambivalence nexus that I have been developing in relation to *Pierre* is the communication theoretical notion of noise, which John Guillory has recently found evidence of in Roman Jakobson’s famous description of

the so-called poetic function. In his discussion of the influence of Jakobson's theory on twentieth century developments in the media concept, Guillory writes, "[t]he poetic function introduces a kind of melodious noise into the channel of communication, heightening consciousness of the channel as such and so distancing the message from the object or referent" (352).⁶⁰ In contradistinction to the fantasies of unmediated communication proffered earlier by Melville, *Pierre* can be thought of as drawing attention to "the channel as such," that is, as drawing attention to the mediating function of writing and thereby distancing message—and author, according to the terms of Melville's quasi-romantic poetics—from addressee(s). Jakobson describes the poetic function as "promoting the palpability of signs" (356), a good indication that the material character of writing *as such* is being emphasized in those instances of verbal communication where the poetic function happens to be foregrounded. Significantly, however, Jakobson connects his theory of the poetic function to Empson's understanding of ambiguity, observing that "[t]he supremacy of the poetic function over the referential function does not obliterate the reference but makes it *ambiguous*" (371) [emphasis added]. Once again, ambiguity operates by safeguarding the poetic utterance from a total descent into unintelligible noise, providing motivation (not to mention critical prestige) for those instances of communication deemed poetic. Yet again, however, the corollary concept of ambivalence might serve to unsettle the intentionality underpinning Jakobson's model of communication/mediation, which, as he himself notes, has a certain obliteration of reference as its horizon.

As I already suggested, shame is the most ambivalent of Tomkins's affects, insofar as it is a barrier to communication that is itself communicated. In this sense,

shame could also be thought of as the noisiest affect insofar as it is constituted, in part, by a warming-up of the face, a heightening of the subject's consciousness of the facial medium. Shame is a variety of communication, in other words, that is constituted by its heightened emphasis on the channel as such, and, here it begins to sound a little like Jakobson's poetic function as well for introducing noise into the channel of communication. It is precisely this odd, counterintuitive proximity between noisy or troubled communication and more critically acceptable notions of poetic or literary utterance that is the crux of the problem that is *Pierre*, a novel terminally stuck between sense-enabling descriptors like "ambiguous" and sense-postponing descriptors like "ambivalent."

It should be clear by now that the affective shift that I am attempting to trace in this period of Melville's writing, from his positive textuality to his more circumspect—and less unambivalently communicative—subsequent writing, is the shift from excitement and/or enjoyment to shame. Tomkins describes shame as an auxiliary to the positive affects, activated in the case of a barrier to continuing interest or excitement. "Such a barrier," Tomkins explains,

might be because one is suddenly looked at by one who is strange, or because one wishes to look at or commune with another person but suddenly cannot because he is strange, or one expected him to be familiar but he suddenly appears unfamiliar, or one started to smile but found one was smiling at a stranger.

(Shame and its Sisters 135)

Each hypothetical scene of shame suggested here by Tomkins configures its activation as auxiliary to a recognition. The circulation of affect is troubled, in the case of shame,

precisely because some mode of recognition has become uncertain; whether it be the mistaken recognition of a stranger or a misrecognition of the mutuality of interest, the trouble that is shame both reinstalls the boundaries between self and other *and* communicates that fact. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick elaborates on this capacity of shame to communicate reduced communication:

Shame floods into being as a moment, a disruptive moment, in a circuit of identity-constituting identificatory communication. Indeed, like a stigma, shame is itself a form of communication. Blazons of shame, the “fallen face” with eyes down and head averted—and, to a lesser extent, the blush—are semaphores of trouble and at the same time of a desire to reconstitute the interpersonal bridge.

(*Touching Feeling* 36)

Sedgwick’s account of shame as “flood[ing] into being as a moment” recalls the spontaneous, non-cognitive character of the shock underpinning Melville’s aesthetics of recognition, with the caveat that shame is always a fraught recognition. Shame, in this sense, can be thought of as a variety of aesthetic experience that—somewhat like the aestheticized disgust response that I examined in Chapter 1—communicates some degree of negative affective relation to the object. In the following analysis of *Pierre*, I attend to a number of the troubled recognitions that recur throughout the novel, eventually arguing that the novel can be read as the index of a partial reduction of excitement about writing and communication—that is, as a partial revolt against the reader.

It is tempting, at this moment in my argument, to think of *Pierre* as performing an ironic reversal of Peter Brooks’s classic thesis that melodrama bursts through repression with a clearly articulated expression of the moral occult, the essential moral reality

lurking underneath the apparent, merely empirical reality. I argued in my previous chapter that Brooks's formulation of the melodramatic mode goes a long way toward explaining the ostensible contradiction underpinning the city mysteries genre and its activist poetics, wherein an idealist dialectical structure (i.e., mystery/revelation) is offered both to explain and to solve the problems of social, material reality. As in city mysteries fictions, the characters in *Pierre* seem to grasp at a moral occult, the existence of which seems to be a matter of the deepest, most intuitive conviction. Needless to say, the novel utterly fails to arrive at the constitutive clarity of melodramatic language and resolution. Some of the more or less canonical readings of *Pierre* understand this kind of failure as satirical, a contemptuous disavowal, on Melville's part, of the sentimental reader's need for clarity of expression, closure, and other signs of a reconciled social order. But, if *Pierre* is better understood through the affective lens of shame than contempt, as I have been arguing, its ambivalent relation to expression, *as such*, is better understood, accordingly, as a partial reduction in the melodramatic impulse to "say everything."

Recalling Wilson's gloss of "the shock of recognition" as the moment when "genius becomes aware of its kin," the first observation to make about *Pierre* is that its unique staging of family melodrama—of the melodramatic mandate to reveal the mysteries of a particular family history—is recurrently undermined by moments in which family members misidentify one another as such. The narrative's primary family melodrama concerns Pierre Glendinning's spurning of his betrothed, Lucy Tartan, in favour of Isabel Banford—an action which leads to his disinheritance; enormously

complicating this plotline, however, are the various erotic entanglements Pierre finds himself engaged in with family members real, faked, and (ultimately) undecided. Pierre enjoys a “romantic filial love” (9) with his mother, Mary, whom (to add another layer of complication) he refers to as “Sister Mary” (20), discovers a supposed long-lost illegitimate sister, Isabel, who poses as his wife to preserve his dead father’s honour, engages in a “love-friendship” (253) with his cousin, Glen, and, finally, welcomes the scorned Lucy back into his life under the pretense that they are cousins. To add to the thickly fraught character of these metaphorically and/or actually incestuous relationships, Pierre is made, in the end, to question the authenticity of a portrait of his father which had led him believe Isabel’s story in the first place, owing to the resemblances between her and the man represented in the painting. After encountering an identical painting in a gallery of European forgeries, Pierre is suddenly struck with the possibility that “his own manifold and inter-enfolding mystic and transcendental persuasions” (409-10) constituted the sum total of his proof that Isabel was in fact his sister; the novel ends with their relationship remaining “an enigma, a mystery, an imaginative delirium (410). *Pierre*, in short, stages recognition as troubled, undecideable, and it questions the intuitive character of its shock.

As if to confirm the relationship, in his imagination, between familial recognition and the circle of genius, Melville uses a family metaphor in another of the letters to Hawthorne that develops his selectively sympathetic reception theory:

I am told, my fellow-man, that there is an aristocracy of the brain. Some men have boldly advocated and asserted it. Schiller seems to have done so, though I don’t know much about him. At any rate, it is true that there have been those

who, while earnest in behalf of their political equality, still accept the intellectual estates. And I can well perceive, I think, how a man of superior mind can, by intense cultivation, bring himself, as it were, into a certain spontaneous aristocracy of feeling—exceedingly nice and fastidious,—similar to that which, in an English Howard, conveys a torpedo-fish trill at the slightest contact with a social plebeian. (*Correspondence* 190)

Here (and elsewhere: another letter to Hawthorne refers to an “infinite fraternity of feeling” [212]), Melville stages the shock of recognition as one of familial recognition, with the implication being that “cultivated” families will recognize one another as such. Melville again extends aesthetic recognition to a Schillerian community of taste, and this time in explicit reference to his source. That the community of taste, moreover, is troped as an aristocracy in this particular configuration of Melvillean communion seems to anticipate the materialization of this figure in *Pierre*, in which the “aristocracy of feeling” and the “intellectual estates” will reappear in the forms of the noble Glendinning family and their hereditary landholding, Saddle Meadows.

In fact, the first chapter of the novel goes so far as elaborately “asserting the great genealogical and real-estate dignity of some families in America” in order to “poetically establish the richly aristocratic condition of Master Pierre Glendinning” (17), an argument which many critics have read as satirizing the oligarchical power structures underlying America’s supposedly classless society.⁶¹

In England the Peerage is kept alive by incessant restorations and creations. One man, George III., manufactured five hundred and twenty-two peers. An earldom, in abeyance for five centuries, has suddenly been assumed by some commoner, to

whom it had not so much descended, as through the art of the lawyers been made flexibly to bend in that direction. For not the Thames is so sinuous in his natural course, not the Bridgewater Canal more artificially conducted, than blood in the veins of that winding or manufactured nobility. Perishable as stubble, and fungous as the fungi, those grafted families successively live and die on the eternal soil of a name. In England this day, twenty-five hundred peerages are extinct; but the names survive. So that the empty air of a name is more enduring than a man, or than dynasties of men; the air fills man's lungs and puts life into a man, but man fills not the air, nor puts life into that. (15)

Sinuous, manufactured, winding, perishable, fungous, and grafted, the English aristocracy, in the narrator's account, constitutes a poor example of a system due to its fundamental incapacity for self-containment and self-perpetuation, unlike the sturdy and uninterrupted lines of America—a counterintuitive history of America's families that will prove faulty in the case of the Glendinnings, whose dramas of incest and murder make them a very sinuous, fungous, and perishable system by the end of the novel. Assuming, then, that Melville is questioning his own earlier idea of an "aristocracy of feeling" in *Pierre*, it is remarkable how far removed he is from the excited spirit of literary nationalism that animates "Hawthorne and his Mosses."

A more pointed attack on American literary nationalism comes later, in the chapter "Young America in Literature," in which Pierre (now in the aspect of a beleaguered young author of talent) is forced to contend with the demands of literary celebrity. The chapter constitutes an unmistakable parody of the antebellum Young America movement, the wide-ranging project for political and cultural nationalism that

Melville had previously been associated with through his friendships with the Duyckinck brothers, Hawthorne, and Cornelius Matthews. Facing undue adulation by (mostly female) fans for his juvenile verse, Pierre frantically attempts to resist all the modes of mass reproduction—e.g. of his writing, his autograph, his daguerrotypic image, etc.—that are demanded by his fame. While often read as an axe-grinding *non sequitur* in the context of the already irreverent narrative arc of the novel, the “Young America in Literature” chapter in fact echoes a certain anxiety, which recurs throughout *Pierre*, toward the public and circulating aspects of the mechanical reproduction of writing.⁶² Out of the whole strange novel, then, the “Young America in Literature” chapter most belies the promises Melville made to Sophia Peabody Hawthorne and his publishers before he finished *Pierre*, namely, that he would present to them a novel that was unambivalent in its desire for mass reproduction.

The crucial performances of disrupted recognition in *Pierre* hinge on a series of analogies between familial and aesthetic recognition, both of which are recurrently problematized in the novel. A key image for these converging modes of recognition is the aforementioned portrait of Pierre’s father, which forms the basis of what Melville alternatively refers to as Pierre’s “mysterious” and “ambiguous” relationship to Isabel. The fact that the portrait will ultimately turn out to be a forgery, copied from a European original, manages to deflate both the cultural and the familial pretensions of the American aristocracy of feeling, thereby both recalling and recasting Melville’s dramatic proclamation, in “Hawthorne and his Mosses,” that “[i]t is better to fail in originality than to succeed in imitation” (1164).

Significantly, it is an uncanny face which provides a counter-image of mystery and ambiguity to the ostensibly familiar portrait of Pierre's father. Pierre describes to Lucy how he was "accosted" by the "henceforth immemorial face" at the cottage of one of his tenants (58), and he began to experience a "wild bewildering, and incomprehensible curiosity" (58) and a "nameless fascination" in relation to this mysterious apparition (63). In a scene that once again recalls the spontaneous aspect of aesthetic recognition, Pierre spends hours locked away with the portrait of his father and the mental image of the mysterious face, before suddenly—"Pierre saw all preceding ambiguities, all mysteries ripped open as if with a keen sword" (103). Pierre's shock of recognition at this moment concerns the "reciprocal testimonies" offered by the portrait, the face, and Pierre's own face, which together provide for him "ineffable correlativeness" (103). The vocabulary of relationality, reciprocity, and interpenetration that Melville deploys to describe the epistemological force of Pierre's recognition that he, his father, and the face (now acknowledged to belong to Isabel) are all related recalls, of course, the vocabulary underpinning Melville's earlier poetics of recognition in "Hawthorne and his Mosses." This recognition of familiarity ballasting the novel's melodramatic plotting of long-lost siblings reunited will not last, however: as I mentioned, the portrait—that is, the link in the Christmas light string of associations linking Pierre and Isabel—itself turns out to be a forgery.

If the canonical sentimental and/or melodramatic plotline of the recognition of long-lost family members is unsettled in *Pierre*, these moments of fraught recognition are always represented through the novel's noisy approach to written communication. Melville develops this association metaphorically throughout the novel, such as when he

hints that the apparent absence of a sister is the only blot on the “illuminated scroll of [Pierre’s] life” (11), or when he notes that Pierre’s mother, in her fifty years, “had never betrayed ... a single published impropriety” (21). The spotlessness of the Glendinnings’ “sweetly-writ manuscripts” (11), of course, ironically contrasts the forthcoming improprieties—i.e., adultery, disinheritance, incest, and, eventually, murder—that will blight their life stories. In another example, in which the suddenly confused Pierre is meditating upon the mysteries of his provenance and his early childhood, the narrator muses, “if, in after-life, Fate puts the chemic key of the cipher into his hands; then how swiftly and how wonderfully, he reads all the obscurest and most obliterate inscriptions he finds in his memory” (85). The phrase “obliterate inscriptions,” here used to describe the most elusive traces in Pierre’s unconscious, recalls Peck’s Rosetta Stone analogy, which compared *Pierre* to the unreadable writing of an undeciphered code; it also recalls what I characterized as the horizon of Jakobson’s poetic function, the moments when noise obliterates reference. Like so many things in *Pierre*, family is mystery: the ideally revealed delineations of relation and recognition, crucial features of the melodramatic mode which *Pierre* at one point promised to emulate, are withheld, while the ideally communicative, sympathetic language through which these mysteries of provenance are conventionally resolved remains *ob*-literate, noisy—remains, in short, mysterious.

It is in the shadows of such confounding moments of familial mystery that Pierre makes his strange resolution to spurn Lucy and his mother, pretend to marry Isabel, and flee Saddle Meadows for the city. Again, the crisis in sympathetic community represented in the narrative finds an analogy in the shifting generic orientation of the

novel; we could say, in other words, that this is the point when Melville trades the mysteries of the country for those of the city.

Consider the following passage in relation to Pierre's flight from Saddle Meadows:

Here is a tale of modernity and modernization; a story about the loss of patriarchal authority, disruption in family life, and the social transformation occasioned by the rise of modern urban culture. Simultaneously, it is a parable about the shift from an older, more private, and more linear Puritan heritage centered around the family, town, and religion to one figured around the crowd—that group of relatively independent men and women who sought work, friendship, and community within the context of an urban, secular culture. (35)

This passage comes from Amy Gilman Srebnick's critical study, *The Mysterious Death of Mary Rogers*, and it describes Mary's flight from her Puritan, rural Connecticut heritage to New York City. The passage could easily read, however, as a laundry list of changes to Pierre's "aristocratic condition" following his own arrival in New York. Like Mary Rogers, Pierre has broken with country life, with family, and with tradition by fleeing his birthright at Saddle Meadows, and in this sense, his flight can be thought of in relation to such more or less paradigmatic antebellum narratives concerning urbanization. As I suggested in my previous chapter, the Mary Rogers story—along with similar sensational murder stories from the 1830s and 1840s—represented a crucial site for the development of urban fiction forms, including urban exposés, detective tales, and city mysteries serials; the two most famous representations of the Mary Rogers story, of course, were Poe's "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" (1843) and Ned Buntline's *The*

Mysteries and Miseries of New York (1849). In the context of Pierre's own flight to the city, then, the typological elements of his move should indicate a corresponding shift in the novel toward the city mysteries idiom.

A scene depicting the initial arrival in the city of Pierre, Isabel, and their "fallen" companion, Delly Ulver, is indicative of what this shifted idiom means for the novel's thematics of recognition:

The coach seems rolling on cannon-balls of all calibers. Grasping Pierre's arm, Isabel eagerly and forebodingly demands what is the cause of this most strange and unpleasant transition.

"The pavements, Isabel; this is the town."

Isabel was silent.

But for the first time in weeks, Delly voluntarily spoke:

"It is not so soft as the green sward, Master Pierre."

"No, Miss Ulver," Pierre said, very bitterly, "the buried hearts of some dead citizens have perhaps come to the surface."

"Sir?" said Delly.

"And are they so hard-hearted here?" asked Isabel.

"Ask yonder pavements, Isabel. Milk dropt from the milkman's can in December, freezes not more quickly on those stones, than does snow-white innocence, if in poverty, it chance to fall in these streets." (268-69)

The "most strange and unpleasant transition," of course, is from the "green sward" of the country to the city pavement, but the transition also signifies the crossing of a generic threshold into the territory of urban fiction and its corresponding tropes. Pierre's

manichean opposition between “snow-white innocence” and the rock-hard hearts of city strangers, for instance, could come straight out of one of Lippard’s fictions. The mysteries in Pierre’s New York, then, are those of Lippard’s and Buntline’s cities—the mysteries hidden by criminals and mysterious strangers rather than by parents and mysterious, long-lost siblings. The stone motif recurs as well—but instead of referring to the impenetrableness of one’s own heart it refers to the hardness of the hearts of unwelcoming strangers. The city mysteries idiom, in other words, as it appears as if out of nowhere in *Pierre*, can be understood as the obverse configuration of the domestic idiom that occupied the first half of the novel. If many readers have expressed surprise that Pierre should suddenly end up in a city mysteries plot, they might return to the very first sentence of the novel: “[t]here are some strange summer mornings in the country, when he who is but a sojourner from the city shall early walk forth into the fields, and be wonder-smitten with the trance-like aspect of the green and golden world” (7). Not only does this opening reference the perspective of a “sojourner from the city,” but it presents precisely the obverse encounter as that which Pierre, Isabel, and Delly experience when they transition from the green sward to the stony pavement.

In the final section of this chapter, I want to consider one particular motif—the motif of blushing and bleeding writing—that can help to focus the interventions in mass writing that Melville seems to be making in *Pierre*. I have been arguing that he offers noisy renditions of more conventionally communicative antebellum genres as part of a partial revolt against the (mass) reader. In elaborating on Melville’s awry version of the city mysteries narrative, I will consider how the tensions I have been noticing in the novel

concerning exposure, publicity, recognition, and mass reproduction are unfurled in a culminating obliteration that encompasses both community and communication.

One of the first instances of the motif of blushing and bleeding writing comes relatively early in the novel, right after Pierre has read a letter from Isabel hinting at her secret existence:

The letter, inscribed in a feminine, but irregular hand, and in some places almost illegible, plainly attesting to the state of mind which had dictated it;—stained, too, here and there, with spots of tears, which chemically acted upon the ink, assumed a strange and reddish hue—as if blood and not tears had dropped upon the sheet;—and so completely torn in two by Pierre’s own hand, that it indeed seemed the fit scroll of a torn, as well as bleeding heart. He hung half-lifeless in his chair; his hand clutching the letter, was pressed against his heart, as if some assassin, had stabbed him and fled; and Pierre was now holding the dagger in the wound, to stanch the outgushing blood. (79)

Recalling the narrator’s opening salvo against the “fungous,” “grafted,” and “perishable” English peerage (which I quoted above), this scene’s dramatic force comes from the suggestion of the fungability of the Glendinning family, made a possibility by that fact of the existence of an unaristocratic, illegitimate Glendinning offshoot (i.e. Isabel). The figurative wound to the “aristocratic condition” of Pierre is materialized in the weird red writing of the letter itself, which, when Pierre presses it to his chest, helps lend to the scene the impression of a tableau vivant of a dying aristocrat.⁶³ The dagger, the instrument of the wound, is the letter itself in Melville’s figure, and like a dagger that sits in a wound, the letter is also an instrument to stanch the bleeding. Pressed against

Pierre's chest, then, the red letter takes on the remarkable double function of stanching his "wound" while advertising its existence, a red writing that materializes his family's shame.⁶⁴ The theatricality and heightened sense of gesture that overwhelm the scene—Pierre's being stabbed, brought to a "half-lifeless" state by a revelatory letter—confirm, once again, that it is within the melodramatic idiom that the action is taking place, but the fact that the writing is deployed to arrest the circulation of family shame, to stanch its communication, seems also to suggest some ambivalence toward such a popular and expressive mode of literary communication. The bleeding letter is also a blushing letter, then, communicating shame as it works to stanch it.

The bleeding-blushing epistle recurs in another of the narrative's many unexpected trajectories, this time concerning the relationship between Pierre and his cousin Glen. In a retrospective chapter describing their childhood relationship, the narrator reveals a "boy-love" mediated almost entirely through letters circulating between the country-dwelling Pierre and the city-dwelling Glen. In a description that resonates with Melville's own ardent letters to Hawthorne, he writes of Pierre and Glen,

nor are the letters of Aphroditean devotees more charged with headlong vows and protestations, more cross-written and crammed with discursive sentimentalities, more undeviating in their semi-weekliness, or dayliness, as the case may be, than are the love-friendship missives of boys. (253)

Pierre and Glen's "discursive sentimentalities" even take a material form that recalls Isabel's red-hued writing: each letter, the narrator explains, was "inscribed cross-wise throughout with red ink upon black so that the love in those letters was two layers deep, and one pen and one pigment were insufficient to paint it" (254). The "insufficienc[y]" of

the epistolary medium to contain the feelings circulating between the boys recalls, again, Melville's fantasy writing machine, with which he would communicate infinitely and immediately with Hawthorne; and here, again as well, the aristocracy of feeling is literalized in the novel as an excessive circulation of feeling between family members through writing. While the letters between Glen and Pierre don't betray any explicit signs of the violence materialized through Isabel's stabbing-stanching letter, the redness of the writing suggests what Melville teasingly calls at various moments in the novel, "a foretaste of death" (396)—in this case, a "foretaste" of the violence that is to come between Pierre and Glen.

The breathless excitement circulating between Pierre and Glen eventually dissipates with age, and the heteronormative requirements of burgeoning manhood turn them into competitors for Lucy's affections. In a letter to Pierre after a long stay in Europe, Glen "mourn[s] the apparent decline of their friendship" and "trust[s] that now, notwithstanding their long separation, it would revive with added sincerity" (256), but Pierre notices, after "accidentally fixing his glance upon the opening salutations of this delicate missive ... certain, not wholly distinguishable chirographic tokens":

the "My very dear Pierre," with which the letter seemed to have begun, had originally been written "Dear Pierre"; but that when all was concluded, and Glen's signature put to it, then the ardent words "My very" had been prefixed to the reconsidered "Dear Pierre"; a casual supposition, which possibly, however unfounded, materially retarded any answering warmth in Pierre, lest his generous flame should only embrace a flaunted feather. (256)

Subsequent letters are found to bear further tonal ambivalences and undecidabilities of

address, “[a]ll of which fluctuations augured ill for the determinateness of [their] love” (256): the next is inscribed to “My dear Pierre,” the third to “Dear Pierre,” and a fourth, giving evidence of a “forced and very spirited advanced march,” to “My dearest Pierre” (256). “It was a little curious and rather sardonically diverting,” explains the narrator, in summing up the turn in the cousins’ relationship,

to compare these masterly, yet not wholly successful, and indeterminate tactics of the accomplished Glen, with the unfaltering stream of *Beloved Pierres*, which not only flowed along the top margin of all his earlier letters, but here and there, from their subterranean channel, flashed out in bright intervals, through all the succeeding lines. (257)

The “fluctuations” in address that are characteristic of this latter phase in Pierre’s and Glen’s relationship, their “forced,” “indeterminate,” and “not wholly successful” strategies at reconciling the lost love, represent conspicuous instances of the partially reduced excitement and enjoyment now circulating between the two men. Whereas, before, their love exceeded the material limits of the epistolary medium, with writing “flow[ing] along the top margin” of the page and “flash[ing] out in bright intervals, through all the succeeding lines,” their reciprocating and mutually amplifying shame now reveals itself through its own “chirographic tokens,” that is, crossings-out and other indices of ambivalence.

In contrast to the excited letters of their boyhoods, Pierre’s letter to Glen, announcing his arrival in the city and requesting accommodation, is stark and severe, as limited in communication as possible: “The preparative letter of Pierre to Glen plunged at once into the very heart of the matter, and was perhaps the briefest letter he had ever

written” (265). The brevity of Pierre’s letter and the recurrence of the stabbing letter motif again connect violence and writing—the *ob*-literation that was hinted at near the beginning of the novel. The stabbing motif returns just after, as well, when Glen fails to reply to Pierre’s written supplication. Pierre tracks down and confronts Glen at a party, flying into a very public rage and threatening to “prick” Glen with a knife, “let out all [his] Glendinning blood, and then sew up the vile remainder” (279). Pierre’s gruesomely specific threat is almost literally to dissect Glen, to cut him open, remove his insides, and sew up the emptied “remainder.” But, of course, this threat to Glen’s body is nothing like how Melville enters Hawthorne’s body in “Hawthorne and his Mosses,” wherein the operational closure of the body—that is, the boundedness of the cardiovascular system—made it an ideal space for enjoying Hawthorne’s warm and generous thoughts in structural isolation from the “popularizing noise” of open circulation. That a prick might open up the system, breaching the boundedness of the aristocracy of feeling, whose operational closure is a basic requirement for its ongoing existence, threatens, once again, the structural integrity of the Glendinnings’ aristocratic condition. Pierre’s threat is *sensational*, then, for being both sensationally violent but also for threatening with sensational exposure or publicity the very intimate privacy previously entailed by Melville’s metaphors of literary aristocracy. Rather than anatomizing Glen (as Melville did with whales in *Moby-Dick*), Pierre’s threat is to taxidermize him, to make him into a monument to the bloodless, emptied, and murdered aristocratic body.

The motif of the blushing/bleeding letter resolves itself through the ultimate convergence of writing and violence that had been predicted throughout *Pierre*. Pierre returns home one day to find two letters awaiting him, and before even having read them,

he guesses that, “in these hands I feel that I now hold the final poniards that shall stab me; and by stabbing me, make *me* too a most swift stabber in the recoil” (413). The first letter turns out to be from his publisher, and the second from Glen and Lucy’s brother, Fredric, and both letters do succeed, as he predicted, in making Pierre “a most swift stabber in the recoil.” The first letter, from his publisher, reads:

Sir:—You are a swindler. Upon the pretense of writing a popular novel for us, you have been receiving cash advances from us, while passing through our press the sheets of a blasphemous rhapsody, filched from the vile Atheists, Lucian and Voltaire. Our great press of publication has hitherto prevented our slightest inspection of our reader’s proofs of your book. Send not another sheet to us. Our bill for printing thus far, and also for our cash advances, swindled out of us by you, is now in the hands of our lawyer, who is instructed to proceed with instant rigor.

(*Signed*) STEEL, FLINT & ASBESTOS. (413-14)

Pierre, we learn in the letter, has promised his publishers a “popular novel,” and he has reneged on this promise by sending them the manuscript of some “mature work” that is “least calculated for pecuniary profit” (392). The letter prods Pierre with the further indignity of judging his experimental and ambitious work, such as it is, a rip-off, “filched” from Lucian and Voltaire, making the work a double-failure according to the terms of the already-quoted Melvillean axiom that “it is better to fail at originality, than to succeed in imitation”: Pierre’s book is a failed imitation, an unsuccessful forgery of European originals, doubly-damned in the context of Melville’s one-time vision of an original American literature. The second letter, which likewise accuses Pierre of fraud, reads:

Thou, Pierre Glendinning, art a villainous and perjured liar. It is the sole object of this letter imprintedly to convey the point blank lie to thee; that taken in at thy heart, it may be thence pulsed with thy blood, throughout thy system. We have let some interval pass inactive, to confirm and solidify our hate. Separately, and together, we brand thee, in thy every lung-cell, a liar;—liar, because that is the scornfullest and loathsomest title for a man; which in itself is the compend of all infamous things.

(Signed) GLENDINNING STANLY,

FREDRIC TARTAN (414)

The temporal coincidence of the two letters, as well as their mirrored content, perlocutionary force, and stylistic construction, all contribute to my sense that writing has been implicated in the novel's plotting of family melodrama all along. Pierre's familial and literary crises, in other words, with their implied consequences of exposure, rupture, and negative publicity, constitute obverse threats to the same situation of his failing aristocratic condition.

Enraged, equally, it would seem, at his slanderous publishers and his slanderous cousin and would-be brother-in-law, Pierre steals two pistols from another tenant at the Apostles, murmuring to himself as he tears off a piece of Glen and Frederic's letter, "for the top wadding, I'll send 'em back their lie, and plant it scorching in their brains" (416); taking that piece of the letter "that more particularly gave the lie," Pierre then "ram[s] it home upon the bullets" (416). The ensuing confrontation between Pierre and Glen takes place when the city streets were "most thronged with haughty-rolling carriages and proud-rustling promenaders" in "a large, open triangular space, built round with the

stateliest public erections” (416). The space, Melville adds, is “the very proscenium of the town,” impressing the cousins’ emphatically public meeting with the additional connotation of the kind of spectacle that recalls the “popularizing noise ... and blood besmeared tragedy” of Shakespearean theatre. Glen initiates the violence by striking Pierre across the face, leaving a “half-livid and half-blood brand” on his cheek that seems equitably to share in the blushing and the bleeding that I have been tracking throughout the novel. Glen’s violence and its amplified reciprocation in the form of a letter-bullet delivered by Pierre’s pistol restages the reciprocating and mutually amplifying shame of their fallen love—but publically and violently, trading their private “discursive sentimentalities” for mid-day, busy-street sensationalism. Pierre’s verbal sally, delivered before he fires, is “’tis speechless sweet to murder thee!” (417), and this spoken speechlessness serves as a good summary of the trajectory from love to shame to rage that has characterized Pierre’s history of communication with his cousin.

Writing, at the moment of the novel’s sensational conclusion, has finally failed to be ambivalently private and public, interested and ashamed; it is here only public, exposed, and violently emptying of interiority: “Spatterings of his own kindred blood were upon the pavement; his own hand had extinguished his house in slaughtering the only unoutlawed human being by the name of Glendinning;—and Pierre was seized by a hundred contending hands” (417). Not only has the Glendinning name been found to be, quite literally, “fungous” and “perishable,” but it has been found so in the full view of a rush-hour public, as urban theatre—as city mystery, exposed.

The difficulties that *Pierre* presents to its readers can be seen, finally, as inverted

consequences of Melville's fallen faith in textual communion. In each case, shame's ambivalence about communication registers as the form of that communication, resistant to yet blushingly hopeful for intersubjective experience. The spilling and spattering of Glendinning blood at the novel's finale represents a neat performance of Melville's concession to participate in mass writing. However, if bloody revenge has the function of penetrating to the moral occult in more conventional instances of popular urban melodrama, it remains difficult to identify any clarifying function behind Pierre's violent actions. Melville's concession to popular writing remains ambivalent, then, in the sense that its supplicating interest in readerly attention is ambivalently coassembled both with a noisy shame and a stabbing, shooting, outwardly-propulsive rage.

Chapter 4: Moody Alcott

“I am always insincere, as always knowing there are other moods.”

—Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Nominalist and Realist”

Louisa May Alcott’s first novel *Moods* (1864) takes its title from a passage in Ralph Waldo Emerson’s essay “Experience” (1844), which Alcott also quotes as the novel’s epigraph: “Life is a train of moods, like a string of beads; and as we pass through them they prove to be many colored lenses, which paint the world their own hue, and each shows us only what lies in its focus.” It would be hard to more explicitly cite influence than through such framing devices as title and epigraph; nevertheless, commentators—including contemporary reviewers, Alcott scholars, and Alcott herself, in subsequent reappraisals of the novel—have recurrently repressed the Emersonian resonances of mood in *Moods*, minimizing, dismissing, or ignoring altogether its philosophical elements while emphasizing the juvenile elements that have come to signify Alcott’s legacy. Where it has been granted by Emerson scholars, at least from Stanley Cavell onward, that Emerson uses language and the essay form to experiment with the recursive and slippery—that is, the moody—foundations of experience, the possibility of an experimental Alcott has not often been entertained in scholarly conversations, despite what I take to be her wry investigation into the conditions of transcendentalist modes of knowing and being in *Moods*.⁶⁵

A rare exception to the trend of disregarding Alcott’s philosophical aspirations in *Moods* comes from her own father, Bronson, who asked, after having listened to his

daughter read out an early draft of the novel, “Where did you get your metaphysics?” (*Journals* 104). Bronson’s question strikes an attitude somewhere between spontaneous acceptance and surprise in relation to Alcott’s philosophical experiment, and it is precisely this attitude that I would like to assume in my reading of *Moods* in this chapter. Bronson’s automatic assumption that his daughter’s novel does have a metaphysics is tempered by his surprising inability to locate the source and type of its philosophy. I say that Bronson’s surprise is itself surprising because it would seem obvious where this daughter of Concord got her metaphysics. Still, there is an uncanniness to the Transcendentalism of *Moods* that justifies Bronson’s surprise, and a kind of alienated uncertainty to Alcott’s *use* of philosophy that would probably have been foreign to Bronson’s cheerful idealist. The whiff of metaphysics in what otherwise seemed written as a popular novel, moreover, would have probably struck one such as Bronson as odd, since the verse, essay, and sermon formats were the familiar and culturally authoritative vehicles of the transcendentalist worldview in nineteenth-century New England. Scholars have begun shifting the patriarchal orientations that have for so long undergirded the stories that are told about New England Transcendentalism, and they have revealed significant convergences in the nineteenth-century histories of feminist and transcendentalist thought.⁶⁶ Predictably, most examples of this convergence occurred “outside the male institutions of college and clergy” (Cole and Argersinger 7), in modes of cultural production and circulation that were more readily available to women: private diary- and letter-writing, conversation, small-scale manuscript-exchange, and, most importantly for my purposes, novel-writing (Cole and Argersinger 8). If the essays, poems, sermons, and public addresses of Emerson and his male contemporaries continue

to represent the most prominent and prestigious cultural artifacts of transcendentalist thought, I will argue that some of Alcott's novels deserve to occupy a similar position, not only for containing transcendentalist ideas but for experimenting in forms fit to index particular problems that emerge out of the transcendentalist conceptions of self, body, and community.

Alcott performs what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari would describe as a “minor” relation to Transcendentalism in *Moods*, a relation that simultaneously inhabits and interrogates the “major” language of Transcendentalism. “Minor literature,” according to Deleuze and Guattari, “is the language of minorities operating within a major language” (16), and this is precisely what Alcott was, as a woman in Concord's intellectual circles. But as a woman of the generation that came after the major transcendentalists—Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Theodore Parker, and even Bronson, her father—Alcott was a minor author in a more literal sense as well, a perpetual minor despite being well into her thirties by the time she published *Moods*—a “little woman” among “representative men.” This was, at least, how she was treated, in Concord and in reviews of her fiction, and this is how she came to represent herself in her private writing and in her exceptionally successful popular fictions.

Deleuze and Guattari also invoke, briefly and somewhat cryptically, the minor aspect of popular literature:

[o]nly the possibility of setting up a minor practice of major language from within allows one to define popular literature, marginal literature, and so on. Only in this way can literature really become a collective machine of expression and really be able to treat and develop its contents. (18-19)

Deleuze and Guattari seem to attribute to popular, proletarian, and marginal literatures the collective value that is one of the constituent features of minor literature, that is, its capacity to express collective enunciations in place of the major and the Romantic—and also, the transcendentalist—fantasy of a message that refers back to “an enunciating subject” (18). Alcott’s surprising experiment in transcendentalist novel-writing would seem to satisfy these conditions of popular literature, insofar as it constitutes a historical instantiation of minor writing: the perennial plots and characters of her popular fictions are everywhere “contaminated” by the “political domain,” they bear the weight of “collective enunciations” that carry with them, because of their very communality, the “possibility to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility” (17). Deleuze and Guattari elaborate upon this intrinsically political aspect of minor literature by contrasting it with the “individual concern (familial, marital, and so on)” of major literatures, wherein the social serves “as a mere environment or a background” (17). In minor literature, conversely, “its cramped space forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics. The individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole story is vibrating within it” (17). In popular novel-writing, then, Alcott seems to have discovered an ideal medium for inhabiting and interrogating some of the idealist, individualist, anti-feminist, and anti-communitarian aspects of transcendentalist discourse. The “individual concern” that is the ostensible “subject” of *Moods*—namely, its heroine’s experimentations in self-hood—vibrates, in this sense, with the “whole story” of social prohibitions against experimental female subjectivity.

While echoing Bronson's question ("Where did you get your metaphysics?") in my approach to *Moods*, then, I also want to remain attuned to the patterned dismissal of the possibility that the novel *is* philosophical—a pattern that registers in *Moods* itself, as well as in the critical, paratextual, and other materials that orbit the text. As I hinted, these disavowals of the novel's metaphysics recurrently treat its organizing concept of mood as a characteristic that is intrinsic to young womanhood, and a characteristic, moreover, that disqualifies young women from "serious" modes of reflection and speech in accordance with the strictures of nineteenth-century gender ideology. On the way to articulating their conception of minor literature, Deleuze and Guattari wonder, parenthetically, whether there are analogous possibilities for philosophy, "which for a long time has been an official, referential genre" (27). In emphasizing the referential and generic aspects of major philosophical practice, Deleuze and Guattari seem to suggest that a minor philosophy, like a minor literature, will have to emerge from a minor, deterritorialized use of language—will have, in other words, to inhabit and pull apart the referential and generic aspects of the dominant philosophical discourses. Alcott does something like this in *Moods*, practicing a kind of minor philosophy while eschewing its major generic and referential aspects. If mood features, as I will demonstrate, as a destabilizing and affective force lurking behind, beneath, or beside major philosophical attempts to ground reason in an a priori experience of self, there is an almost irreparable irony in the idea that mood should *also* feature as a force delegitimizing female speech; this chapter explores ways that *Moods*, as a work of minor literature and minor philosophy, installs itself in the conceptual fractures opened by this irony.

The plot of *Moods* turns on a love triangle between the novel's eighteen-year-old heroine, Sylvia Yule, and two of her brother's close friends, the brooding, heroic adventurer/essayist Adam Warwick, and the soft-spoken poet Geoffrey Moor. Sylvia rejects Geoffrey's first proposal of marriage in an ill-received bid for independence, accepts his second proposal, leaves him when her love for Adam becomes unmanageable, and eventually calls him back to her, before dying young and in a state of blissfully benignant love for her husband at the end of the novel. Sylvia's "moods" are a lexical and thematic presence throughout *Moods*, and they were read by contemporary reviewers as emblematic of her moody indecision regarding her suitors, her immaturity, and her flightiness—characteristics which are all coded as intrinsically "young" and "female" in the review articles. A very brief review offers perhaps the bluntest expression of the general condescension visited upon *Moods*: "One of the foolish novels. A story about married life, written evidently by one who knows nothing about it" (*Alcott: Contemporary Reviews* 31). A longer but no less dismissive review elaborates on the critical consensus of the novel's sins, namely, that Alcott both treats the institution of marriage too lightly and Sylvia's angst too seriously:

To read the light literature of the present day, one must wonder at the taste for horrors which seems to possess the people. Is it not strange, when our country is full of suffering the most terribly real, that anyone should have any superfluity of sympathy to waste on the elaborate agony of self-analyzing, self-tormenting heroines? (*Alcott: Contemporary Reviews* 31-32)

Contrasting the novel's representations of "elaborate agony" with the "most terribly real" trauma of the ongoing Civil War, the reviewer exploits a loaded association between

“real” masculine suffering (i.e. of the body) and the implicatively stagey or histrionic suffering of (hysterical) women. The reviewer continues this attack on exorbitant female self-consciousness by comparing Alcott’s “self-analyzing, self-tormenting” heroine unfavourably to Jane Austen’s more “temperate” heroines, who “never insisted that marriages were made in heaven” (32). Besides misreading the satirical tone of Austen’s representations of marriage, the reviewer misses what I understand to be a governing irony in Alcott’s novel, namely, that introspection will signify as self-absorbed and frivolous when it is gendered as female and as earnest, existential, and, ultimately, self-reliant, when it is gendered as male. Similarly, in another review with the exasperated title “Another Feminist Novel,” Alcott and her fellow “maiden reformers” are chastized for regarding marriage as “an experiment”: “if the love that drew the parties together does not prove genuine and lasting,” the finger-wagging reviewer laments, of Alcott’s perceived lack of reverence for the institution in question, “separation is the natural and appropriate remedy” (*Alcott: Contemporary Reviews* 27). Again, Alcott is lectured through the genre of the review, treated as a misguided “girl” and “maiden” despite being 32 years old by the time the novel appeared.

Another, related trend in the *Moods* reviews takes Alcott to task for her philosophical treatment of social institutions, and of marriage in particular. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *Elective Affinities* (1809), a novel whose translation into English in 1854 caused ripples among New England’s more puritan literati, is invoked in a number of the reviews as a source-text for Alcott’s critique of marriage and near-representation of divorce. These allusions manage to double-damn Alcott, condemning her perceived adoption of Goethe’s licentious moral philosophy, on the one hand, and her

failure to properly live up to the aesthetic standards of her purported model, on the other hand. In a self-delightedly patronizing review, for instance, a young Henry James writes, of this critical identification of a “doctrine of affinities” in *Moods*, “we are inclined to think that our author has been somewhat maligned. Her book is, to our perception, innocent of any doctrines whatever” (*Alcott: Contemporary Reviews* 35). Another review, published in an English magazine, similarly minimizes Alcott in relation to Goethe: the reviewer locates *Moods* among the “transcendental school of novels” but observes that Alcott, unlike Goethe, “faints at last, and leaves society with its old frontiers” (*Alcott: Contemporary Reviews* 33). This latter review, in particular, seems to have vexed Alcott, who refers to it in her journals: “English people dont [sic] understand ‘Transcendental Fiction’ as they call ‘Moods.’ My next book shall have no *ideas* in it, only facts & the people shall be as ordinary as possible, then critics will say its all right” (140). Alcott’s wish to purge “*ideas*” from her fiction—here, at least, in explicit response to the mode of belittlement characterizing the reviews—could be understood as anticipating the stylistic shift away from the more romantic and esoteric plots and characterizations of *Moods* to the more prosaic language and domestic plots of *Little Women* (1868) and her other best-sellers.

I argued in Chapter 1 that Edgar Allan Poe exploits the lexical association between “ideas” and Idealism to develop an alternative poetics of the material effect that can be traced, in “Berenice” (1835), through an alliterative string that marks the tale’s progression from “*idées*” (ideas) to “*dents*” (teeth) to (the material) “deed.” “Idea” plays the similar role of signifying a mode of idealist or idealizing philosophy in Alcott’s journal entry, but with the different context of New England Transcendentalism and its

gender politics. Ideas and deeds exist in alternative spheres of gendered activity and cultural production in the version of the distinction that appears in the reviews and in Alcott's journals: ideas belong to the speculative philosophical domain of men and their philosophical writing, while the mundanely material, prosaic, and domestic domains are to be left to women and their novels. Like Poe, however, Alcott will turn a rejection of ideas to her advantage. As my reading of *Moods* will demonstrate, Alcott questions the grounding of self-reliant self-hood on idealized concepts such as "soul" and "genius," emphasizing instead the generative minor-or, secondary-relations that turn out to be, always already, the necessary foundations for thinking subjectivity.

Alcott's frustration over the reception of *Moods* will be dramatized a few years later in the "Literary Lessons" chapter of *Little Women*, with Jo March's ill-fated first foray into novel-writing. After dutifully internalizing all the conflicting advice offered by her family and publisher, Jo finds herself with a "ruin" on her hands:

So, with Spartan firmness, the young authoress laid her first-born on her table, and chopped it up as ruthlessly as any ogre. In the hope of pleasing every one, she took every one's advice; and like the old man and his donkey in the fable, suited nobody.

Her father liked the metaphysical streak which had unconsciously got into it, so that was allowed to remain, though she had her doubts about it. Her mother thought that there *was* a trifle too much description; out, therefore, it came, and with it many necessary links in the story. Meg admired the tragedy; so Jo piled up the agony to suit her, while Amy objected to the fun, and, with the best intentions in life, Jo quenched the sprightly scenes which relieved the somber

character of the story. Then, to complicate the ruin, she cut it down one-third, and confidingly sent the poor little romance, like a picked robin, out into the big, busy world to try its fate.

Well, it was printed, and she got three hundred dollars for it; likewise plenty of praise and blame, both so much greater than she expected, that she was thrown into a state of bewilderment, from which it took her some time to recover. (295)

The contrast between Jo's loving and intimate object-relation to her novel (her "first-born") and the apparent horror she experienced at its being picked apart by her readers recalls Melville's famous complaint to Hawthorne about the public life of his experimental novels: "What I feel most moved to write, that is banned,—it will not pay. Yet, altogether, write the *other* way I cannot. So the product is a final hash, and all my books are botches" (*Correspondence* 191). Alcott's opinion of *Moods* following its publication and its first round of reviews seems to have been that it was a "botch," a "hash" sewn together from the diverging snippets of other people's opinions. And so, Jo's love for her "first-born" novel is transformed into some other, more complicated object-relation that perhaps more accurately approaches the feelings of Dr. Frankenstein for his own first-born hash. As for *Moods*, meanwhile, it is effectively alienated from Alcott's own ego-investments through its transformation into the object of one of the many life-lessons populating *Little Women*.

Alcott's affective investment in her first-born novel shifts through the course of its print life-cycle, and this shift can be schematized as one from excitement and love to shame, what Silvan Tomkins calls an "incomplete reduction" (*Shame and its Sisters* 134)

in positive affect that sees Alcott progressively staging her relation to the novel in terms of a renunciation of its philosophical aspect. Perhaps the ultimate moment in this shifting configuration comes in the 1882 second edition of the novel, in which Sylvia's experimental side is dampened and she is allowed to live (recalling that she falls ill and dies at the end of the first edition) and learn from what Alcott calls, in the preface to the second edition, her "mistakes" (225). Alcott writes, in this same preface, that the novel represented an "attempt to show the mistakes of a moody nature, guided by impulse not principle," and she identifies "girl[s] of eighteen" as her ideal readers, claiming that "they alone ... have divined the real purpose of the book in spite of its many faults, and have thanked me for it" (225). The preface not only apologizes for the immoralism of *Moods*, then, but it also repurposes its plot as a cautionary tale for young girls who might be taught to avoid Sylvia's impulsive "mistakes." The second edition of *Moods*, much like its fictional reincarnation in *Little Women*, becomes reassimilated, to an extent at least, into the didactic poetics that would characterize both Alcott's successful juvenile-domestic fiction of the late-1860s onward and the more general mid nineteenth-century body of domestic, largely didactic novels that Nina Baym calls "woman's fiction."⁶⁷

It is important to remember, however, that Alcott envisioned *Moods* as a work for adults while she was writing and revising it and that she and her family positioned Emerson (and not "girl[s] of eighteen") as the novel's ideal reader through its pre-publication life. "Emerson must see this," Bronson insisted following his first encounter with the work (*Journals* 104), while Alcott proudly reports, elsewhere, that "Mr. Emerson offered to read it when Mother told him it was 'Moods' and had one of his sayings for motto" (*Journals* 99-100). Despite the fact that she did not, ultimately, share

her *Moods* manuscript with Emerson, Alcott does seem to have configured her author-function in far more excited, experimental, and relational terms, during this period, than she would ever do again. In a turn of phrase that she will recycle, quite pointedly, a few years later to describe Jo's attitude when composing her ill-fated novel in *Little Women*, Alcott even declared that "[g]enius burned so fiercely" while she was writing *Moods*, "that for four weeks I wrote all day and planned nearly all night, being quite possessed of my work" (*Journals* 99).

Alcott's uncharacteristic allusion to her own genius at this moment near the outset of her career can be contrasted to an elision of the same term just as the forthcoming reality of the novel's public circulation began dawning on her. After several painful rejections, *Moods* was finally accepted for publication by A.K. Loring, who nevertheless demanded dramatic revisions, including cutting the novel down by a third and killing off Sylvia, whose immoralism, to Loring's mind, could not be rewarded with a happy and lasting marriage. Alcott writes, in her journal, of the novel's imminent publication:

Proofs began to come, & the chapters seemed small, stupid, & no more my own in print. I felt very much afraid that I'd ventured too much & should be sorry for it. But Emerson says 'that which is true for your own private heart is true for others,' so I wrote from my own life & experience & hope it may suit some one & at least shall do no harm. (*Journals* 133)

Alcott's shyness about *Moods* has precisely to do with its being in proof and in print—that is, she is self-conscious about the potential of its public circulation after having seemed only proud and pleased when it circulated between friends and family in manuscript form. Alcott's Emerson paraphrase in the journal entry comes from the opening passage

of “Self-Reliance” (1841), in which Emerson recalls some verses he had read recently that were “original and not conventional” (*Essays and Lectures* 259). “To believe your own thought,” Emerson continues, in reference to the author of the verse in question, “to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men,—that is genius” (259). Alcott’s allusion to the passage would seem to evince an earnest desire to write originally and not conventionally, and, moreover, in a voice that is universalized through its genius—exactly the sort of universality of scope that will be denied her over and again in the reviews of the novel. But her elision of Emerson’s actual reference to “genius” is telling. Gustavus Stadler observes exactly this sort of reticence on Alcott’s part to proclaim her own “genius,” but according to a logic of *articulated* shyness or embarrassment that he associates with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s notion of “queer performativity” (109): “these acts of self-belittlement,” Stadler explains, “were also important acts of self-presentation for Alcott, stagings of her relationship to the institution of literature, literary history, and the act of literary writing” (108). Alcott’s self-consciousness about how “small” her writing looked in proof could constitute another such staging of self-belittlement as self-presentation, and her strategic paraphrase of Emerson (i.e., with the mention of “genius” absented) additionally instances her self-negating and minor relation to figures of “genius” such as Emerson.

There is an unexpected consonance with Emerson’s conception of genius in Alcott’s journal entry, however, that suggests that she might have been a more perceptive reader of her so-called “Master” (qtd. in Stadler 108) than most of his contemporaries. Emerson continues his preliminary remarks on genius in “Self-Reliance” as follows:

In every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts: they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty. Great works of art have no more affecting lesson than this. They teach us to abide by our spontaneous impression with good-humored inflexibility then most when the whole cry of voices is on the other side. Else, to-morrow a stranger will say with masterly good sense precisely what we have thought and felt all the time, and we shall be forced to take with shame our opinion from another. (259)

Emerson articulates his version of genius in terms of a genealogy of the self-reliant artist, whose originary recognition of his “own rejected thoughts” catalyzes in him the courage to “abide by [his] spontaneous impression.” Surprisingly, then, self-reliance is both preceded and enabled by a relation to an *other*, and it is a relation, moreover, that Emerson stages explicitly in terms of shame—the “shame,” that is, of taking “our opinion from another.” Alcott’s elision of “genius” from her citation begins to make a lot more sense in the context of Emerson’s paradoxical formulation of borrowed self-reliance: in citing him, that is, in taking her opinion from him, Alcott both disqualifies her own claim to genius while, through the very same gesture, producing the necessary conditions of genius. Alcott establishes, in short, a wry relation of “alienated majesty” to her ostensible Master that is characterized by a peculiarly generative mode of shame.

Emerson and Alcott play with a heteronomous conception of genius that is antithetical to the Romantic cult of “intentional and autonomous” creativity (Will 7). Barbara Will argues that the etymological sense of “genius” as “generation” (i.e. from the Latin “*gens*” and “*genus*”) opens the genius concept up to meanings that are not limited to (the Romantic and the Modernist) construction of “the generative power of the spirit or

‘animus’ that inheres in all human beings” (3); in examining Gertrude Stein’s dialogic experiments, for example, Will points to the generation of genius through pluralistic, multi-vocal modes of relation and interaction (10).⁶⁸ Alcott’s use of troubled citation to suggest the conditions of her affiliation with Emersonian thought strikes me as another version of the kind of collaborative poetics that Will describes. There is certainly a deconstructionist element to Alcott’s use of Emerson: she inhabits his ideas, pulls at their seams, and experiments with the terms of their instantiation *as* text. There is something additionally generative, however, in the way that Alcott stages her own author-function in terms of borrowed or second-hand genius, that exceeds a mere critique of Transcendentalism. Her use of the genius concept to construct a counter-image to self-reliance that emphasizes the (shamefully) collaborative and communitarian aspects of artistic production belongs, I will argue, to Alcott’s broader reflections on the concept of mood, a slippery term that ends up being at the crux of her playfully shy contributions to philosophical discourse.

It is not at all obvious what Alcott means when she refers to moods in any given instance in her novel. In fact, the word is so thoroughly undecided that it could constitute an example of what Deleuze and Guattari call “intensives” in their discussion of minor literature. Quoting the linguist Haïm Vidal Séphir, they describe intensives as “any linguistic tool that allows a movement toward the limit of a notion or a surpassing of it,” adding in their own words, “[o]ne could equally cite the accents that are interior to words, their discordant function” (22). Intensives are one way in which minor writing can inhabit a major language, accenting words at or beyond the limits of their major

significations, and it is through such discordances that minor writing resists “refer[ing] back to an enunciating subject who would be its cause” (18). In the sense that minor writing resists being constructed as the enunciation of a transhistorical subject, it is always “something other than a literature of masters” (17). It is worth recalling, here, that Alcott borrows her structuring concept of mood from her own professed Master, and, in fact, it is precisely a “literature of masters” that Emerson constructs in *Representative Men* (1850), his schema for the “contagion” of ideas (*Essays and Lectures* 626): “The genius of humanity is the real subject whose biography is written in our annals” (630), he writes, and, “great men exist that there be greater men” (632). But, insofar as Emerson argues that the “uses” of great men—the “services” they provide—constitute developments in a kind of Hegelian dialectic of world genius, Alcott uses the Emersonian concept of mood as a countervailing structure, one which is both interior to Emerson’s Transcendentalism and resistant to its particular discursive outcomes, including the major constructions of self-reliance, genius, and representativeness.

An exchange between Sylvia and Geoffrey in the second edition of *Moods* gives a sense of some of the “accents that are interior” to her deployments of the word “mood.” Following another of Adam’s “upheaval[s]” against “established customs, creeds, and institutions” (254), Geoffrey asks an apparently moved Sylvia whether all this heavy talk has worn her out. “No,” Sylvia responds, “it has stirred me up and made me feel as if I must lay hold of something at once, or drift away I don’t know where.... His philosophy is too large for me, I get lost in it, and though I admire I cannot manage it yet, and so feel bewildered” (256). Geoffrey, in his turn, responds to Sylvia with ingratiating

reassurance, insisting that she “must not let Adam’s thunder and lightning disturb [her]”

(256). “We have seen the world through his glass,” Geoffrey continues,

which, though a powerful one, is not always well regulated, so we get a magnified view of things. He is a self-reliant genius, intent on his own aims.... He has his work to do, and will do it manfully when he gets through the ‘storm and stress’ period of which I told you. (256)

Sylvia tells Geoffrey that she fancies herself “in a little period of [her] own” (256), and it is clear that Alcott wants, as usual, to emphasize the little. Adam’s “philosophy,” by contrast, is “large,” and Sylvia finds it hard to “manage.” Other associations that emerge out of their respective “periods” are also germane. In associating his period of turmoil with a period in the development of German Romanticism (i.e. *Sturm und Drang*), Alcott seems to grant Adam’s feelings an archetypal status in a kind of world-historical dialectic of culture: he will “get through” this “period,” and he “will do it manfully,” that is, he will struggle but will, eventually, attain the “aims” that are his destiny as a “self-reliant genius.” Sylvia’s “little period,” meanwhile, with its connotation of menstrual imbalance, serves to shrink her own feelings to the level of ‘mere’ female physiology, which, of course, is another way of discounting them altogether. Where Adam’s moods are archetypal, Sylvia’s are physiological; where Adam’s are dialectical, Sylvia’s are cyclical.

Recalling, however, Emerson’s genealogy of genius, it is significant that Adam’s upheaval issues directly from his self-reliant genius, while Sylvia’s own period is presented as a response to Adam’s imposed perspective (or “glass”). On the diegetic level of their conversation, Sylvia’s period seems to require approbation from her male

interlocutor, Geoffrey, who “was always patient and kind with her moods” (256), but, again, Alcott may be having some fun at the expense of her male characters here, who seem to be unaware of any senses in which Sylvia is moody other than a paternalistic one. There is a minor way of understanding Sylvia’s bewilderment that resists disarming her little and heteronomous moods in relation to Adam’s supposedly autonomous genius. The orientation metaphor structuring Sylvia’s bewildered response to Adam, her feeling of being “lost” and “adrift” in too “large” a system echoes Emerson’s famous question, muttered in his most bewildered and despairing mood at the beginning of “Experience”: “Where do we find ourselves” (*Essays and Lectures* 471)? After his frustrated tries at getting “nearer” the “reality” of his grief (over the death of his son, Waldo), Emerson discovers that “[t]he secret of the illusoriness is in the necessity of a succession of moods” (476): “gladly we would anchor,” he continues, “but the anchorage is quicksand” (476). With no anchorage, of course, the possibility of “finding ourselves” is slight: Emerson’s restrained skepticism makes Adam’s confidence in the dialectical attainment of the aims of his self-reliant genius seem blustery and misplaced.

Similarly, Alcott seems to allude to the passage from “Experience” that she uses as the novel’s epigraph when referring to Adam’s glass, which “though a powerful one, is not always well regulated, so we get a magnified view of things.” Emerson’s own optics metaphor, which likens moods to “many colored lenses, which paint the world their own hue,” suggests the unavoidably processual condition of experience, with the impossibility of settling on a given lens for accessing the Absolute contrasting Adam’s implicatively naïve commitment to a single glass. That Adam’s glass produces a “magnified view of things,” that is, a view that is distorted by dint of its excessive size, extends Alcott’s play

on the largeness of Adam's philosophy, but in this context, Sylvia's feeling of being too little and too adrift implies that she is somehow more epistemologically attuned to the problematics of finding ourselves. Alcott, in other words, seems to be tuning into a minor frequency of Transcendentalism, here and elsewhere, that is less assured of foundation, orientation, and autonomy than the major frequencies. The grammatical redundancy that is "self-reliant genius" can be contrasted, then, with the concept of mood, a term that Alcott and Emerson both use to express skepticism about any and all foundations that might serve to anchor the individual self.

Adam is described, at another moment in the novel, as "a conscience in human shape" after he accuses his one-time fiancée, Ottila, of "conquer[ing] him" (9), if only briefly, through a "passion of the senses, not a love of the soul" (11). Alcott's phrase "conscience in human shape" echoes Emerson's own famous phrase "man thinking" (which he uses to describe the ideal condition of the American scholar [*Essays and Lectures* 54]), except that Alcott's phrase carries the additional connotation of judgment: Adam's "shape" is taken over by an idealized "conscience," turning him into a kind of perfect transcendentalist subject, an only ambiguously materialized judging spirit. Alcott would have surely been aware of her own father's "Orphic Sayings," which appeared in installments in the *Dial* over twenty years before *Moods* was written. One particular installment of Bronson's sayings, on the topic of "Conscience," could be imagined as a target for Alcott's impatience with the kind of masculinist Transcendentalism preached and practiced by Adam: "[i]t is the perpetual effort of conscience to divorce the soul from the dominion of sense," Bronson writes, "to nullify the dualities of the apparent, and restore the intuition of the real ... [for] ... conscience alone divines unity, and integrates

all experience in identity of spirit” (88). Bronson’s breezy and enthusiastic account of the sublation of self resonates through Alcott’s characterization of Adam’s own cheerfully confident Idealism, especially insofar as both men oppose “conscience” to “the dominion of sense.” Adam, of course, associates such forms of sensuality with the feminine, and he laments that, “in spite of all resistance,” he “was conquered by a woman” (9). It could be that Alcott was inspired, in her representation of Adam’s inflexible conscience, by her father, whose similarly idealist and idealistic investment in spirit at the expense of all merely sensual concerns, such as food, clothing, and shelter, was one of the primary factors that forced Alcott into relying, at times quite desperately, on the economic fruits of her literary labours to support herself and her family.

Richard Brodhead refers to Bronson as “not just improvident but virtually antiprovident,” and he describes Alcott’s family upbringing as “needy, economically almost wholly insecure, and humiliatingly dependent on the charity of well-wishers” (75) as a result of Bronson’s neglect and his various failures; he observes a direct correlation, moreover, between Bronson’s antiprovidence and Alcott’s extreme creative discipline. This contrast reappears in another, more explicit critique of transcendentalist anti-sensualism, namely, Alcott’s newspaper piece “Transcendental Wild Oats” (1873), a satirical account of her and her family’s 1840s experience at the experimental farm Fruitlands. Upon arriving at the farm and noting the scarcity of crops, the narrator rests easy in the “firm belief” on the part of her father and the other men at the farm “that plenteous orchards were soon to be evoked from their inner consciousness,” and, later, she similarly describes how “[a]bout the time the grain was ready to house, some call of the Oversoul wafted all the men away.” Accordingly, it is the women at Fruitlands who

end up being the “beast[s] of burden,” performing all the domestic and agricultural labour on the farm in an extension of the domestic sphere of labour that sees it encompassing “masculine” forms of labour as well, since the men, of course, are all busy with their spirits. As Cole and Argersinger note, the “deflationary language” (10) with which Alcott treats the men’s philosophical pretensions in “Transcendental Wild Oats” offers a powerful feminist perspective on certain androcentric assumptions underpinning New England’s Transcendentalist cultural and social practices. I like the idea that Alcott’s language is “deflationary” of male Transcendentalism, and I wonder if this idea could have an even broader compass: if Alcott is deflating Transcendentalist egotism in “Transcendental Wild Oats,” she is also deflating the very spirits or souls upon which the Fruitlands men float, popping the bubble of their disembodied Idealism and sending them tumbling back to the ground. Again, this figure seems connected to the orientational metaphors that underpin both Emerson’s and Alcott’s use of mood, which this time can be contrasted to disembodied articulations of subjectivity such as soul, conscience, spirit, or Oversoul. Mood, in this sense, can be thought of as grounding the Transcendentalist spirit or conscience in what Alfred North Whitehead would call the “stubborn facts” of experience, with “experience,” in Alcott’s account, encompassing not only the needs and motives of the body but also a kind of radically empiricist assimilation of these material contingencies to the work of the mind.

Assuming that Alcott is encouraging some of these heterophonic significations of mood in *Moods*, it bears considering in more detail how mood signifies in some of the philosophical contexts at play. I have argued that Emerson’s disorienting conception of mood informs Alcott’s own feminist-inflected uses of the same term, but Emerson and

Alcott were probably both tapping into a rich philosophical history of thinking through the moody orientation of the subject. Stanley Cavell argues that Emerson's "Experience" can be read as an interrogation of "the epistemology, or say the logic, of moods" (*Emerson's Transcendental Etudes* 11), an interrogation that Cavell sees Emerson as positioning, moreover, in explicit relation to Immanuel Kant's epochal question, in *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (1783), "is metaphysics possible?" (qtd. in Cavell 12). Cavell stages Kant's response to his own question, as well as Emerson's response to Kant's response, as follows:

Genuine knowledge of (what we call) the world is for us, but it cannot extend beyond (what we call) experience. To which I take Emerson to be replying: Well and good, but then you had better be very careful what it is you understand by experience, for that might be limited in advance by what we know of human existence, that is, by our limited experience of it. When, for example, you get around to telling us what we may hope for, I must know that you have experienced hope, or else I will surmise that you have not, which is to say precisely that your experience is of despair. (12)

Cavell wants to admit the affective range and the particularities of experience that emerge from Emerson's essay on grief into the Kantian conception of experience as a means of tempering what Emerson himself calls the "paltry empiricism" underpinning the idealist conception of experience. For Cavell, the "moral" of Emerson's essay comes through in its "late prayerful remark," "[b]ut far be from me the despair which prejudices the law by a paltry empiricism" (11-12). The law in question, in Emerson's comment, involves the relationship between the world of things and the world of thought, a relationship that

Emerson understands to be most wanting, according to Cavell, where it relies on a “paltry idea of experience” (11). The alternative, *robust* idea of experience is captured, of course, in Emerson’s conception of mood. For Cavell, Emerson’s (often contested) status as a philosopher is definitively revealed in works such as “Experience,” wherein the frequent charge against him, (made by Matthew Arnold, among others), that he “built no system,” is refuted precisely through his system-undermining meditations on mood (14).

In what constitutes a somewhat more generous acknowledgement of Kant’s contribution of the problematics of mood, Thomas Pfau positions Kant’s short essay “What Does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?” (1786) at the threshold of modern conceptualizations of emotion for countering the Scottish Enlightenment taxonomies of “occasional and empirically locatable sensations, sentiments, and passions” with a transcendental notion of feeling as the fundamental, unconscious substratum of experience (*Romantic Moods* 9). Kant captures this “unconscious substratum of experience” in his term *Stimmung*, which, as Pfau notes, is often translated as “attunement” or “mood” not only in the works of Kant but in those of Martin Heidegger as well. The latter of these two German philosophers, Pfau explains, will make use of the concept of *Stimmung* in waging his own far more explicit epistemological and methodological critique of philosophical rationalism:

[Mood] is the horizon wherein all unconscious practice—including the whole spectrum from hyperrational pursuits to vehement passions—is being transacted, a horizon that therefore can never come into view as such. As the presupposition for maintaining *any* cognitive or, for that matter, emotive relationship to the world whatsoever, ‘mood’ is ontologically anterior to the realm of what may logically

be verified and discursively represented as knowledge. It is in the nature of ‘mood’ not to be reflexively aware but, as the substratum of conscious awareness and representation, to resist discernment, particularly where attempts are made to positively, consciously fix it in representational form. (10)

Pfau’s account of the Heideggerian elaborations of the Kantian conception of *Stimmung* are more or less analogous to Cavell’s account of Emerson’s challenge to the Kantian account of experience, insofar as both Kantian revisionists question the possibility of grounding a transcendental account of experience in the very first place. I am inclined, however, to pursue the Emersonian rather than the Heideggerian inflections on the mood-concept. For Pfau, Heidegger’s descriptions of mood constitute an elaboration of Kant’s “transcendental conditions of possibility” with the added methodological challenge presented by the subject’s “having-been-thrust” into the world (10). In the brief Emersonian reading of Kant’s essay that follows, I want to tweak Pfau’s (continental philosophical) perspective, emphasizing not the transcendental aspect of Kantian feeling but the revisionist version of empiricism that emerges out of his claim that knowledge is grounded, in the first instance, through a *felt* relation to the world.

Kant begins his essay with the problem of how we make “*experiential use*” of our concepts, “which are not otherwise derived from experience” (*Religion Within Boundaries* 3). These concepts, Kant reasons, “however far up from sensibility we may abstract them,” must be underpinned by “some intuition” (i.e. some mode of perceptual experience), a conclusion that leads him to the question of *orientation*: “what does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?” Kant works through this question as follows:

The extended and more precisely determined concept of *orienting oneself* can be helpful to us in presenting distinctly the maxims healthy reason uses in working on its cognitions of supersensible objects. In the proper meaning of the word, to *orient oneself* means to use a given direction (when we divide the horizon into four of them) in order to find the others—literally, to find the *sunrise*. Now if I see the sun in the sky and know it is now midday, then I know how to find south, west, north, and east. For this, however, I also need the feeling of a difference in my own subject, namely, the difference between my right and left hands. I call this a *feeling* because these two sides outwardly display no designatable difference in intuition. If I did not have this faculty of distinguishing, without the need of any difference in the objects, between moving from left to right and right to left and moving in the opposite direction and thereby determining *a priori* a difference in the position of the objects, then in describing a circle I would not know whether west was right or left of the southernmost point of the horizon, or whether I should complete the circle by moving north and east and thus back to south. Thus even with all the objective data of the sky, I orient myself *geographically* only through a *subjective* ground of differentiation. (4-5)

Kant's observation that objective geographical orientation requires a "*subjective* ground of differentiation" (i.e. a "feeling" of the difference between the right and left hands) exemplifies, for him, the fundamental grounding of rational thought in subjective feeling. But, as Pfau observes, "the transformation of a mere 'feeling' of difference into a logical principle is possible only if the world that is to be 'known' remains constant" (8)—hence Kant's examples from "the *objective* data of the sky" and, later in the essay, "a dark ...

room that is *familiar* to me” (5) [emphases added]. Kant then moves from these examples of “geographical” and “mathematical” orientation to the more central question of “logical orientation,” wherein the “familiar objects (of experience)” are left behind and reason finds “no object of intuition at all, but merely space for intuition” (5). This mental “space,” which is analogous to the sky and the room in Kant’s earlier examples, is likewise made navigable through reason’s tendency to “bring its judgments under a determinate maxim according to a subjective ground of differentiation” (5), a caveat in the usual priority of transcendental experience that Kant describes as “reason’s feeling of its own need” (6). Despite the fact of his world needing to remain “constant,” as Pfau puts it, Kant’s formulation of a subjective feeling of difference that precedes the categorical assimilation of the world to experience seems to offer at least the potential for a non-paltry conception of experience—or, in other words, a conception of experience that is moody.

Kant elaborates on his claim that the subject is “oriented in thinking” through a “subjective ground of differentiation” with two counter-examples of disorientation, one involving the hypothetical geographical reversal of the constellations and the other involving the “joke” of rearranging all the objects in a familiar room (5). In both instances, disorientation is the brief outcome of the removal of constants, but the subject is soon able to become re-oriented by re-orienting its subjective feeling of the difference between left and right to the rearranged external conditions (5). Pfau implies that the Heideggerian trauma of being “thrown” into the world consists precisely in the fundamental absence of such constants, and I would argue that Alcott’s and Emerson’s reflections on mood are analogously traumatic elaborations of the Kantian counter-factual

situation of disorientation. Emerson's orientational crisis in "Experience," for example, which leads him to ask where we find ourselves, could be read as an interrogation of the "law" that promises a certain coordination between the world and the categories of the mind: Emerson's feeling of the *un*-reality of grief (472), in this sense, presents itself as a misfit between Kant's "subjective feeling of difference" and the reality which it is supposed to meet and order. Similarly, Emerson elaborates on the (already quoted) "necessity of the succession of moods" later on in "Experience":

This onward trick of nature is too strong for us: *Pero si muove*. When at night, I look at the moon and stars, I seem stationary, and they to hurry. Our love of the real draws us to permanence, but health of body consists in circulation, and sanity of mind in variety of facility of association. (476)

In this example, Emerson's favourite dialectic between "the one, the many" (*Essays and Lectures* 639) recurs as a distinction between movement and fixity, between "permanence" and "a succession of moods." Emerson could again be replying to Kant, here, in citing Galileo's apocryphal utterance after having been forced by the Inquisition to recant from his observation that the earth revolves around the sun: "*Pero si muove*," "and yet it moves." In Emerson's disorienting images, both the "moon and stars" and the human body are in motion, and "I" merely "*seem* stationary" out of a "love of the real." Emerson, in other words, shifts the very grammatical mood of the transcendental utterance, from the Kantian indicative to the unresolved interrogative. "What is the aboriginal self, on which a universal reliance may be grounded?" (*Essays and Lectures* 268), he asks near the outset of his career, and some years later, "[w]here do we find ourselves?"

So: where *do* we find ourselves? The answer that is offered by Kant, experimented with by Emerson, and elaborated upon, I would argue, by later thinkers in the pragmatist tradition such as William James and Alfred North Whitehead, is that we find ourselves in what James calls “a world of pure experience” (*Pragmatism and Other Writings* 314).⁶⁹ This answer, of course, is neither idealist nor empiricist, but it does manage to substitute a radical for a paltry empiricism. As Pfau notes, the Heideggerian response to this problem of conventional philosophical demonstration is to turn to poetry, and, more generally, to “the modality of virtual, figural constructions” (12) in order to awaken mood. A similar response can be found in Emerson’s compositional experiments with the essay form, which presents him with a formal-aesthetic index of certain problems intrinsic to propositional modes of philosophical demonstration. Consider, by way of example, the following passage from “Circles” (1841):

Our moods do not believe in each other. To-day I am full of thoughts, and can write what I please. I see no reason why I should not have the same thought, the same power of expression, to-morrow. What I write, whilst I write it, seems the most natural thing in the world; but yesterday I saw a dreary vacuity in this direction in which now I see so much; and a month hence, I doubt not, I shall wonder who he was that wrote so many continuous pages. Alas for this infirm faith, this will not strenuous, this vast ebb of a vast flow! I am God in nature; I am a weed by the wall. (*Essays and Lectures* 406)

Emerson’s claim about the “alienated majesty” of “taking one’s opinion from another” returns here as an alienation from self: “I shall wonder who he was that wrote so many continuous pages.” The compositional act, then, as it emerges out of this passage, serves

not as a transparent method for organizing thoughts or demonstrating propositions; it is an index, rather, to the existential and methodological problem that “[o]ur moods do not believe in each other.” Elsewhere, Emerson writes, “I am always insincere, as always knowing there are other moods” (*Essays and Lectures* 587), and in both of these examples, wherein mood is associated with unbelief or insincerity, the solution is to adapt a mode of compositional experimentation to the “stubborn fact” of the subject’s alienation from itself. If Emerson finds recourse for this mode of experimentation through certain interventions in the major and androcentric forms of the sermon, public address, and essay, moreover, Alcott performs analogous experiments with the novel form on the way to interrogating the contours of moodiness and its gendered social expressions.

Sylvia appears near the beginning of *Moods* in the midst of the existential crisis that I described earlier, and from the moment of her introduction she expresses the hope that she might mitigate her despair through a particular mode of intense, spiritual friendship; not surprisingly, Emerson’s “Friendship” (1841), a professed favourite of Alcott’s, resonates through this hope. Despite Sylvia’s often-articulated desire for friendship, however, her family insists that her moods will be stabilized through the normalizing influences of courtship and marriage. Sylvia begs her father, near the beginning of the novel, to forbid her brother, Mark, from carrying out a plan to “bring every gentleman he knows (and that is a great many) to the house, and make it so agreeable that they will keep coming” (25). “Please tell him not to,” Sylvia asks of her father, “for I don’t want any lovers yet,” but her father advises that she go along with her

brother's plan, dismissing her anxiety with the suggestion that she "try be more like others" (25). In response, Sylvia elaborates upon her frustration:

I cannot be like others, and their friendships would not satisfy me. I don't try to be odd; I long to be quiet and satisfied, but I cannot; and when I do what [her sister] Prue calls wild things, it is not because I am thoughtless or idle, but because I am trying to be good and happy. The old ways fail, so I attempt new ones, hoping they will succeed; but they don't, and I still go looking and longing for happiness, yet always failing to find it, till sometimes I think I am born a disappointment. (25)

Sylvia's desire to experiment ("the old ways fail, so I attempt new ones") is recurrently dampened by her family's desire to see her settle down; her brother, meanwhile, is encouraged in his desire to express himself through painting, even though it is implied that he is not that good at it and that all his formal experiments will come to nothing.

Another scene further illustrates the troubled relationship between friendship and marriage that preoccupies Alcott throughout the novel. Following their reacquaintance after a long separation, Mark asks Sylvia what she thinks of his friend Geoffrey (i.e. the man she will ultimately marry):

"He went away when I was such a child that since he came back I've had to begin again; but if I like him at the end of another month as much as I do now, I shall try to make your friend my friend, because I need such a one very much."

Mark laughed at the innocent frankness of his sister's speech but took it as she meant it, and answered soberly—

“Better leave Platonics till you’re forty. Though Moor is twelve years older than yourself he is a young man still, and you are grown a very captivating little woman.”

Sylvia looked both scornful and indignant.

“You need have no fears. There *is* such a thing as true and simple friendship between men and women, and if I can find no one of my own sex who can give me the help and happiness I want, why may I not look for it anywhere and accept it in whatever shape it comes?” (38)

Mark’s patronizing laugh is another indication that the kind of friendships alluded to by Sylvia are unfit for women of a marriageable age. That she is merely “captivating,” moreover, suggests that her only available modes of relation to men (or anyone, for that matter) involve captivity—which is a sorry alternative to the freedom and subjective expansion that friendship enables in Emerson’s account. In fact, the “Platonic” ideal of companionship, which Sylvia is prohibited from seeking, seems to form a kind of backdrop to Emerson’s version of friendship: “Let the soul be assured that somewhere in the universe it should rejoin its friend,” he writes, “and it would be content and cheerful alone for a thousand years” (*Essays and Lectures* 342). Emerson’s various paradoxes involving heteronomous self-sufficiency, which I have already explored in relation to his descriptions of genius and self-reliance, recur in his conception of friendship: “The soul environs itself with friends,” he writes, for example, “that it may enter into a grander self-acquaintance or solitude” (344); or, later in the same essay:

A friend, therefore, is a sort of paradox in nature. I who alone am, I who see nothing in nature whose existence I can affirm with equal evidence to my own,

behold now the semblance of my being, in all its height, variety, and curiosity, reiterated in a foreign form; so that a friend may well be reckoned the masterpiece of nature. (348)

Passages such as these, wherein Emerson reimagines the hostile moment of recognition characterizing Hegel's master-slave dialectic as an occasion for cheerful intimacy, contribute to my sense that his individualism is always already informed by a relation to an other, and that genius, moreover, is always a collaborative effort: it is the friend, in other words, and not the artifact that is the "masterpiece" in his account.

There is a further sense in which Mark's warning Sylvia away from Platonics functions as a gendered prohibition against self-cultivation through collaboration. If friendship is a necessary prerequisite, for Emerson, for the expansion of self-reliant selfhood, he might have had recourse to the *Bildung* tradition, in which such modes of self-acquaintance are similarly unavailable without what Sylvia calls the "help" of friends. Pfau notes that the idea of *Bildung* (or "self-cultivation") underpinning the form is traceable back to the Greek idea of *padeia* ("education"), which, in its influential Platonic elaborations, involved the development of the individual soul according to a metaphysically-ordained "end" or "idea" (what Plato calls "*eidos*" in *Republic*) ("*Bildungsroman*"). In the context of Sylvia's fraught questing after self-cultivation, mentorship, and friendship, then, Mark's prohibition registers as an implicitly gendered denial of the models of selfhood that were, during Alcott's lifetime, being promoted in Concord—models of selfhood that are also represented through the experiences and friendships of the novel's male characters. It is no wonder, then, in the context of

Sylvia's frustrated *eidos*, that Alcott should exasperatedly proclaim that her next novel after *Moods* "shall have no *ideas* in it."

More needs to be said about the ultimately fruitful outcome of Adam's and Geoffrey's friendship in *Moods*, a friendship, moreover, that should be considered in stark contrast to Sylvia's own foiled attempts at finding an Emersonian friend. After sending her husband away following the revelation of her love for Adam, Sylvia remains in New England while Adam and Geoffrey "manfully" reconcile and venture off to Europe together. Sometime after their departure, Sylvia receives a package:

Across the sea there came to her a little book, bearing her name upon its titlepage. Quaintly printed, and bound in some foreign style, plain and unassuming without, but very rich within, for there she found Warwick's Essays, and between each of these one of the poems from Moor's Diary. Far away there in Switzerland they had devised this pleasure for her, and done honor to the woman whom they both loved, by dedicating to her the first fruits of their lives.... Each had helped the other; Warwick's rugged prose gathered grace from Moor's poetry, and Moor's smoothly flowing lines acquired power from Warwick's prose. (194)

It's probably not a coincidence that the arrangement of Adam's and Geoffrey's book is identical to that of Emerson's first and second series of essays, wherein each essay is separated by a short poem. On account of her prohibition from all Platonics, Sylvia, meanwhile, must endure the status of dedicatee or addressee, a third position that is passive and notably outside the reciprocally generative dynamics of collaboration and secondary authorship that produce the book.

The structure of Sylvia's death scene, which follows not long after the arrival of the book, can be read as an analogous moment in her symbolic pacification. In the nineteenth century tradition of what Jonathan Elmer calls "sentimental child-martyrs" (94), (the American patron saints of whom are Harriet Beecher Stowe's Little Eva and, to a lesser extent, Alcott's own Beth March), Sylvia dies beautifully: she was, Alcott observes, "[q]uite happy, quite content" (216). However, the fact that Loring, the novel's initial publisher, insisted that Sylvia die in order to enforce the immorality of her attitudes toward marriage suggests to me that Alcott is having some fun by making of Sylvia's death a Victorian cliché. It seems a final indignity to the restless, wild, and experimental Sylvia that she should be so thoroughly disciplined by generic expectation after spending the entire novel looking for ways to subvert it—an indignity whose irony was probably not lost on Alcott when she conceded to kill Sylvia off as one of the preconditions for publishing her novel.

Alcott attempts to avenge Sylvia's generic disciplining in "Behind a Mask: or a Woman's Power" (1866), her first major work following the frustration of the first edition of *Moods*. The novella was among the dozens of tales and longer works of fiction that Alcott published in *Flag of Our Union* and other story papers, under pseudonyms such as "a lady of Massachusetts," "a Well Known Author," or, most famously, "A.M. Barnard" (Stern 94).⁷⁰ While it seems arbitrary to divide an author's canon neatly into repressed and cathartic texts, as Madeleine Stern and other scholars have done with Alcott's domestic and sensational writing, respectively, I do agree with Stern and Brodhead that anger plays a prominent role in the sensational writing.⁷¹ As Brodhead

notes, both Alcott and her alter-ego, Jo March, were prone to fits of rage (71), and he finds numerous moments in her journals where Alcott refers to herself as “cross,” “moody,” and “willful” (73). Brodhead argues that this anger was interpreted as “morally problematic” by the domestic ideology that pervaded Alcott’s family life, and it was disciplined, accordingly, through the agencies of parental love and an ideologically-enforced self-control (73). The residues of this same domestic ideology infiltrate a number of moments in *Moods* (including Sylvia’s happy deathbed scene), with the consequence that even Alcott’s most trenchant and urgent critiques of self-important self-reliance in that novel are never angry; instead, they are quietly knowing, ironic, and shy. If there is a specific mood that pervades “Behind a Mask,” on the other hand, it is anger.

“Behind a Mask” follows Jean Muir’s experience as a governess for the Coventry family. Like Sylvia, Jean is referred to as “little” throughout the novella: she is “poor little Muir” (362), a “[p]oor little woman” (367), and “a most uncanny little specimen” (365). Jean claims to be nineteen, which is Sylvia’s age at the beginning of *Moods*, and like Sylvia, she becomes an object of the affections of more than one male character—in this case, the Coventry brothers, Edward and Gerald, and their uncle, John. Jean also shares Sylvia’s passion for masquerading, moving the Coventry clan to wild applause with her *tableau vivant* “attitudinizing” (194). Unlike Sylvia, however, it turns out that Jean is a professional: we discover, by the end of the narrative, that “poor little Muir” is in fact a former actress, a divorcée, and a woman “of thirty at least” (367), masquerading as a young governess as part of a plot to marry into the Coventry family and inherit their wealth.

Jean's narrative can be read as a kind of alternative history for Sylvia, an extended version of her story that doesn't inflict the generic ideological necessities of her happy reunion with her estranged husband and her happy death. Unlike Sylvia, whose reconciliation to domestic ideology allows her to die in peace, Jean doesn't have much to be happy about. In the following passage, Alcott reveals the secret behind Jean's mask for the first time in the narrative:

Still sitting on the floor she unbound and removed the long abundant braids from her head, wiped the pink from her face, took out several pearly teeth, and slipping off her dress appeared herself indeed, a haggard, worn, and moody woman of thirty at least. The metamorphosis was wonderful, but the disguise was more in the expression she assumed than in any art of costume or false adornment. Now she was alone, and her mobile features settled into their natural expression, weary, hard, bitter. She had been lovely once, happy, innocent, and tender; but nothing of all this remained to the gloomy woman who leaned there brooding over some wrong, or loss, or disappointment which had darkened her all her life. For an hour she sat so, sometimes playing absently with the scanty locks that hung about her face, sometimes lifting the glass to her lips as if the fiery draught warmed her cold blood; and once she half uncovered her breast to eye with a terrible glance the scar of a newly healed wound. At last she rose and crept to bed, like one worn out with weariness and mental pain. (367)

Jean is represented as being "moody" in a sense that is quite different than Sylvia's playful, experimental moodiness. For one thing, Jean's moodiness is of a piece with her

being “haggard,” “worn,” and “thirty at least,” associations which are suggestive of the heavy toll wrought by playing a “little woman” for so many years.

Jean’s moodiness is also kept behind a mask, a detail that is significant in the context of the Emersonian connotations of “mood.” As I demonstrated, Emerson plays with the compositional temporalities of his essay writing in order to track the “succession of moods” that constitute the paradoxically “insincere” truth of his experience. While Alcott denies Sylvia a comparable medium for experimenting with her moodiness, she makes Jean (as well as a number of her other sensational heroines) an actress. The idea that acting could stand in for writing as a possible avenue for the aesthetic awakening of mood is suggestive, finally, of Alcott’s ambiguous attitude toward the mood concept in “Behind a Mask.” While her acting abilities enable Jean to exercise a degree of control and social agency that is explicitly denied to Sylvia, it is only because she is shrewd enough to know, in the first place, that she will be accepted only if she plays a “happy, innocent, and tender” girl of nineteen; the flip-side of this equation is the ideologically prescribed necessity of keeping her moodiness behind a mask, along with all the other emotional and physical indications that she is not a little woman.

Notes

Introduction: The Secondary Creation

¹ For the most influential articulation of the culture industry thesis, see Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

² Bruce Clarke and Mark B.N. Hansen remark that the emerging transdisciplinary field of neocybernetics "shifts the emphasis of observation and description from subject to system" (6). They describe the constitutive "decomplexification" of the system: "it is a given that any particular system that emerges within an environment is necessarily less complex than that environment" (11). While Clarke and Hansen are not interested in the Foucauldian author function per se, it strikes me that one productive line of thinking the shift from "subject to system" might be in terms of a shift from the author function's "principle of thrift" to the author-system's decomplexification.

³ A similar argument could be made of any number of early Americanist texts. See Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land* (1950) and R.W.B. Lewis's *The American Adam* (1955), two examples whose titles alone confirm the early Americanist obsession with origination and primality.

⁴ McGill cites both Foucault's "What Is an Author?" and Roland Barthes's "From Work to Text" in elaborating her methodological shift away from authors and their works. McGill laments an ironic effect of post-structuralist and deconstructive readings that take cues from Foucault's and Barthes's emphasis on textuality over works and authors: "it is most often classic works that are submitted to deconstructive reading and canonical authors who emerge as the motive force behind masterfully self-deconstructing literary artifacts" (6).

⁵ In elaboration of the Derridean concept, Geoffrey Bennington describes the “originary secondarity of writing” (125).

⁶ Poe’s cosmological writings include the three cosmological dialogues (“The Power of Words,” “The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion” [1839], and “The Colloquy of Monos and Una” [1841]), as well as the speculative prose-poem *Eureka* (1848).

⁷ Cosmic retrograding is only one instantiation of the dilemma of origination in Poe’s work. In “The Philosophy of Composition” (1846), Poe attempts to work backwards, from the effect to the form, in analyzing the composition of his own poem, “The Raven,” because, as he explains, “I have often thought how interesting a magazine paper might be written by any author would would—that is to say, who could—detail, step by step, the processes by which any one of his compositions attained its ultimate point of completion” (*Essays and Reviews* 14). Poe’s detective, Dupin, moreover, possesses a talent at tracing backwards that is comparable to angelic retrograding. He shows this talent off in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841) by connecting a present unspoken thought of the narrator’s back to a seemingly inconsequential moment, fifteen minutes before, that set off the particular train of thought (*Poetry and Tales* 402-03). Similarly, in “The Purloined Letter” (1844), Dupin tells the story of a precocious schoolboy who was capable of back-tracing the degrees of guile, or wisdom, or foolishness that anyone possessed by mimicking their facial expression and attending to the consequent “thoughts or sentiments” that would arise in his “mind or heart, as if to match or correspond with the expression” (*Poetry and Tales* 690). In each of these examples, an effect is traced backwards through a chain of impulses with the help of a kind of fantasy, preternatural analytical power.

⁸ See Frank Luther Mott's *American Journalism* (215-252), Michael Gilmore's *American Romanticism and the Marketplace*, Michael Denning's *Mechanic Accents*, Ronald Zboray's *A Fictive People*, William Hunzicker's *The Popular Press*, and Trish Loughran's *Republic of Print* for more detailed accounts of these historical changes.

⁹ Gustavus Stadler understands this figure to suggest the paradoxically blushing or shamed theatricality underpinning Alcott's stagings of her own author-function (108-09)—a reading that I return to in my fourth chapter.

Chapter 1: Revolution of Thought/Revulsion of Feeling: Poe and the Interest

Concept

¹⁰ See Sianne Ngai, "Merely Interesting." Ngai remarks on Friedrich Schlegel's initial distinction between *die schöne Poesie* ("beautiful poetry") and *die interessante Poesie* ("interesting poetry"), which set the formal, rule-bound universality of the former poetic practice (of the Classical Greek and Roman writers) against the "restlessly subjective and idiosyncratic" experimentalism of the Romantics (781-82). Ngai describes how Schlegel would subsequently revise his theory of *das Interessante*, however, by emphasizing the hybrid form of the novel as epitomizing the interesting's unsatisfiable striving for new forms and modes of knowledge (783). My sense is that Poe, who was an enthusiastic (if unschooled) reader of both Schlegel brothers, saw a similar experimental potential in short form fiction that Friedrich Schlegel saw in the novel a few decades earlier. See August Wilhelm Schlegel, *Lectures on Dramatic Arts and Literature*. Poe is known to have read Black's translation of Schlegel's work; Schlegel's emphasis on the "unity of impression" probably suggested to Poe his own conception of the "unity of effect."

¹¹ Of the systems theoretical inflection of his phrase “the figure of mass culture,” Elmer explains: “the ambiguity of the genitive (both subjective and objective) marks the trace of the social limit, that disjunctive relay point between any individual’s figuration of mass culture and mass culture’s figuration of the individual” (21).

¹² This chapter’s exploration of Poe’s aesthetic theory can be situated within the recent (re)turn to aesthetics in American Studies. For commentaries on this trend, see Samuel Otter’s “An Aesthetics in All Things,” Christopher Castiglia and Russ Castronovo’s “A ‘Hive of Subtlety’: Aesthetics and the End(s) of Cultural Studies,” and Cindy Weinstein and Christopher Looby’s introduction to the edited collection *American Literature’s Aesthetic Dimensions*.

¹³ Kant’s early work on aesthetics, the Burke-inspired *Observation on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, exemplifies his pre-Third Critique evaluation of aesthetic feelings as “merely empirical,” a conclusion that is borne out in the text’s emphasis on the relative aesthetic feelings between genders and across nationalities..

¹⁴ As an indication of the dominance of this conception of interest in the eighteenth century, Swedberg quotes Helvétius, who writes in 1748, “[a]s the physical world is ruled by the laws of movement, so is the moral universe ruled by the laws of interest” (4). Because he is motivated to trace the history of the social scientific uses of the interest concept, Swedberg is not particularly attuned to the alternate interest paradigm—the subjective paradigm—that nevertheless inhabits the signifier “interest” along with its more stably objective connotations.

¹⁵ Sedgwick’s helpful co-option of Paul Ricoeur’s phrase “hermeneutics of suspicion” is applicable here. Ricoeur first introduced the phrase to describe the critical force of

exposure underpinning the hermeneutic projects of Nietzsche, Marx, Freud, and their various followers, which Sedgwick sees as having evolved, in cultural studies disciplines over the last decades, into a “mandatory injunction” to practice paranoid over all other possible forms of critical reading. See *Touching Feeling* 124-25, 138-39. See also: Bruno Latour, “Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?”

¹⁶ An example Richardson quotes is Emerson’s use of “affection” to articulate the simultaneously divine and subjective sources of creative thought: “when a faithful thinker, resolute to detach every object from personal relations, and see it in the light of thought, shall, at the same time, kindle science with the fire of holiest affections, then will God go forth anew into the creation” (62).

¹⁷ Hansen and Pollin’s book includes an extensive review of Poe’s familiarity with German culture and the German language, his numerous references to German writers and thinkers, and the cultural politics of “Germanism” in Poe’s America.

¹⁸ Poe’s most famous self-defense against the charge of “Germanism” comes in the preface to his collection *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*: “If in many of my productions terror had been the thesis, I maintain that terror is not of Germany, but of the soul,—that I have deduced this terror only from its legitimate sources, and urged it only to its legitimate results” (*Poetry and Tales* 129).

¹⁹ Poe caused a minor stir in American newspapers in July 1843 when, in a review of William Ellery Channing’s poetry, he called Carlyle an “ass” while complaining about his obscurantism (*Essays and Reviews* 461); two years later, Poe favorably reviewed Carlyle’s *Life of Schiller*.

²⁰ Poe mocks Kantian obscurantism with Kant/cant puns on two different occasions in his career, in “How to Write a Blackwood Article” (*Poetry and Tales* 279) and, a decade later, in *Eureka* (*Poetry and Tales* 1263). See also “Never Bet the Devil Your Head,” where Poe characterizes the taste for obscurity in Coleridge, Kant, Carlyle, and Emerson, as “mystical,” “pantheistical,” “twistical,” and “hyperquizzitistical” (*Poetry and Tales* 461).

²¹ I am skeptical of Dayan’s reading of the tonal strategy in Poe’s Gothic tales as singly “bathetic” and “parodic,” a “devious undoing of the vagaries of mysticism and inflated rhetoric” targeting the linguistic excesses of “those misusers of language, the mystifiers of Concord.” It feels too much like an arbitrary superimposition of eighteenth century aesthetic biases (i.e. in favor of clear, expressive language) onto the dense tonal particularities of nineteenth-century fiction to claim that one idiom of excess (say, Poe’s baroque gothicism) *parodies* while insisting that another (say, Emerson’s dense mysticism) *is parodied*, especially since tonal ground is so difficult to stand on in Poe’s notoriously slippery manipulations of audience expectation.

²² Dayan makes a similar observation about Poe’s punning on “bad taste” in relation to Berenice’s violated mouth (*Fables of Mind* 138).

²³ Whalen claims that Poe’s letter to White proves that “his first alibi was profit” and “his first science was political economy” (9), against an older Romantic tradition—beginning, probably, with Baudelaire—that viewed Poe as entirely too ill at ease in the competitive setting of American print capitalism to do anything but retreat into aesthetic isolationism. While Whalen’s study contributed to a timely adjustment of Poe’s perceived relationship

to American magazine culture, I don't see any reason to continue viewing Poe's authorial motivations as *either* exclusively artistic *or* exclusively mercenary.

²⁴ See also Marie Bonaparte's *Edgar Poe, étude psychanalytique* and Joel Porte's *The Romance in America*.

²⁵ Freud writes: "[t]he one structure which affords no possibility of an analogy is the teeth; and it is precisely this combination of similarity and dissimilarity which makes the teeth so appropriate for representational purposes when pressure is being exercised by sexual repression" (5:387).

²⁶ Hunter's treatise seems to have had an enduring influence through at least the first half of the nineteenth century, although early nineteenth century dental anatomists, including Robert Blake in *An Essay on the Structure and Formation of the Teeth in Man and Various Animals* and Henry Gilbert in *On the Extraction of Teeth*, do contest aspects of Hunter's account, most particularly his hypothesis that teeth lack circulatory mechanisms.

²⁷ Jones's recent study of Poe and "the literature of revulsion" resonates with my sense that "bad taste" constitutes one of Poe's primary, winking responses to the problem of aesthetics in an unstable literary marketplace. Jones argues that Poe's writing tracks "forms of destitution" (2) emerging out of the so-called Revulsion of 1837—the historical term for the broader economic downturn following the Panic of 1837—through an "aesthetic of revulsion" (3).

²⁸ Note that Guyer translates the German "*Ekel*" as "loathing" in this passage; however, most previous translations, including James Creed Meredith's famous 1911 translation, translate "*Ekel*" as "disgust."

²⁹ See, for example, Tomkins, *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness* 4:983.

³⁰ See Darwin's *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*.

Chapter 2: Convulsive Fictions: Lippard and Poe

³¹ Lippard will later relate the Chestnut Street Theatre incident to the Astor Place Riot ("Tragedy"). In an editorial condemning "Upper-tendom" and the state militia for allowing the protests outside the Astor Place Theatre to escalate into the eventual massacre of 25 citizens, Lippard recalls his own brush with riot outside the Chestnut Street Theatre.

³² Lippard explicitly directs his readers to speculate upon the identities of the real-world citizens that he fictionalizes with a found-narrative preface. Lippard explains that an old lawyer friend bequeathed him a package containing his professional records, which Lippard claims to have used as the basis for his fiction. "In that packet," the lawyer tells the author, shortly before his death, "you will find, records of crimes, that never came to trial, murders that have never been divulged; there you will discover the results of secret examinations, held by official personages, in relation to atrocities almost too horrible for belief" (3).

³³ Reynolds's groundbreaking work on Lippard includes *George Lippard*, a literary biography; *George Lippard: Prophet of Protest*, a collection of Lippard's journalism and fiction; extended discussions of Lippard's urban writing in *Beneath the American Renaissance*; and a scholarly edition of *The Quaker City*. Reynolds argues that Lippard's work belongs to antebellum America's "subversive literature" (8), a protomodernist literature which he sees as prefiguring the "irrationalism," "grotesqueness," and "bizarre juxtapositions" of the surrealists (460).

³⁴ See Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* for the classic articulation of this thesis. See also Michael McKeon's *The Origins of the English Novel* for a dialectical critique of Watts's progressivist account.

³⁵ Looby's observation and the texts of Lippard's *Spirit of the Times* journalism come from a Lippard website maintained by Looby and David Shepard.

³⁶ See Stephen Thomas Knight's *The Mysteries of the Cities*, which discusses the city mysteries sensation in the United States and Australia.

³⁷ Lippard brags, in the *Quaker City* weekly, that Park Benjamin named him "THE EUGENE SUE of America, possessing graphic powers, which even excel those of the great French Novelist" ("Advertisements"), while elsewhere he chafes at being associated with the immoralism of "the French school" (qtd. in Reynolds Introduction xiv).

³⁸ Zboray and Zboray observe that, in 1844, 11 "mysteries" titles appeared in New England alone (458).

³⁹ *The Holy Family* was Marx's first work written in collaboration with Friedrich Engels; however, the sections of the book that deal with Sue are entirely Marx's own.

⁴⁰ Poe's "Doings of Gotham," a series of urban sketches written for the *Columbia Spy* in 1844, constitute another, somewhat conventional contribution to antebellum city writing. Still, these sketches contain a number of traces of Poe's familiar stance of condescension toward popular culture.

⁴¹ There are a number of city mysteries fictions that take up the case of Mary Rogers in some or another form, including, most notably, Ned Buntline's *The Mysteries and Miseries of New York* (1849) and Joseph Holt Ingraham's *La Bonita Cigarera; or the*

Beautiful Cigar Vendor (1844). See Srebnick's *The Mysterious Death of Mary Rogers* (109-57) for a comparison of various literary depictions of the Mary Rogers case.

⁴² See "Probably Poe," Maurice Lee's examination of Poe's surprisingly extensive engagement with nineteenth-century theories of probability and chance.

⁴³ Poe's omission here might refer to the evidence pointing toward "a fatal accident under the roof of Madame Deluc" (550), i.e., the historical Madame Restell, which had come to light in the period between the first and second editions of the tale. Scholars have suggested that his omission of these findings can be chalked up to the delicacy of the situation, but this does not explain why the omission is so explicitly invoked.

⁴⁴ Compare the image of the rudderless boat to a similarly crucial clue in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," the false nail that allows Dupin to unravel the mystery of the apparently locked room. John Irwin sees a multilingual pun in this image, with the so-called "clew" being a "clou" (i.e., the French word for nail) (196). Against this image of closure, which is doubled on diegetic and figurative levels, the rudderless boat withholds closure on the figurative level while offering it only off-stage, on the diegetic level.

⁴⁵ See Adam Frank's "The Letter of the Laugh" and the introduction to Jonathan Elmer's *Reading at the Social Limit* for two accounts of the ways that Poe cultivates a sense of contemptuous distance from the print culture that he belonged to.

Chapter 3: Melville's Partial Revolt Against the Reader

⁴⁶ Tomkins describes anger, like the other affects, as "a ballistic response of the body" (*Shame and its Sisters* 211).

⁴⁷ It is important to note that Tomkins will find reasons, between the publications of the second and third volumes of *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness*, to distinguish between the

innate affects disgust and dissmell (a neologism coined to suggest olfactory rejection).

Contempt, in this revised schema, is not an innate affect but a “learned analog of dissmell” (3:619). Significantly, Tomkins’s revised conception of the sneer of contempt is theorized to be a “*mixture* of dissmell and anger” (3:631).

⁴⁸ Lawrence, for instance, describes Melville as “the greatest seer and poet of the sea” (334), and this conception of Melville as a mystical mariner (to paraphrase the title of Weaver’s study) who turned his back on society recurs throughout all these early Melville Revival studies.

⁴⁹ See Jane Tompkins’s *Sensational Design*, a revisionist account of nineteenth-century sentimentalism and the “cultural work” it performs, for one of the earliest and most influential critiques of modernist anti-sentimentalism.

⁵⁰ A significant exception to the dearth of Melville scholarship on shame is Joseph Adamson’s *Shame, Melville, and the Evil Eye*. Adamson’s avowed project is to read “deep-seated shame as the affective bedrock of personality in Melville’s novels” (175), a psycho-biographical approach that has more in common with Henry A. Murray’s personality-psychology analyses of Melville’s work (or Marie Bonaparte’s psycho-biographical readings of Poe’s work, for that matter) than the textual approach that I attempt in this chapter. Though useful and often very insightful, Adamson’s study seems limited, to me, by its insistence on reifying the depth-psychological concept of “personality,” thereby missing the intrinsically social dimensions of shame. Adamson writes, for instance, that “[t]he ultimate fear at the heart of Melville’s work is the fear of paralyzing, petrifying shame, the fear of being struck dumb and powerless by humiliating exposure” (295). This chapter follows Adamson’s suggestion that the “fear of ...

humiliating exposure” goes a long way toward understanding crucial aspects of Melville’s writing, but I am more interested in thinking shame—and the fear of “exposure”—in relation to his textual practices and aesthetic theory than in relation to his “personality.”

⁵¹ “What I feel most moved to write, that is banned,—it will not pay. Yet, altogether, write the *other* way I cannot. So the product is a final hash, and all my books are botches,” Melville writes, in the June 1851 letter (*Correspondence* 191).

⁵² See Lawrence’s Levine’s *Highbrow/Lowbrow* and Nigel Cliff’s *The Shakespeare Riots* for historical and cultural context for the Astor Place Riot. Levine’s study is particularly significant for its influential argument about the role of the Astor Place Riot in the hierarchization and “sacralization” (83) of nineteenth-century American culture.

⁵³ The petition, signed by 47 citizens and re-printed in the New York *Herald*, reads (in part):

To W.C. Macready, Esq.

Dear Sir:—The undersigned, having heard that the outrage at the Astor Place Opera House, on Monday Evening, is likely to have the effect of preventing you from continuing your performances ... take this public method of requesting you to reconsider your decision, and of assuring you that the good sense and respect for order, prevailing in this community, will sustain you on the subsequent nights of your performance. (qtd. in Leyda 302)

⁵⁴ See Kittler, *Discourse Networks* (3-24).

⁵⁵ See Samuel Otter’s *Melville’s Anatomies* for an extended discussion of Melville’s use of the anatomical mode as a means for critiquing elements of nineteenth century

scientific racism. Otter appears to lump most of Melville's novels into the anatomy category; however, according to the letter of Frye's description, it strikes me as somewhat idiosyncratic to assimilate the modes of textual exuberance registered in anatomies to Melville's more conventional early sea romances, on the one hand, and the more difficult, circuitous language games of *Pierre*, on the other hand.

⁵⁶ See Hershel Parker's introduction to *Pierre; or, the Ambiguities: The Kraken Edition* for a detailed account of the composition history of *Pierre*. Parker pays particular attention to changes Melville made after reading the *Moby-Dick* reviews.

⁵⁷ See, for instance, *Science and Poetry*.

⁵⁸ Murray's depth-psychological analyses of Melville and his writing are exemplified in the following passage:

Melville's greatness of range is confined to one dimension, that of depth, the distance he went down into himself; and this, in turn, is a measure of his antipathy to the human environment. He and his hero are as one in their complete repudiation of the world, in their desire to get out of it. (475)

⁵⁹ See, for instance, the notorious New York *Day Book* review article of *Pierre* entitled "Herman Melville Crazy!"

⁶⁰ In Jakobson's own words, "the poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination" (358). In less technical terms, Jakobson argues that, unlike the phatic, referential, conative, emotive, and metalingual functions of verbal communication, the poetic function focuses "on the message for its own sake" (356). It is important to recall, moreover, that Jakobson is neither arguing that the poetic function serves to articulate the entirety of poetic utterances nor that it is

restricted to the domain of poetry: Jakobson's examples of the poetic function in action include political slogans, advertising jingles, and nursery rhymes.

⁶¹ See, for example, Nicola Nixon's "Comprising Politics and Herman Melville's *Pierre*" for a discussion of Melville's anachronistic invocation of an American aristocracy in New York and New England, where the Anti-Rent Wars had recently led to the abolishment of manorial feudalism by the United States Supreme Court.

⁶² Compare Pierre's anxiety to Melville's observation, in a letter sent to Hawthorne the same month that *Pierre* was published: "This name of "*Hawthorne*" seems to be ubiquitous. I have been on something of a tour lately, and it has saluted me vocally & typographically in all sorts of places & in all sorts of ways" (*Correspondence* 230).

⁶³ The scene recalls Poe's "William Wilson," a tale which, perhaps not coincidentally, includes a secondary character named Glendinning ("a young *parvenu* nobleman" [*Poetry and Tales* 350]). The tale culminates in a confrontation between the narrator and his doppelganger, who is stabbed "repeatedly through and through his bosom" by the "real" William Wilson (356)—like Pierre, Wilson himself is metaphorically "murdered" by an uncanny revenant, a shadow self come to disturb his "aristocratic condition."

⁶⁴ The association, here, between Pierre's red letter and *The Scarlet Letter*, is difficult to ignore: Hawthorne's own red letter also advertised as it stanced (i.e., through penitence) a familial shame. That Melville should construct such an allusion out of a punning association between letters of the alphabet and epistolary letters perhaps speaks, once again, to the effects of the loss of his private and intimate textual communion with Hawthorne.

Chapter 4: Moody Alcott

⁶⁵ See, for example, Cavell's *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes and Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, as well as *The Other Emerson*, a collection of essays inspired by Cavell that pursues his emphasis on Emerson's experimentalism and anti-foundationalism.

⁶⁶ Two notable examples are Tiffany Wayne's *Woman Thinking* and a special issue of *ESQ* committed to developing a "female genealogy of Transcendentalism."

⁶⁷ See Nina Baym's *Woman's Fiction*, a groundbreaking study of the huge (and at the time of Baym's study, still largely neglected) corpus of novels "by American women authors about women" (11).

⁶⁸ Will argues that Stein reimagines the figure of the author-genius, in her collaborative compositions, in terms a "dialogic and relational transactions between 'talker' and 'listener,' author and audience" (10).

⁶⁹ See Joan Richardson's *A Natural History of Pragmatism* for an intellectual history of Pragmatism that brings together Emerson, James, and Whitehead, among others. I elaborate upon the pragmatist tendencies of James and Whitehead in Chapter 1, where I also argue for Edgar Allan Poe's status as both a Kantian revisionist and a proto-pragmatist.

⁷⁰ Alcott scholars often contrast her prolific career publishing sensational writing in story papers to her far less successful attempts in the 1860s to establish herself as a prestige author and regular contributor to the *Atlantic Monthly*. See Stern (94-95) and Brodhead (*Culture of Letters* 69-106).

⁷¹ Stern writes that Alcott turned to sensationalism in order to “achieve an emotional catharsis for herself” (94), an argument that seems unnecessarily reductive of the range of affective positions on display throughout Alcott’s domestic and sensational writing.

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